

# Wangchuk weak, Delhi HC orders regular monitoring

Wangchuk has lost over 9 kg after starting hunger strike and his body is consuming muscles and his organs may be next, says doctor; govt. assures High Court of necessary medical intervention

**Aroon Deep**  
NEW DELHI

**W**ith activist Sonam Wangchuk's health condition worsening on the 19th day of his indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar, the Delhi High Court ordered the Union and Delhi governments to ensure regular monitoring of his health.

Doctors warned on Thursday that Mr. Wangchuk's health condition had entered a critical stage. Satish Lamba, a doctor who has been examining Mr. Wangchuk regularly, said he has lost over 9 kg, but is "mentally alert". However, Dr. Lamba warned later in the evening that his body was likely consuming muscles and his organs may be next.



**Holding ground:** Sonam Wangchuk during his hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Thursday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Mr. Wangchuk's "blood sugar today is 80 mg/dl, and his pulse is 72 bpm," Dr. Lamba said. He said that doctors were maintaining "extra vigilance" and that at his current stage, Mr. Wangchuk's uric acid levels were likely elevated as his muscles were likely being broken down

by his body. He now weighs 56.9 kg.

Earlier in the day, the Delhi High Court ordered that Mr. Wangchuk must be "regularly medically checked up by government doctors." A Bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia asked Solicitor-

General Tushar Mehta whether any mechanism was in place to monitor Mr. Wangchuk's health. Mr. Mehta submitted that Mr. Wangchuk undergoes a daily health check-up.

"He [Mr. Mehta] further assures the court that depending upon the opinion of the doctors, whatever medical intervention is needed to check the deteriorating health condition of Mr. Wangchuk will also be taken," the court recorded in its order.

The Bench passed the direction while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by advocate and activist Rakesh Kumar Saini.

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**MORE VOICES OF SUPPORT**

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# Wangchuk weak, Delhi HC orders monitoring

The petition sought urgent intervention to safeguard Mr. Wangchuk's health. Mr. Saini sought intervention "even if forcibly" to save Mr. Wangchuk's life.

Mr. Wangchuk has been on a hunger strike demanding Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over issues concerning the country's education system. On Thursday, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)'s protest site filled up substantially as more high-profile figures arrived at Jantar Mantar to register their support.

Three student supporters from the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)'s student outfit, the All India Students' Association (AISA), were also at a critical stage of their concurrent hunger strike, Sai Balaji, a former AISA president, said in a statement. "Aameen is at risk of a hypovolemic shock due to dehydration, Neha's RBS levels hover around a dangerous 49 mg/dl and Manish has lost more than 10% of body mass," Mr. Balaji said.

While there have been calls for Mr. Wangchuk to end his hunger strike, he has remained resolute in continuing it.

*(With inputs from Soibam Rocky Singh)*



# Cong. to 'strongly oppose' move to reintroduce delimitation Bill

Kharge urges Modi to convene an all-party meeting on the Bill; party identifies Ram Temple row, 'corrosion' of educational institutions, and foreign policy failures as key issues for the Monsoon Session; INDIA bloc to hold strategy meet on Monday

**Sandeep Phukan**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, and the "systematic corrosion" of educational institutions, were among the key issues identified by the Congress parliamentary strategy group on Thursday for the forthcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament.

The party also resolved to strongly oppose any attempt by the Centre to reintroduce the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, which proposes to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha and initiate the delimitation exercise.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to convene an all-party meeting before any revised version of the Bill is introduced. "I would, once again, request you to convene an all-party meeting to discuss the go-



Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge along with leaders Jairam Ramesh, P. Chidambaram and others during the meeting. ANI

vernment's revised proposals on delimitation, etc., and give us adequate time to study them in detail before they are introduced in Parliament," he said.

In a post on X after the meeting, Mr. Kharge said the party would hold the government accountable over the alleged "*chanda chori*" (donation theft) at the Ram Temple, paper leaks, the "systemic corrosion" of the education system, institutional capture, the breaking of political

parties, corruption, inflation, foreign policy failures, ethanol blending, deforestation, and the alleged assault on the rights of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and minorities.

The strategy meeting, chaired by Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, was attended by Mr. Kharge, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, and senior leaders

K.C. Venugopal, P. Chidambaram, Jairam Ramesh, Shashi Tharoor, Manish Tewari, Kumari Selja, Gaurav Gogoi, and Manickam Tagore, among others.

Addressing a press conference, Congress's communications chief Jairam Ramesh alleged that the Union government was attempting to revive the delimitation Bill after failing to secure the required two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha in April.

## **'Will maintain unity'**

"The Congress party has consistently maintained that it will strongly oppose the delimitation Bill and will continue to do so. We will also make every effort to maintain the unity and solidarity of all Opposition parties," he said, adding that the party would also oppose the proposed Constitutional amendment relating to the removal of Ministers facing 30 days of custody. The Congress would oppose the pro-

posed Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, any amendment to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, and proposed changes to the National Food Security Act, if they were introduced during the session, he said.

He accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of "splitting parties" to manage a two-thirds majority by "cunningness".

Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Kharge were in touch with all the parties that had supported the Congress on April 16 and 17 in defeating the government's delimitation Bill, he added. The Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance will also hold its strategy meet on Monday, to evolve its joint strategy.

