

EQUIPPED WITH HEAT, FLAME DETECTORS

PM flags off India's first hydrogen train: 2-hour Jind-Sonipat travel, 14 halts and zero emission

With 10 coaches, it can carry maximum of 2,600 passengers; 2 round trips a day

Dheeraj Mishra
Jind, July 17

INDIA JOINED a select group of nations on Friday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the country's first hydrogen-powered train connecting Jind and Sonipat in Haryana — a significant achievement for the Indian Railways in the use of zero emission, clean fuel technology.

The first hydrogen-powered non-AC passenger train will cover the 89-km Jind-Sonipat railway section in around two hours, running at a maximum operational speed of 75 kmph. The journey includes halts at 14 stations. The Northern Railway is expected to soon announce the date for the commencement of commercial operations.

After flagging off the train from Jind, Modi said, "Even today, we read that India's first train ran between Bombay — now Mumbai — and Thane [in 1853]. Similarly, whenever hydrogen trains are mentioned in the future, the names of Jind, Sonipat and Haryana will inevitably be mentioned."

"If we look at the history of railways, the 19th century was defined by steam engines. The

20th century was characterized by diesel and electric trains, and now, the 21st century belongs to hydrogen-powered trains. Today, Indian Railways has taken a major step forward with this 21st century technology," said Modi.

The train was essentially created by replacing the diesel engines on old diesel electric multiple unit (DEMU) rakes with a zero-emission hydrogen-electric propulsion system. The train will make two round trips a day, covering 356 km and consuming around 300 kg of hydrogen. For refuelling, a 3,000-kg hydrogen capacity storage plant has been developed in Jind.

The Prime Minister said there are immense possibilities of expansion. "We will continue researching how to reduce costs, how to increase efficiency, and step by step, after thorough investigation, we will keep moving forward. Hydrogen trains have only recently come into existence in the world only around 7-8 years ago. Currently, only three or four countries in the world have the capability to run hydrogen trains. And even in those countries, hydrogen trains are still in their early stages," he said.



During the flag-off ceremony of India's first hydrogen-powered train in Jind on Friday. REUTERS

With 3200 horsepower (HP), the 10-coach train — eight passenger and two driving power cars — can carry a maximum of 2,600 passengers. It is equipped with 15 hydrogen leak detectors, seven heat detectors and three flame detectors.

"Not only the most powerful, India's hydrogen train is also the longest. In other countries, hydrogen trains run with three or four coaches. But India, in its very first attempt, has run a 10-coach hydrogen train," the PM said. Chandrakant Kumar, the train's additional loco pilot, said he underwent training in Shakurbasti in Delhi and Integral Coach Factory in Chennai, but added that "there is not much of a difference between driving the hydrogen train and DEMU train".

"Since hydrogen is very flammable, the safety standards in the train are very high. Leak detectors have been installed in the train and the system will shut down automatically in case of such an incident," said Kumar.

"There is 440 kg of hydrogen at a 350 bar pressure on the train — 220 kg in each driving power car — from where the fuel cell will take the hydrogen to produce electrical energy. It will take around four hours to refill the hydrogen cylinders on board from the plant. There are eight fans and six CCTVs in each driving power car. The hydrogen leak detectors and flame detectors are installed at the plants as well."

Nitin Parikh, a train manager on board, said the primary

job is to run the train safely and on time. "However, it is great that we have accepted the new and clean technology for Railways. It will help in cutting down the emission significantly. In this train, the emission is only the water vapour. This is not the main line, but the branch line and number of passengers are higher."

On board the country's first hydrogen train were students of Nav Vidya Senior Secondary School, Jind. "It is a beautiful train. I am a Class 9 student and I have learnt how electrolysis splits water into hydrogen and oxygen. I have not travelled very far by train yet. I want to travel to Delhi by train," said Alisha, as the train chugged off from Jind.

Other projects

Modi also inaugurated the Haryana section of the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway (158 km), the Jind-Gohana National Highway (40.60 km), Ambala-Kala Amb four-lane highway (33.81 km) and Sikh museum in Kurukshetra. The PM laid the foundation stone and inaugurated various projects worth around Rs 14,700 crore in Jind.

