

India's first privately made orbital rocket Vikram-1 places payloads into orbit

Hemanth C.S.

SRIHARIKOTA

India achieved a major milestone in its space journey on Saturday as the country's first privately developed orbital rocket, Vikram-1, successfully placed multiple technology demonstration payloads and postcards – including from Prime Minister Narendra Modi – into a low earth orbit.

Dubbed 'Mission Aagamman' (meaning arrival), the launch marked India's entry into an elite group of nations, becoming only the third country in the world to achieve the feat through a privately developed launch vehicle. The mission was a "grand success", said private space launch company Skyroot Aerospace, which developed the rocket.

Vikram-1 lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota at 12.05 p.m. Earlier, the launch was temporarily put on hold from its original time of 11.30 a.m.

'Defining moment'

Pawan Kumar Chandana, co-founder and CEO of Skyroot Aerospace, said that during the flight, Vikram-1 completed every principal mission milestone, validating the performance of its propulsion, avionics and guidance, navigation, and control systems under true operational conditions.

Private entry

The 'Mission Aagamman' makes India the third country in the world to attain private orbital launch capacity

1 Developed by Skyroot Aerospace, Vikram-1 is a **multi-stage orbital launch vehicle** built with an all-carbon composite structure

2 It is powered by **in-house developed propulsion systems**, including 3D-printed engines

3 It is designed to carry **small satellites** weighing up to 350 kg to low earth orbit

PAYLOADS

- Embrace by CosmoServe Space
- Solaras Satellite by Grahaa Space
- Scope Satellite by Skyroot Aerospace

■ uD3PP and mD3RN by Germany's Dcubed

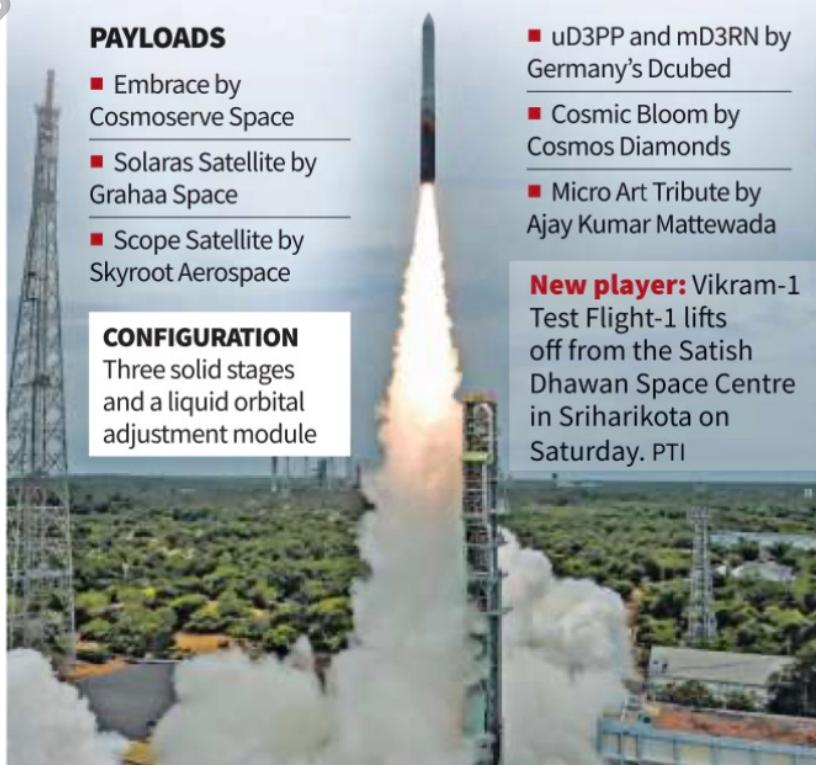
■ Cosmic Bloom by Cosmos Diamonds

■ Micro Art Tribute by Ajay Kumar Mattewada

CONFIGURATION

Three solid stages and a liquid orbital adjustment module

New player: Vikram-1 Test Flight-1 lifts off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota on Saturday. PTI



Following the successful launch, Mr. Modi had a phone conversation with the team of Skyroot Aerospace. Speaking to Mr. Chandana, the Prime Minister said that the launch is a defining moment in India's space journey.