Referring to Mr. Ramesh's comments, BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said that instead of making political statements, the Congress leadership should focus on its own internal issues.



# NITI Aayog suggests ₹50,000-crore fund for biotech growth

**Jacob Koshy**

NEW DELHI

A NITI Aayog road map has proposed creating a ₹50,000-crore BioEconomy Growth Fund, a dedicated production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for biomanufacturing and six national biotechnology missions as part of an ambitious strategy to transform India into one of the world's top three biotechnology powers by 2035.

The report, "Roadmap for building India as a leading bioeconomy powerhouse by 2035", released on Thursday, says India should move beyond the broad framework laid out under the Biotechnology for Economy, Environment and Employment (BioE3) policy and adopt a mission-mode execution strategy backed by new financing, regulatory reforms and cross-ministerial governance. It targets expanding India's bioeconomy from \$195.3 billion in 2025 to \$691 billion by 2035 and \$2.6 trillion by 2047, while creating over 30 million high-value jobs.

"The goal is not to just research but to build globally competitive biotechnology companies," said Debjani Ghosh, Distinguished Fellow, NITI

Aayog, at the launch.

The centrepiece of the recommendation is a proposed ₹50,000-crore fund for 2026-35 to bridge the biotechnology sector's "valley of death" – the gap between proof-of-concept research and commercial-scale manufacturing. The fund would provide blended finance, equity-risk instruments, viability-gap funding and infrastructure support for biomanufacturing, advanced therapeutics, synthetic biology, fermentation technologies and diagnostics.

The roadmap also recommends launching six National BioMissions with clearly identified lead Ministries and measurable outcomes by 2035. These include GeneIndia for affordable gene and cell therapies, AgriBio 2.0 for climate-resilient gene-edited crops and biological farm inputs, BioX Foundry to commercialise synthetic biology innovations, One Health Grid for integrated surveillance of infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance, Marine Biotechnology to expand seaweed cultivation and marine bio-products, and BioPharma-Next to establish India as a global hub for biologics, biosimilars and AI-enabled drug discovery.



# After ambushes, CRPF tells forces in Manipur to use armoured vehicles

**Vijaita Singh**

NEW DELHI

In the wake of two ambushes on Assam Rifles personnel in Manipur and Nagaland, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) units deployed in Manipur have been instructed to use only armoured vehicles for movement and to avoid sudden or unplanned deployments, a senior government official said on Thursday.

In June, the CRPF inducted two battalions of the Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), a specialised unit raised for anti-Maoist operations, in the northeastern State to step up operations against armed groups, dismantling of bunkers, and recovery of weapons.

At least 100 armoured vehicles have been sent to Manipur in the past two



Army personnel carry the coffins of two Assam Rifles personnel, who were killed in an attack in Manipur on July 6. PTI

months, the official said.

The CRPF is the largest Central security force deployed in Manipur, with 200 companies comprising around 20,000 personnel.

In addition to the CRPF, the State has around 100 Border Security Force companies, comprising approximately 10,000 personnel, and about 26,000

personnel from the Assam Rifles and the Indian Army deployed across the region.

The CoBRA battalions have been given pre-induction training in crowd management as the State often witnesses obstruction by locals, especially women, during security-related operations.

“We have advised the

personnel to avoid any sudden movement for administrative or operational reasons. They have also been asked to take action against armed miscreants, anyone found with a gun is to be arrested or fired upon, if they do not surrender,” said the official.

As the ethnic conflict between the Kuki and Meitei people in Manipur has now expanded to tensions between Kukis and the Naga people, plans are afoot to deploy the CoBRA battalions in the hill districts of Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, and Ukhrul, another government official said.

While Churachandpur and Kangpokpi are Kuki-Zo-dominated districts, Ukhrul is a Naga-majority area.

The ethnic violence, which erupted on May 3, 2023, has claimed the lives of 300 people so far.

# Parliament set to take up Bills to amend FCRA, prevent insult to *Vande Mataram*

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which seeks to amend the 1971 law to make the intentional insult of, or disruption during, the singing of National Song *Vande Mataram* a punishable offence is among the five new Bills listed by the government for the coming Monsoon Session of Parliament.

Apart from these, the government has listed the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, which was introduced during the Budget Session of Parliament, and the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, which is currently under the consideration



**Fresh start:** The Monsoon Session of Parliament is scheduled to begin on July 20. ANI

of a Joint Committee of both Houses. The other four new Bills listed by the government are the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, which proposes stricter provisions for delayed registration; the Income Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2026; the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment

Bill, 2026; and the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026.

## Legislative agenda

The legislative agenda circulated among parliamentarians does not include the 130th Constitutional Amendment Bill, which seeks the automatic remo-

val from public office of any person, including the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers, who has been jailed for 30 days, and the 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill, which proposed the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats to facilitate the implementation of women's reservation.

The former Bill is in the final stages of deliberation before a Joint Parliamentary Committee headed by BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi. The latter was defeated in the previous session of Parliament by a united Opposition. The government has not formally confirmed or denied reports that it may introduce a revised version of the Bill during the session. The session is scheduled to begin on July 20.