Referring to the West Asia conflict, he said that due to 99% electrification of Railways, trains ran continuously despite the oil crisis in the wake of the Strait of Hormuz situation.

India rejects former Japan Minister's remarks on bullet train project delay

Maitri Porecha

NEW DELHI

Japan will provide its next-generation E10 series Shinkansen trains to India for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail (MAHSR) project, official spokespersons from the Ministries of External Affairs and Railways said on Friday, addressing queries on the status of the project.

"India-Japan discussions on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed train are progressing well. Japan will provide E10 series train in the early 2030s. The train is still under development. Meanwhile, construction work is rapidly progressing. First section will be opened in 2027," a spokesperson from the Ministry of Railways said.

The clarification comes in response to a recent crit-



Need for speed: An artist's impression of the future E10 series of the Shinkansen. EAST JAPAN RAILWAY COMPANY/TANGERINE

ical social media post by a former Japanese Minister regarding the project, which will be India's first bullet train network. In the post, Hideki Makiyara, a member of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, had blamed New Delhi for the timeline delays. He had also flagged concerns over the Japanese side allegedly being "excluded from the signalling system" of the high-speed network.

The MEA clarified that the statement represented an "individual opinion" that stands at "considerable variance with facts."

Launch in 2027

Japan has been playing a key role in the implementation of the mega project in terms of financing it as well as sharing technology, and engineering expertise. Railway officials said that India and Japan had agreed

to start the operations with an Indian high-speed train, which is slated to run at an operational speed of 280 kmph. The train is currently being developed indigenously by BEML Limited and the Integral Coach Factory. "We will start off by using the indigenous train because India wants to make the Surat-Bilimora section in Gujarat operational by August 2027, and the Japanese E10 trains will only arrive in 2030," officials said.

Civil construction work along the 508-km corridor has accelerated rapidly, officials said. The Railway Ministry has awarded a tender to German multinational Siemens for installation of signalling systems along the bullet train corridor stretch, with a view to start the operations by 2027.

(With PTI inputs)



U.S. delivers another MH-60R Seahawk to the Indian Navy

The Indian Navy has received another MH-60R Seahawk multi-role naval helicopter from the United States, further strengthening its anti-submarine warfare and maritime surveillance capabilities. This brings the total number of helicopters delivered to 21, out of 24 ordered under a \$946 million deal. The latest helicopter was delivered at Kochi last week, while two more helicopters are expected to arrive in India this week, the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi said on Friday. U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor described the development as “excellent news” for bilateral ties, saying the advanced helicopter would enhance maritime security.

SC opposes use of SIR data for non-poll tasks

The top court issues notice to the Election Commission and Bengal government after Congress leader's petition says the State is denying welfare benefits to people excluded from electoral rolls

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

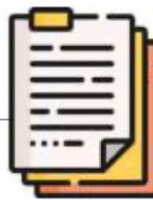
The Supreme Court stated on Friday that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is only linked to elections as a petition said the West Bengal government is using SIR data to delete names from schemes ensuring food security, women's welfare and Backward Caste certifications.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, one of the three judges on the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, said the Supreme Court, in its May 27 judgment in the Bihar SIR case, had made it very clear that the SIR outcome cannot be used for any other purpose, least of all to conclusively determine citizenship.

"The Election Commis-

Key concerns

Petition raises issues on Bengal government's use of SIR data



1 Deletion from electoral rolls has led to serious civil consequences

2 SIR data is being linked with PDS and other government schemes

3 Only 38,000 of 34 lakh appeals have been heard so far; at present rate, the appellate process is likely to take nearly 21 years to complete

4 Absence of publicly available guidelines on filing of documents, conduct of hearings and entitlement of excluded electors to file appeals

sion has a corresponding duty to refer the matter to the government for adjudication under the Citizenship Act... Until and unless that is done, for all other purposes, the status must go on. The EC is not a constitutional authority regarding Articles 9, 10, 11 and 12 [dealing with citizenship rights] of the Constitution," Justice Bagchi

observed. The court issued notice to the EC, West Bengal government, and the Chief Electoral Officer of the State on a petition filed by Congress leader Prasenjit Bose that deletion from electoral roll has resulted in serious civil consequences extending beyond the right to vote.