"The growing participation of our private sector is opening new frontiers and accelerating innovation. This achievement will encourage countless youngsters to dream bigger and innovate fearlessly," the

Prime Minister said.

The launch comes 46 years after India launched its first experimental satellite launch vehicle, SLV-3. On July 18, 1980, India became the sixth member of an exclusive club of space-faring nations when the SLV-3 was successfully launched from the same venue as Vikram-1.

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STEEP CLIMB

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India launches first private orbital rocket

“The vehicle deployed its customer payloads and generated a wealth of in-flight data that will directly inform future Vikram missions and the continued evolution of Skyroot’s launch programme,” Mr. Chandana said.

He added that the average age of the Skyroot team is 28 years and there are also team members who are fresh out of college across the country. “We have a team of freshers, experienced persons and a diversified workforce,” he said.

Vikram-1 is a seven-storey-tall, multi-stage orbital launch vehicle built with an all-carbon composite structure and powered by in-house developed propulsion systems, including 3D-printed engines and high-thrust solid-fuel rocket boosters.

It is designed to carry small satellites weighing up to 350 kg to low earth orbit.

During the flight, Vikram-1 deployed six technology demonstration payloads from Grahaa Space, Cosmoserve, DCubed and Skyroot, along with Cosmos Diamonds’ artwork ‘Cosmic Bloom’, and a micro-art piece.

Pawan Goenka, chairman, IN-SPACe, said: “Only a handful of nations can reach space on their own, and today a private Indian company joined that exclusive club. What lifted off today is the culmination of years of work, a team of over a thousand people, and efforts of close to 400 suppliers with it. Congratulations to team Skyroot. You have given us an India moment.”

A handwritten postcard from Prime Minister Narendra Modi also travelled to space on Vikram-1, along with hundreds of cards from well-wishers across the world.

Earlier in the day, five minutes before liftoff, the launch was put on hold. Later, the Automated Launch Sequence (ALS) was restarted, and the liftoff was rescheduled at 12.05 p.m.

Police move Wangchuk to hospital on Day 21 of fast

Activist demanding resignation of Union Minister refuses medical interventions at hospital; police cite HC order for the move; personal physician, lawyer denied access to Wangchuk, says his wife

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Activist Sonam Wangchuk was whisked away by police from the Jantar Mantar protest site on Saturday morning, in a setback for the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)-led protest demanding resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Mr. Wangchuk, who is on the 21st day of an indefinite hunger strike, was grabbed behind raised curtains by plainclothes officers in a matter of minutes, shortly after mobile Internet was briefly shut down in the area, according to two people at the site. He has been admitted to the Safdarjung government hospital.

The forced hospitalisation came two days before the CJP's planned march to Parliament, which the activist had insisted he would attend.

Gitanjali J. Angmo, Mr. Wangchuk's wife, said that she was not able to visit him with a smartphone in hand, and that his personal physician and lawyer were not being allowed access. Central security personnel were added at Safdarjung Hospital's entry gates.

The New Delhi Deputy Commissioner of Police said in a statement that Mr.



Strong resolve: Activist Sonam Wangchuk gestures to the crowd as he is moved from Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Saturday. PTI

Wangchuk was taken to the hospital following the Delhi High Court's order to closely monitor his health. The court had not specifically ordered his hospitalisation.

Mr. Wangchuk refused to permit intravenous or oral medical interventions while hospitalised, the Safdarjung Hospital said in a bulletin in the afternoon. Ms. Angmo urged the hospital to shift him to a facility of her preference.

Abhijeet Dipke, the

CJP's founder, was held at a flat during the police action at Jantar Mantar, and was only released upon Mr. Wangchuk's hospitalisation. Mr. Dipke vowed to proceed with Monday's strike and declared that he would start his own hunger strike.

Opposition parties roundly condemned Mr. Wangchuk's forced hospitalisation. "The removal of Sonam Wangchuk ji from Jantar Mantar while he was on a non-violent hunger

21 protesters continue hunger strike

NEW DELHI

Despite deteriorating health conditions, at least 21 protesters from across the country continued their hunger strike at Jantar Mantar on Saturday, saying that activist Sonam Wangchuk's hospitalisation had only reinforced their determination to continue until Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigns. While protesters have been advised to rest as much as possible and conserve energy, they have continued to address press briefings in the sweltering heat, saying that they would not stop their protest until the "government shivers". » PAGE 10

strike is wrong... No amount of force can deter India's students, and those of us who love and believe in them, from raising these issues," said Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, who held his own programme on exam irregularities in Dehradun on Friday evening.