# Modi set to flag off India's first hydrogen-powered train from Haryana's Jind

Unlike traditional trains, the NaMo Green Rail generates its own power through chemical reaction between hydrogen and atmospheric oxygen; PM will unveil initiatives worth over ₹25,000 crore

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

In a push towards sustainable transport, modern health care and advanced connectivity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Haryana, Chandigarh, and Punjab on Friday and unveil initiatives worth over ₹25,000 crore.

The highlight of the multi-State visit will be the flagging off of the NaMo Green Rail, India's first-ever hydrogen-powered fuel cell train in Haryana's Jind.

Designed and integrated indigenously, the 10-coach train is among the world's longest and most powerful hydrogen-fuelled passenger trainsets. It is powered by a 3,200 horsepower propulsion system.

Unlike traditional trains, it generates its own electricity onboard through a chemical reaction between hydrogen and atmospheric oxygen, leaving behind water vapour.

The Prime Minister will



India's first hydrogen-powered train, the NaMo Green Rail, is ready for operations on Jind-Sonapat route in Haryana. X/@NAYABSAINIBJP

then proceed to the Ekla-vya Stadium in Jind to lay foundation stones and dedicate to the nation national highway projects worth ₹12,470 crore, including the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway.

The 157.92-km, four-lane access-controlled stretch has been built at a cost of ₹9,680 crore and will reduce the travel time between Delhi and Katra from 14 hours to six hours. The Jind-Gohana Greenfield Highway (NH-352A) will re-

duce travel time from two hours to 40 minutes.

He will also lay the foundation stone for a state-of-the-art Sikh museum in Kurukshetra to honour the legacy of the Sikh gurus. He will also dedicate to the nation new medical colleges in Bhiwani and Narnaul.

## Healthcare facilities

In the afternoon, the Prime Minister will arrive in Chandigarh to inaugurate and commission health-care and road infrastruc-

ture projects worth ₹4,700 crore in the city. The projects include PGIMER Chandigarh's Advanced Mother and Child Centre, a 300-bed tertiary care facility tailored for high-risk pregnancies and intensive newborn treatment.

Mr. Modi will also inaugurate an advanced neurosciences centre, which will be an integrated hub offering neurology, neurosurgery, and neuro-critical care diagnostics under a single roof. He will lay the foundation stone for the PM-ABHIM Critical Care Block, a 150-bed emergency response and disaster backup facility.

Mr. Modi will also inaugurate the six-lane greenfield highway from IT City to Kurali (Mohali) to streamline inter-State transit between Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir.

Concluding his tour in Jalandhar, the Prime Minister will dedicate rail and road infrastructure projects worth ₹5,470 crore.



# + Moisture-absorbing nature of ethanol is contaminating fuel, claim petrol dealers

**Jagriti Chandra**

NEW DELHI

Petrol pump owners claim ethanol's hygroscopic nature or affinity towards water is leading to contamination of E20 stock during monsoons and in coastal areas since existing underground storage tanks were designed for conventional petrol, not higher ethanol blends. The claims come amid viral videos on social media purportedly showing customers collecting what appears to be muddy water, rather than E20 from fuel dispensers.

One such video involved a Toyota Hycross car, which allegedly broke down shortly after refuelling. The automaker blamed fuel contamination as the car was E20 compliant. The maker of the video was later among at least 3 against whom an FIR was filed.

Three petrol pump owners shared concerns over the roll out of E20 with *The Hindu* on the condition of anonymity.

"The underground tanks that store fuel often have some amount of water due to ingress during rains or moisture or condensation or from the fuel tanker that brings petrol to the petrol pump. Now, when the water content in the entire E20 stock in underground tanks exceeds 0.5%, ethanol binds with water because of its hygroscopic nature or affinity for water. This results in phase separation where water-ethanol mixture settles at bottom of the tank, while the petrol forms a separate layer above," said an industry veteran.

As fuel is drawn by the



Moisture absorption by ethanol may contaminate E20 fuel.

dispensing unit from the bottom of the underground tank, some vehicles may end up being dispensed with this water-rich mixture instead of E20.

"As a result, vehicles may not start, or break-down after a distance. We come to know about contamination only when such customers come to us with complaints," said a dealer.

Automotive experts say, such contaminated fuel can independently cause fuel injector to malfunction, poor driveability, fuel pump failures and in severe cases, engine damage.

Pump owners said the concerns were compounded in coastal areas where sub-soil water can further contaminate E20 if seals on underground tanks are not properly in place.

## Fear of corrosion

A pump owner also feared underground tanks and pipelines made of mild steel could turn susceptible to corrosion because of ethanol's tendency to absorb water, potentially adding to fuel contamination. Some said OMCs replaced seals and washers in petrol dispensing units with neoprene rubber in preparation for E20 rollout.

Dealers also said there was a need for creating awareness among vehicle owners to prevent disputes at fuel stations and motorists should be advised on the need for protecting vehicles from rain as well as during washing to prevent water ingress in fuel tanks but the oil marketing companies (OMCs) were actively dissuading them from displaying any informational boards.

"Some petrol pumps had hoardings saying E20 was being dispensed on government order, but OMCs were offended and ordered for them to be removed," said one of the petrol pump operators.