Mr. Bose, represented by senior advocate Gopal

Sankaranarayanan and advocate Neha Rathi, drew the court's attention to three orders passed by the West Bengal government. The petition said the State issued a notification on May 19 that purged voters must not remain beneficiaries of the Annapurna scheme for cash transfer to women unless they had filed appeals before the SIR tribunal.

On June 4, the State directed the deletion of beneficiaries under the Public Distribution System (PDS) on the basis of the outcome of the SIR. On May 14, it issued an order calling for authorities to re-verify and cancel caste certificates of names deleted from the SIR list.

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More support pours in as Wangchuk continues hunger strike on 20th day

Aroon Deep

NEW DELHI

Activist Sonam Wangchuk continued his indefinite hunger strike on the 20th day on Friday demanding Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation as more political parties extended support to him.

Mr. Wangchuk lost 350 grams in weight and was experiencing mild dehydration, his physician Satish Lamba said, according to a statement issued by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP). His blood pressure was 108/68mmHg, blood sugar at 80mg/dL and pulse rate 72bpm. He still



Frail but firm: Activist Sonam Wangchuk on his 20th day of hunger strike at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi on Friday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

remained “mentally alert,” Dr. Lamba said.

Congress leaders, including Pawan Khera, called on Mr. Wangchuk. A Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar lawmaker also paid visit

while Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker expressed solidarity with students.

The activist is under watch by government-appointed doctors following a Delhi High Court order that compelled the Minis-

try of Health to ensure timely medical intervention if his condition deteriorates.

In a video message shared at the end of the 20th day of his fast, Mr. Wangchuk urged people to join the CJP's proposed Parliament march on July 20 in large numbers, saying public participation was the movement's biggest strength. “Yes, I am still alive. Twenty per cent of my body is gone. After fats, muscles are gone. After that, organs will go. Finally, the brain. The time has not come yet,” he said.

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IRAN ATTACKS US ALLIES, DAMAGES POWER AND WATER DESALINATION PLANT IN KUWAIT

Bridges hit, Chabahar port tower falls as US escalates Iran offensive

Associated Press

Dubai, July 17

THE UNITED States expanded its airstrike campaign against Iran early Friday by hitting more bridges, energy sites and collapsing a tower at a key Iranian port, backing up US President Donald Trump's threats to start striking infrastructure to pressure Tehran to ease its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran launched missile attacks against US-allied nations in the West Asia, including Qatar, a mediator in the war, and Kuwait, where a power and water desalination plant — vital infrastructure in the desert nation — was damaged.

The interim ceasefire agreed to last month has collapsed, and the region has endured days of back-and-forth attacks by the US and Iran as they battle for control of the strait.

Iranian officials say recent US strikes have killed dozens of people and wounded hundreds of others, with new casualties reported in Friday's strikes.

The US airstrikes hit bridges overnight into Friday in Iran's southern Hormozgan province, killing at least seven people, Iranian state television reported. The attacks hit Ban-



The damaged portion of a bridge in Bandar Khamir, Hormozgan province of Iran, Friday, REUTERS

dar Khamir, a city on Iran's coast on the Strait of Hormuz.

The highway and railway bridge strikes appeared aimed at cutting off Bandar Abbas, Iran's main port, from roads leading into the Islamic Republic's central region onward to Tehran, the capital.

While other routes still are open, the US strikes could expand further, potentially disrupting both the movement of military materiel and goods

needed for Iran's 90 million people. Iran also acknowledged "attacks on power infrastructure" during the US airstrike campaign for the first time Friday when its Energy Ministry issued a call for people to use less power in southern provinces.

The US military's Central Command said it hit dozens of targets in its latest airstrikes, which concluded at dawn Friday, the sixth night in a row of American attacks.

The strikes also collapsed a tower at Iran's Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman, a key trade route for landlocked, neighbouring Afghanistan, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

Chabahar port, which Iran had been running with support from India, has been a repeated target of American airstrikes.

Iran described the tower as overseeing commercial traffic into the port. However, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary

Guard also operates at ports across the country. As of 6 am Friday, the US strikes had killed at least 38 people and wounded more than 400 in Iran, Health Ministry spokesperson Hossein Kermanpour said.