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FAST AND COMPOSED

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Police move Sonam Wangchuk to hospital

Mr. Dipke meanwhile urged people to gather at Jantar Mantar, fearing police action overnight to clear out the site. Later in the day, Mr. Dipke was subjected to an ink attack. The Delhi police have apprehended the attacker.

Three students from the CPI (ML) Liberation's All India Students' Association continued their concurrent hunger strike at the site.

Former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal called for more crowds to gather at the protest site. Mr. Dipke and Mr. Wangchuk "are fighting for the future of your children," Mr. Kejriwal said in a video message. "Sitting at home won't work anymore. Now everyone must unite and take to the streets. Only then will something change in this country."

"The news that Mr. Wangchuk was forcibly removed from his hunger strike site by the use of force is extremely condemnable," Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said.

"A government that treats dissent as a threat instead of a democratic obligation cannot demand trust while evading accountability," former West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said in a post on X.

"If the Government is genuinely concerned about Mr. Wangchuk's health, it should engage with the protesters and address their legitimate demands instead of resorting to repression," CPI general secretary D. Raja said on X.

‘Wangchuk not alone’: at least 21 refuse to end fast

Three AISA activists enter 21st day of hunger strike; protesters have been advised by doctors to rest, conserve energy and speak less, but they remain resolute after Wangchuk’s hospitalisation

Ashna Butani
Suruchi Kumari
NEW DELHI

Even as social activist Sonam Wangchuk was taken to the hospital on Saturday morning following his 21-day hunger strike at a protest in Jantar Mantar, called by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), at least 21 protesters, from across the country continued their hunger strike despite deteriorating health conditions.

They asserted that Mr. Wangchuk’s removal from the site has only strengthened their resolve to continue until Dharmendra Pradhan resigns as the Union Education Minister.

Crowds continued to swell on the 28th day of the protest, and volunteers at a medical counter handed out Strepsils and Oral Rehydration Salts to protesters. As scores of people walked in and out of the site, those on hunger strike stayed in their makeshift tents lined up metres away from the stage at one side.

The tents were brimming with posters, whiteboards full of slogans, bags, clothes, towels and other necessities. The names of those on hunger strike were stuck on boards, along with the number of days that they have been protesting.

All India Students’ Association (AISA) activists Neha, Ameen Amitoj, and Manish Kumar, Ph.D. scho-



Hue and cry: Abhijeet Dipke, CJP’s founder, before beginning an indefinite hunger strike demanding the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in New Delhi on Saturday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

lars at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Ambedkar University Delhi and Allaha-bad University, respectively have been on hunger strike for 21 days.

Protesters have been advised by doctors to rest as much as possible, conserve energy and speak less. Despite this, they have continued to address press briefings in the sweltering afternoon heat.

Ms. Neha said that they would not stop their protest until the “government shivers”. “We saw how Sonam Wangchuk was picked up by the police, and they tried to pounce upon us, but they could not reach us because people surrounded us,” Mr. Manish said.

Nitish, 30, who has been on hunger strike for 16 days, originally from Bihar,

now working in Delhi, has not returned to work since the indefinite protest began last month.

‘Wangchuk is not alone’

Along with them, Aaditya, a social activist from Uttar Pradesh, has rejoined the hunger strike after being forced to stop upon falling ill on July 6. After Mr. Wangchuk was removed from the site, they have tied a white strip of cloth around their head with ‘ka-fan’ written on it.

Mr. Nitish said, “We tied it today, and if they have to do anything to Wangchuk sir, they will have to go through us first. And today we are not even drinking water, as a mark of our protest to what happened in the morning,” he said, with chapped lips.

Doctors said that those on hunger strike have been walking through the crowds to the mobile washrooms on the two ends of the site. A few doctors have been voluntarily conducting health check-ups on the protesters.

Dr. Tilopa, a volunteer, said that the three protesters from AISA are in critical condition and have lost 10% of their body weight each. “Manish and Ameen have bleeding gums, which could be a sign of vitamin C deficiency, liver damage or protein deficiency. Neha’s blood sugar has dropped to dangerously low levels and has been fluctuating. If prolonged, the strike can lead to conditions like seizures, shock, organ failure and various other complications,” she said.