The dealers said they had been instructed to check underground storage tanks for water contamination thrice a day with the frequency increasing to once every two hours in monsoons. Many pumps use a dipstick coated with water-finding paste that turns red in the presence of water. If contamination is detected, the dealer informs the oil marketing company (OMC), which deploys personnel to drain the water from the tank using a hand pump.

Dealers said they were unhappy with the financial burden of the process. They pointed out while they buy the entire stock of E20 from OMCs, they must bear the losses when any contaminated portion was to be discarded.

## Zero tolerance

IOCL said in a statement that it has zero tolerance policy to contamination. Inspections and testing are being carried out on a regular basis, it added.



# Skyroot to launch Vikram-1 orbital rocket tomorrow

Anonna Dutt

New Delhi, July 16

INDIAN SPACE-TECH startup Skyroot Aerospace will attempt the first orbital launch of its indigenously developed rocket, Vikram-1, on Saturday, July 18, at 11.30 am, from the country's premier spaceport at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. The mission, named 'Aagaman', meaning 'arrival', marks a milestone for India's private space sector: the nation's first-ever attempt to place a payload into orbit using a completely privately developed launch vehicle.

All necessary airspace and maritime notices have been issued establishing restricted zones during the launch window, according to the company.

"We have done everything that could be done to test Vik-

ram-1 on the ground. On July 18, we are eager to see how Vikram-1 performs in a real flight environment for the first time," said Pawan Kumar Chandna, co-founder and CEO of the company.

"This is our first test flight, and we will be getting valuable data from it. This will be foundational to Skyroot's aspirations of establishing launch cadence. We are excited to see this through," he added.

Even in its first flight, Vikram-1 will carry several technology demonstrations from the Indian earth-observation nanosatellite maker Grahaa Space, Indian space debris removal company Cosmoserve, space component developer DCubed, and its own SCOPE satellite, which will collect important flight data. Aside from this, Vikram-1 will also carry a



India's first private orbital rocket, Vikram-1, stands fully stacked at Sriharikota for the upcoming 'Mission Aagaman' test flight.

CREDIT: INSTAGRAM/@SKYROOTAEROSPACE

diamond art piece called Cosmic Bloom from Cosmos Diamonds and a micro-art piece.

"This test flight will show us how every technology we have developed over the years performs in real-world conditions. With the in-flight data gathered from this mission, we will return to the shop floor to learn, improve, and build further. This test flight is the first step towards creating a reliable, on-demand launch company for the world from India," said Naga Bharath Daka, co-founder and COO of the company.

## Vikram-1 launcher

Named in honour of Dr Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme, the launcher stands seven storeys tall. It is engineered to deliver small satellites weighing up to

350 kg to Low Earth Orbit (LEO). For this launch, it is targeting a 450 km orbit at a 60-degree inclination.

Alongside Skyroot's Vikram-1, Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro)'s own Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) and Agnikul's under-development rockets are set to expand India's capability to launch satellites in this region of space. This is significant given the increasing number of companies developing small satellites intended for low Earth orbit, such as the fleets by internet providers Starlink and OneWeb.

So far, two Indian launch vehicle developers, including Skyroot, have demonstrated sub-orbital flights — vehicles that take a satellite to outer space but lack sufficient velocity to put it into orbit.

'NO CENTRAL SUBSIDY FOR LAND ACQUISITION TO SET UP CHIP PLANTS, STATES EXPECTED TO TAKE LEAD'

# Govt not keen to cover land, tech transfer costs in new chip scheme

Soumyarendra Barik  
New Delhi, July 16

UNDER THE next phase of India's ambitious Rs 1.27 lakh crore Semiconductor Mission, the Central government may not offer subsidies to companies arising out of technology transfer costs, with the prevailing thought being that calculating such expenses is complicated, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

The Centre may also no longer offer subsidies for land acquisition to set up chip manufacturing plants, as state governments are expected to take the lead on that, a senior government official said.

Under the first iteration of the scheme, there was a provision for the government to cover a portion of technology transfer costs that approved companies may incur, but a senior government official said that it has been removed under India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0. Even though the provision existed under ISM 1.0, such disbursements were not made, it is understood.

"The reason we have de-

cided to not offer subsidies on technology transfer costs is because when we were evaluating proposals under the first leg of the scheme, there was a realisation that such transfer costs are quite opaque. It is almost impossible to reliably calculate the exact amount, so we have made changes accordingly," the official said, requesting anonymity.

Technology transfers are an important element in companies setting up semiconductor manufacturing operations in India, because many participants may not have access to such technology in-house. For instance, Tata Electronics, which is setting up a chip fabrication plant in Gujarat, is getting the manufacturing technology from Taiwan's PSMC.

These reconsiderations also point to the broader theme of India's shifting priorities under its new chip incentive scheme. The new policy is expected to place greater reliance on subsidising chip design, and the broader ancillary industry.