On Friday, Qatar twice warned the public to take shelter as a barrage of Iranian missiles targeted the nation. People heard explosions overhead as air defences fired to intercept the missiles. Qatar's Interior Ministry said falling debris wounded a child.

Iran also targeted Bahrain and Kuwait early Friday. In Kuwait, authorities said Iran attacked a power and water desalination plant, causing widespread damage to the station. About 90 per cent of the country's drinking water comes from desalination.

Kuwait said it extinguished the blaze and was working to assess the damage and get the station working again.

Jordan's military said it intercepted three incoming missiles Friday morning launched by Iran. Explosions also could be heard Friday morning in Irbil and Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region as air defences targeted incoming fire.

China pitches AI governance model for Global South

Ananth Krishnan

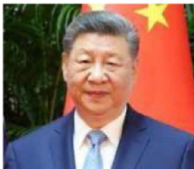
It is the clearest signal yet of China's global leadership ambitions in Artificial Intelligence. On Friday, Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled a new initiative on global AI governance, pitched largely at the Global South and developing countries. China, along with 29 other countries, mostly from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, has established a World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO) based in Shanghai.

Mr. Xi described the effort as "a major move by China to answer the call of the Global South and unite the international commun-

ity together to promote vigorously AI development and governance."

"It will be an important milestone in the history of AI development," he told a summit on AI governance in Shanghai.

He announced that in the next five years, China would provide developing countries "with 5,000 opportunities in AI training and seminar programmes", as well as set up joint AI application cooperation centres with ASEAN, the League of Arab States, the African Union, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and BRICS.



Xi Jinping

The broader context is China's push to both develop its alternatives to Western AI models and to offer them to developing countries. Beijing is concerned about the security implications of relying on models based in the West such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Anthropic's Claude.

Mr. Xi hinted at these concerns in his speech,

saying countries "should jointly oppose overstretching the national security concept in the field of AI and placing one country's security over that of others". He did not name the U.S., but Chinese officials have previously hit out at Washington for what they have described as securitisation of technologies, including AI.

A day before the launch of WAICO, Chinese AI firm Moonshot announced its latest Kimi K3 model that has surprised Western analysts with its capabilities. Chinese companies like Moonshot and DeepSeek are offering open-source models, which Beijing sees as giving them an edge n

developing countries seeking technology for AI adoption. Mr. Xi said China would "encourage open source, openness, collaboration and sharing."

If security implications of using Western AI models are one concern, ideology is another. Chinese officials have also spoken of what they see as an "infiltration" of Western values through AI platforms and an erosion of sovereignty. This is a message that, Beijing believes, will find resonance in many developing countries and in the Global South.

"We should tend to the garden of civilisations with great care to ensure that the beauty of each civilisa-

tion is appreciated and shared," Mr. Xi said. "We often say in China, 'A single string cannot make music, and a single tree does not make a forest.' AI development should not be a solo performance by a single country, but a symphony of international cooperation."

Among the nations signed on to WAICO are Brazil, Russia, South Africa, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Venezuela. India, which was present at the Shanghai summit and sent a Joint Secretary-level delegation, is alone among the five founding BRICS countries in its absence in WAICO.

Andy Burnham elected U.K. Labour leader

The former Manchester Mayor is slated to replace Keir Starmer as Prime Minister on Monday; 'I will work to build a new politics,' Burnham said, reiterating his pledge to reduce the concentration of decision making power in London and distribute it, along with economic growth, across the U.K.

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Former Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham was elected without contest to the leadership of the Labour party on Friday and is now slated to replace Keir Starmer as U.K. Prime Minister on Monday. In a speech on Friday to a specially convened conference of Labour MPs, Mr. Burnham paid tribute to the man he ousted as he went on to lay out his plans for Labour and the country, calling the transition the most significant "change moment" in British politics in 40 years.

Mr. Burnham outlined five priority directions for his government, starting with a commitment to end

infighting within Labour and the "insidious briefing culture" at Downing Street. He also said he would not punish Labour MPs who had views different from his (a reference of not 'withdrawing the whip' from MPs – as Mr. Starmer had done – who did not want to vote along party lines on legislation).

"I will work to build a new politics," Mr. Burnham said, adding that he wanted to end the political turbulence Britain had seen since 2016 and build consensus where possible. However, under him, Labour would not "try to out-Green the Greens, or out-Reform Reform or doing what we've done in the past of wearing too many Tory clothes", Mr. Burnham said.