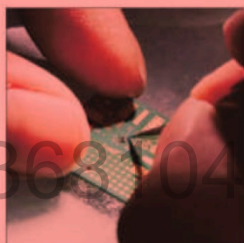
"In terms of our priorities for the new scheme, first would be chip designing, then bringing the broader supply chain

## • TECH TRANSFER COSTS

**TECH TRANSFERS** are an important element in firms setting up semiconductor manufacturing operations in India, because many participants may not have access to such tech in-house

**UNDER THE** first iteration of the scheme, there was a provision for government to cover a portion of tech transfer costs that approved firms may incur

**BUT A** senior government official said the provision has been



removed under ISM 2.0. Even though it existed under ISM 1.0, such disbursements were not made

ecosystem to India, and then subsidising building of new chip manufacturing units," a second official said.

On Wednesday, the Union Cabinet approved ISM 2.0 with an outlay of Rs 1.27 lakh crore. Under the first scheme, India managed to attract 12 chip making plants, including a fabrication facility being set up by the Tata Group.

The country's foray into semiconductor production and

packaging has been outlined as a strategic move by New Delhi to insert itself into the global chip supply chain and establish the sector to deepen domestic value addition in its electronics sector. Semiconductors — used to power devices from toasters to fighter jets — have become a critical resource amid heightened geopolitical tensions over the last few years.

By 2029, India expects to achieve the capability to design

and manufacture chips required for nearly 70-75% of domestic applications, and by 2035, the country aims to be among the top semiconductor nations globally.

Compared to the first iteration of the ISM, government incentives for semiconductor manufacturing plants have been slashed in ISM 2.0. For instance, the first scheme carried a uniform capex subsidy of 50% for fabs and assembly plants. However, under ISM 2.0, silicon fabs will receive a subsidy of 40%, and other fabs will get 35%. Similarly, the incentive for advanced packaging has been kept at 35%, and 25% for conventional packaging.

Under the new scheme, the government will offer grants and may also take equity in large companies and start-ups that design semiconductor chips, which rank higher on strategic and commercial parameters. The government's investment will depend on whether these companies are able to raise money from private equity investors.

FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)



# Vessels to and from India among top applicants for Hormuz passage

Three-week data from June 17 shows 40% of vessels seeking to cross Hormuz were to or from India and China

**Sukalp Sharma**

*New Delhi, July 16*

MERCHANT VESSELS to and from India were among the top applicants for passage through the Iran-recommended routes to cross the Strait of Hormuz in the three weeks following the June 17 US-Iran peace MoU, as per Iranian data.

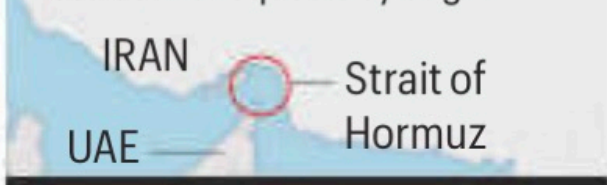
According to Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA), set up by Iran to regulate the flow of maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, over 200 non-Iranian vessels coordinated with it to receive passage permits and insurance coverage during the three week period.

Among the transit requests to exit the Persian Gulf received by the Islamic Republic's PGSA

## • Transit requests

| Origin/destination | West-bound | East-bound |
|--------------------|------------|------------|
| India              | 21%        | 20%        |
| China              | 19%        | 21%        |
| Other Asia         | 20%        | 29%        |
| Intra-region       | 24%        | 22%        |
| Other World        | 16%        | 8%         |

East-bound requests by destination  
West-bound requests by origin



SOURCE: PERSIAN GULF STRAIT AUTHORITY

set up recently by Tehran, those bound for India had a 20% share, second only to China's 21%.

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# Hormuz passage

The share of the rest of Asia was 29%, while that for intra-region (in the Persian Gulf) movements was 22%. The share of the rest of the world was 8%.

To enter the Persian Gulf, of all transit requests, India topped the list of origins with a 21% share, followed by China at 19%. Other Asian countries had a combined share of 20%, intra-region movement requests accounted for 24%, while the rest of the world had a share of 16%.

The PGSA didn't provide the absolute number of transit requests received. This data also doesn't include vessels that crossed or attempted to cross the strait without seeking Tehran's permission.

Post these three weeks after the MoU, tensions resurfaced in the region, leading to a significant drop in maritime traffic. While vessel movements have not completely stopped, they are sharply down following the resurgence of conflict around the critical trade artery. On its part, Iran and the PGSA maintain that the strait is closed.

The data is in line with trade patterns considering India and China have traditionally been

the major destination for cargo, particularly energy shipments, exiting the strait, with the rest of Asia making up a bulk of the remaining traffic.

Around 40% of India's crude oil imports, 60% of its LNG imports, and a whopping 90% of its LPG imports came from West Asia through the strait. The country's dependence on imports stands at over 88% for oil, 60% for LPG, and about 50% for natural gas, which is imported as LNG.

Before the war broke out late February, the Strait of Hormuz usually accounted for a fifth of global oil and LNG flows. Given the high dependence on West Asia for energy and other imports like fertilisers, it was expected that vessel traffic between India and the Persian Gulf would pick up.

What is now playing out in the Strait of Hormuz is a battle between Iran and the US to effectively control the waterway. The US and its allies have been encouraging vessels to use the strait's waters hugging Oman as an alternative to Tehran-designated lanes.

The stark differences in the MoU's interpretation and the

vagueness in its terms have now emerged as the flashpoints between Tehran and Washington. Maritime data shows that ever since last week's fare-up, which followed Iran's targeting of a few vessels taking the Omani route through the strait, even the vessels crossing the strait are mostly doing so using paths designated by Iran.

During the war, Iran actively regulated the flow of vessels through the strait, allowing only a handful to pass, that too using routings dictated by it. Following the June MoU with the US, Iran continued to insist that vessels cross the strait only through the routings designated by it, and that too after seeking permission from the PGSA. Tehran also plans to impose a service fee for transits, but at a later date.

Earlier this week, US president Donald Trump even proposed a 20% charge by the US Navy to facilitate safe passage of commercial ships through the strait, only to backtrack the very next day.

According to the data released by the PGSA, of the 200-plus transit applications it received in the three weeks following the MoU, 53% were for exiting the Persian Gulf, while 47% were to enter the Gulf. The PGSA said that it ap-

proved 79% of the applications, while 14% were under process as of July 14. It said that the average time taken to process the transit applications was 50 hours. As for requests by type of vessels, tankers had the highest share at 41%, followed by bulk carriers at 27%. Container ships, LNG carriers, and service vessels accounted for 18%, 2%, and 1%, respectively, with other vessel types accounting for an 11% share.

According to vessel tracking data from commodity market analytics firm Kpler, there were just 14 vessel crossings on Sunday (July 12), down from 24 on July 11 and 19 on July 10. As per data from S&P Global, the last time ship transits were lower than this level was on June 14, three days before the US and Iran inked their peace deal MoU.

There are reports that transits have grown slightly over the past three days, but most pertain to Iran-linked vessels. Since mid-June, vessel movements through the strait had risen meaningfully, even crossing 90 on June 24, with the average being between 40 and 50 on most days in the three weeks that followed the MoU, industry data shows. But these were still lower than the pre-war levels of up to 140 daily transits.



# US revives rule to deny green cards to immigrants on public benefits

**Associated Press**

*Miami, July 16*

THE TRUMP administration is reviving a rule that could deny green cards to immigrants who use public benefits that could include food stamps, Medicaid, housing vouchers and others.

The policy, known as “public charge,” appeared on Thursday in the Federal Register and will be formally published on July 20. The policy was first imple-

mented in February 2020 as one of President Donald Trump’s moves to limit legal immigration during his first administration, but it was reversed after Democratic President Joe Biden came to power.

Under the policy, applicants for green cards have to show they wouldn’t be burdens to the country or “public charges.” Its return comes when the Republican administration is implementing a hardline policy to

curb both illegal and legal immigration, and when the cost of healthcare and food is rising.

The federal government “is reaffirming the requirement of self-reliance, protecting public resources and ending policies that encouraged dependency on the backs of hard-working American taxpayers,” US Citizenship and Immigration Services said in a post published on its X account.

“Under President Trump,

USCIS is restoring the basic principle that immigrants must be able to support themselves,” the post said. The agency said the rule will take effect on September 18. While the administration’s crackdown on immigration has an increased focus on deportations and immigration enforcement in cities across country and at borders it has taken action targeting legal immigrants and mixed status families.

Federal law already requires

those seeking permanent residency or legal status to demonstrate they will not become a public charge. The Trump administration’s rule includes a broader range of programs that could disqualify them.

The Trump administration first promoted the rule in 2018 as a way to ensure that only those who were self-sufficient came to the US. Immigrant rights advocates criticized it, saying it amounted to a “wealth test.”

# U.S. expands Iran strike, hits ship trying to run blockade

Iran retaliated by launching missiles and drones at U.S. allies in the region, and warned its attacks may escalate; Tehran says American attacks have killed more than 35 people and wounded 300

**Associated Press**

DUBAI

**T**he U.S. intensified its strikes on Iran early Thursday, hitting targets farther north and firing into a ship the U.S. accused of trying to break its naval blockade on the Islamic Republic. Iran retaliated by launching missiles and drones at U.S. allies in the region, and warned its attacks may escalate.

Days of back-and-forth strikes by the U.S. and Iran across West Asia – and renewed threats to the Strait of Hormuz – have shredded the interim deal to end the Iran war and could tip the region back into all-out war. Iranian officials say U.S. strikes have killed more than 35 people and wounded over 300.



The Carrier Air Wing 7 flying in formation over the *USS George H.W. Bush* in the Arabian Sea during the West Asia war. AFP

For the first time in this latest round of violence, strikes also reached into areas around Iran's capital, Tehran, showing a widening set of targets for the Americans.

Col. Ebrahim Zolfaghari, a spokesperson for the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, threatened

that Iran could launch widespread attacks on regional infrastructure if the U.S. acts on President Donald Trump's repeated warnings that America could hit Iranian bridges and power plants.

"All the infrastructure in the region will be crushed under the steel blows of

the powerful armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran" should Trump's threat be carried out, Mr. Zolfaghari said.

"Under no circumstances and in no way will we allow America, as a foreign and extraregional country, to interfere in the Strait of Hormuz. This is Iran's invincible red line."

The U.S. strikes early Thursday hit around Tehran, state media reported. It also reported that American attacks targeted Semnan province, home to Iran's ballistic missile production and space programme.