Andy Burnham hugs his wife Marie-France van Heel as he is confirmed as Labour's new leader in central London on Friday. AFP

"Let me tell you, I'm quite happy that [Conservatives Leader] Kemi [Badenoch] doesn't approve of my wardrobe," Mr. Burnham quipped, adding that he did not approve of Tory clothes either. Mr. Burnham is known to wear attire that is more casual

than is the usual practice for U.K. Prime Ministers. His "Manchester clothes" – usually a T-shirt and blazer – have been the subject of discussion. Last month, Ms. Badenoch told the U.K. House of Commons that Mr. Starmer had been abandoned by his col-

leagues for "a pair of eyelashes and a black T-shirt".

On Friday, Mr. Burnham promised to set a direction for government that is "distinctively" Labour. He said Britain had taken a wrong turn in the 1980s and the country had surrendered control of essentials like water and housing. The former Manchester mayor is known to champion the idea of greater public control of utilities and recently announced that he would be kick-starting the largest ever public housing boom since the post-War period.

Large parts of Britain had been "de-industrialised", Mr. Burnham said on Friday. "And that is why this change today is the most significant change moment in our politics for 40 years." He emphasised

that while he previously was focused on Manchester, he would now focus on all of the U.K. He reiterated his pledge to reduce the concentration of decision making power in London and distribute it – along with economic growth – across the country.

He praised his predecessor as having put Labour in a position to change lives, taking the party from its "worst defeat" to a landslide victory in 2024. He cited among the outgoing Prime Minister's achievements, new rights for workers and renters, waitlists for medical appointments falling, an end to the right of hereditary 'Lords' to sit and vote in Parliament, and rebuilding Britain's reputation internationally.

Xi pitches China as leader of new global AI order, challenges dominance of US



Chinese President Xi Jinping waves as he arrives at the opening ceremony of the World AI Conference in Shanghai, Friday. REUTERS

Reuters

Shanghai, Beijing, July 17

CHINESE PRESIDENT Xi Jinping on Friday cast Beijing as the champion of a new global AI order, using China's premier tech conference to promote open-source technology and challenge US influence over the rules governing the fast-moving sector.

In a speech to the opening ceremony of the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai, Xi urged countries to seize the "historic opportunity" of open-source AI, and pledged to help developing nations build AI capabilities, warning against the emergence of "new historical injustices" from unequal access to the technology.

The remarks amounted to Xi's clearest articulation yet of China's ambition to shape global AI governance, framing its open-source models as a global public good and positioning Beijing as an alternative to Washington at a pivotal moment in the race for technological leadership.

Comparing AI's significance to the invention of the steam engine and electricity, Xi outlined a vision in which China shares AI technology and expertise with countries across the Global South, while leading global efforts to create standards governing the emerging technology.

The speech pitched China's AI coalition as a rival to the U.S.-led "Pax Silica" international initiative to secure global AI and critical mineral supply chains, though Xi avoided naming

Washington.

Chinese state media has increasingly portrayed Beijing's AI strategy as a response to what it calls a U.S.-led attempt to erect an "AI Iron Curtain."

In a commentary published on Thursday, Yuyuan Tiantian, a prominent social media account affiliated with state broadcaster CCTV, said China was seeking to build "another order" by "pooling the strength of all humanity and all countries to build an open-source, all-factor AI ecosystem."

The WAIC conference underlined the shifting AI landscape, with Chinese open-weight AI models making rapid gains against proprietary systems from U.S. companies such as OpenAI and Anthropic.

Beijing-based startup Moonshot AI on Friday unveiled Kimi K3, which it described as the world's largest open AI model by parameter count, a month after the U.S. government abruptly pulled Anthropic's frontier-class AI models due to security concerns.

Reuters reported earlier this month that Beijing is weighing restrictions on overseas access to some of China's leading AI models, highlighting the growing tension between its promotion of open-source AI and an increasingly stringent national security agenda.

Xi also called for AI systems to remain under human control and urged countries to establish early-warning and emergency-response mechanisms to manage AI risks, in his clearest remarks to date on AI safety.