Iranian media also reported "American missile strike in the vicinity of Qeshm" and "American enemy's aggression" on the port city of Bandar Abbas later on Thursday.



# Kremlin says no hope of resuming peace talks as strikes kill 5

**Agence France-Presse**

KYIV

The Kremlin said on Thursday that there is no immediate prospect of resuming peace talks with Ukraine, though it said that Russia remains open to the idea of negotiations. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russia was appreciative of Türkiye's willingness to help peace efforts, but no new talks were expected for now.

Russian and Ukrainian strikes killed five people on both sides of the war border, officials said on Thursday.

The attacks came as Ukraine has stepped up drone barrages against Russia in what it calls retribution for Moscow's inva-

sion, now in its fifth year.

Ukrainian shelling killed a 15-year-old girl and her grandmother in a village in the western Russian border region of Bryansk, said acting governor Yegor Kovalchuk.

Ukraine and Russia also launched missile and drone attacks on vessels in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Ukraine's military said it struck six Russian tankers and two tugboats, while Russia's Defence Ministry said its forces hit a maritime vessel and a speedboat of the Ukrainian armed forces while they were en route to ports in the Odesa region. Russia also has intensified strikes on Ukraine's deepwater Black Sea ports in the Greater Odesa area.

# Israel 'will keep troops in Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza'

**Agence France-Presse**

JERUSALEM

Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz told his U.S. counterpart Pete Hegseth early Thursday that Israel is determined to keep its forces in "security zones" it has carved out inside Lebanon, Syria and the Gaza Strip.

In a statement, Mr. Katz's office said the two men spoke overnight and the Minister "emphasised Israel's determination to remain in the security zones in Syria, Gaza, and Lebanon in order to protect Israel's borders and the communities near the border from the threats posed by jihadist forces".

"We have never asked the United States to act in our place along our borders," Mr. Katz said.

His comments come days after U.S. President Donald Trump asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to pull Israeli



Israeli soldiers stand at the site where a house was damaged amid hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces. REUTERS

forces out of Syria and Lebanon, according to U.S. news outlet *Axios*.

Citing a U.S. official, *Axios* reported that Mr. Trump told Mr. Netanyahu the Israeli deployment was fuelling tensions in Syria.

"They don't want you there. You should redeploy," Mr. Trump told him, according to *Axios*.

After the December 2024 overthrow of Syria's long-time ruler Bashar al-Assad, Israel sent troops into a United Nations-pa-

trolled buffer zone that separated Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights.

Israel has also carried out repeated incursions into Syrian territory since then, as well as bombings, and has said it wants a demilitarised zone in the country's south.

In Lebanon, Israeli forces remain deployed in what the military describes as a security zone extending roughly 10 kilometres into Lebanese territory.



# Nepal protests have a new Gen Z face, this time in anti-Balen Shah govt camp

**Yubaraj Ghimire**

*Kathmandu, July 16*

A 25-YEAR-old who died of self-immolation on July 10 is emerging as the face of the discontent against the Balendra Shah government, which swept to power less than four months ago on the strength of Gen Z support.

Anticipating that ongoing protests over Ganesh Nepali's death and other issues may mount, the ongoing Parliament Session was adjourned.



25-year-old Ganesh Nepali died of self-immolation on July 10.

Ganesh set himself on fire in an altercation with police after the Kathmandu Metropolitan Council clamped the wheels of

his motorcycle for allegedly blocking passage at a complex of the Department of Passports, suffering 60% burns.

Ganesh was a rider with a ride-sharing app, and the motorcycle his means of making a living. This fanned protests already underway by disparate groups over the Shah government's alleged highhandedness, including the dissolution of trade unions and student organisations, pushing through

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

# Nepal protests

of ordinances bypassing Parliament and eviction drives.

Home Minister Sudhan Gurung's accusations against the Opposition of politicising Ganesh's death further fuelled the mass anger.

Realising the building tensions over the incident, the government got Ganesh admitted to a top hospital and Gurung announced he was personally monitoring his case, with arrangements made for his air-transfer to AIIMS in Delhi if needed. However, Gopal died after nearly a day of battling for his life.

On Monday, he was cremated in Kathmandu, at a funeral site overlooking the famous Pashupatinath Temple, with his old parents travelling around 700 km from Mugu, a backward region of Nepal, for the last rites. The family agreed to cremate the body after the

government agreed to their demands.

The funeral was attended by several families among the over thousand displaced during a demolition drive in Kathmandu in April, which has also been seeing protests, including a bid to take a motorcycle procession into the Central Secretariat.

On Wednesday, in an outreach to another group of protesters, the Principal Secretary to PM Shah, Kumar Ben, appealed to about 50,000 contract employees in the government sector to return to work, promising that their services would not be terminated.

As per the conditions agreed to with Ganesh's family, the government has announced a five-member team led by a Deputy Inspector General of Police to investigate his

death, a job for his wife Ekmaya Pariyar, 20, and funding for their two-year-old daughter's education. Pariyar, who has done a diploma course in IT, is pregnant with the couple's second child, and soon after Ganesh's death, the government cleared a 'citizenship certificate' for her, with Gurung personally handing it over. Pariyar did not have the formal certificate, and with the document, she is now entitled to a job and other relief announced by the government.

According to sources, the government may also declare Ganesh a 'martyr', a status enjoyed by hundreds of people, mostly Maoist cadres, who died during agitations over the past 20 years of the country's troubled history.

The family says the police action in clamping his motorcycle's wheels distressed Ganesh as he had bought the vehicle on loan and the next instalment was coming up soon. He also had a scuffle with

an official, leading to the mobile phone the latter was carrying getting damaged.

Soon after, Ganesh took some petrol out of his locked motorcycle, poured it on himself and set himself on fire.

Ganesh's brother Madan Nepali, who is four years older, says he is a civil engineer diploma holder but works as a labourer in Kathmandu, while their parents survive on the government's social security dole. Their eldest brother died around 18 years ago.

"We are Dalits and our parents are marginal farmers who sent us to the city to work honestly, pursue our studies and live with dignity... Ganesh was supporting his family with his earnings," says Madan.

The two brothers planned to visit their home in October for the festival of Dashain. Madan says they hoped to eventually go abroad, to the Gulf and finally Japan or South Korea after acquiring additional skills.



ousting of Fedorov, who tried to revitalise Ukraine's forces, sparks public anger

# Zelenskyy dismisses defence chief, triggers unrest; drone warfare deputy commander quits in protest

Reuters

Kyiv, July 16

RARE PROTESTS erupted in Ukraine Thursday over dismissal of Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov as a dispute between the reformer and Kyiv's top general spilled into open during president's second overhaul of his wartime cabinet in a year.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's reshuffle has fuelled public anger over his exclusion of Fedorov, a 35-year-old tech expert who has aimed to reshape Kyiv's outmanned army into a more efficient fighting force to take on Russia. On Thursday, Zelenskyy appointed acting security chief Yevhen Khmara as acting Defence Minister and asked Parliament to confirm him.

Hundreds of people took to the streets in the capital Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities to demand Fedorov be reappointed and a senior commander of Kyiv's air war resigned.

## Fedorov Vs Army Chief

Speaking to reporters in Kyiv,

### • WHO IS MYKHAILO FEDOROV?

- A 35-year-old politician and technology reformer from Vasylivka in southern Ukraine, now under Russian occupation.
- The last minister to serve in every government formed by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy since 2019. Appointed defence minister in January 2026.
- Dismissed after six months amid reported tensions with military leadership and criticism over stalled conscription reforms.



Fedorov said he had declined an offer from Zelenskyy to serve as an adviser. In a scathing attack on military chief Oleksandr Syrskyy, Fedorov accused the general of blocking ministry initiatives. He said he had agreed to make things work with Syrskyy after unsuccessfully petitioning Zelenskyy to replace him, but that Ukraine's top general had taken to deliberately undermining him behind the scenes.

"We hit a situation where all the initiatives we proposed were

blocked, and Syrskyy, considering all problems we discussed today, is not ready to look (me) in the eye and talk openly about the problems," Fedorov said.

He accused Syrskyy of presiding over a dysfunctional culture of lies, poorly organised units and lack of personal responsibility in the military.

Syrskyy, 60, has been in his post since early 2024 but has faced criticism for a rigid command style which some service members have said results in

high troop losses. In a statement, Syrskyy called for focusing on Ukraine's war effort and recalled his role in helping defend Kyiv from Russian forces in the first weeks of their 2022 invasion. "And now in this city, briefings can be held, visions can be developed, and decisions can be made," he said. "The president is not supposed to pick sides in this kind of situation during wartime," Zelenskyy said.

## Drone Warfare Leader Resigns

Pavlo Yelizarov, a deputy commander of Ukraine's air force and a key leader in drone warfare, said he was stepping down in response to Fedorov's dismissal — calling it "a great evil" for Ukraine's defence.

Ukraine is in its best battlefield position since late 2022, striking Russia's oil sector and military logistics in drone and missile attacks that have weakened Moscow's war machine. But Kyiv's forces still face Russian advances amid a critical shortage of ground troops.

## Kremlin says no peace talks possible now

Moscow: The Kremlin said Thursday there is no immediate prospect of resuming peace talks with Ukraine, though it said that Russia remains open to the idea of negotiations.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was appreciative of Turkey's willingness to help peace efforts, but no new talks were expected for now.

"We are well aware of our Turkish friends' readiness to continue facilitating a shift toward a peaceful resolution of the situation surrounding Ukraine," Peskov told reporters.

"We are grateful to the Turkish side for this. At the moment, however, there are no immediate prospects for resuming the negotiation process; we do not see any such signs. Nevertheless, Russian side certainly remains open to this path." REUTERS

# Bangladesh diplomat named head of UN mission in Afghanistan

**Agence France-Presse**

UNITED NATIONS

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday named a senior international official from Bangladesh, Rabab Fatima, as the new head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

A career diplomat who served in several capitals before representing her country at the United Nations, Ms. Fatima is currently the global body's high representative for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small developing states.

"Ms. Fatima brings to the position over 30 years of experience in national and international civil ser-



Rabab Fatima

vice, encompassing bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, policymaking, advocacy, program planning and implementation," the office of Mr. Guterres's spokesperson.

She takes over from Canadian Georgette Gagnon, the deputy special representative of UNAMA who had been serving as acting head of mission.



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