Panels examining Bill for removal of Ministers and VBSA Bill defer meeting

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill on Saturday cancelled its July 20 meeting where the Bill's draft report was to be adopted. This came a day after the Committee examining the Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill to remove Prime Minister, Chief Ministers, and Ministers if they are detained in prison for 30 days in serious criminal offences deferred its meeting.

Opposition leaders – Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh and Trinamool leader Sagarika Ghose – called the development, which comes just ahead of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, a “big victory” for the Opposi-

Opposition leaders call the development, just ahead of the Monsoon Session, a ‘big victory’

tion. In a social media statement, Mr. Ramesh said, “The shadow of the embarrassment that the [Narendra] Modi government had to endure in the Lok Sabha on April 17, 2026, still lingers.”

On April 17, the government's effort to pass Bills related to delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies was defeated in the Lower House. On Saturday, Mr. Ramesh referred to the defeat of the delimitation-related Bills as a “humiliation suffered by the Modi government” that had cast a “long shadow that persists in spite of the Union Home

Minister's bluff, brag, and bluster”.

While the Committee examining the Constitution Amendment Bill on Friday said it had deferred its meeting so as to make room for more consultations, the panel on the VBSA Bill, which intends to overhaul the country's higher education regulatory framework, on Saturday said it had deferred its meeting until further notice.

The panel on the Constitution Amendment Bill, headed by BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi, in its draft report, recommended replacing “removal” of Ministers with “suspension”. The Committee on the VBSA Bill, headed by BJP MP D. Purandeswari, in its report, revealed that the Centre had agreed to changes proposed by its

NDA-allied governments in Andhra Pradesh and Meghalaya over concerns of over-centralisation, as reported by *The Hindu*.

The Trinamool is learnt to have submitted a formal dissent note to the committee on the VBSA Bill, in which it has called the legislation a “constitutional Trojan Horse” being presented as a standards-setting framework for higher education. The party's note further expounds that the proposed VBSA architecture exceeds Parliament's constitutional role, weakens cooperative federalism, affects academic freedom and institutional autonomy, and proposes reform without a financing framework – issues that were reportedly raised by Congress leader Digvijay Singh, who is also on the panel.

US new immigration rule threatens stay of over 3 lakh Indian students on F-1 visa

Experts say rule will not only impact F-1 status but also affect optional practical training

Divya A

New Delhi, July 18

OVER THREE lakh Indian students studying in the US on F-1 visa are set to be affected by the new regulation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which mandates that they transition to the new system “automatically” and have their “authorised stay capped at a maximum of four years”.

Experts point out that there is still a lack of clarity, and processes will become clearer once the rules become applicable in mid-September. However, they say the new rule may complicate matters for existing students.

This rule fundamentally changes how international students maintain lawful status in the US, says Bangalore-based Sukanya Raman, US Immigration Advisor at the law firm, Immigration Desk. “Instead of remaining in F-1 visa status for as long as they comply with their academic programme, students now face fixed admission deadlines and must file for an extension of stay to complete longer degrees,” she says.

The DHS on Thursday announced a rule that eliminates “duration of status (D/S)” — a provision that allowed foreign students, exchange visitors and media representatives to extend their stay without being subject to additional screening.

International students in the

US are largely on F-1 visas. Holders of F (student visa) and J (exchange visitor visa) visas can remain in the US for as long as they maintain their student status; their stay is marked as “D/S”. If they need more time to complete a programme, they can request their educational institution to extend the duration of their stay.

However, the new rule demands that students be admitted for a fixed period matching the length of their academic programme, with a maximum initial admission of four years. Those who take longer to complete their degrees have to formally petition the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for an extension of stay. The post-graduation grace period to prepare to depart the US or apply for a status change has also been halved from 60 days to 30 days.

As of January 2025, there were about 300,000 Indian students in the US, mostly in graduate (Master’s) programmes in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields. According to the US State Department report, in 2024, 90,129 Indians obtained F visas.

The US government claims that this shift restores integrity to the nation’s immigration system, combats rampant visa abuse, and strengthens national security through regular vetting.

Experts say the new rule will not only impact the F-1 status but also affect other related issues such as optional practical training (OPT). For F-1 students, the duration of stay has been considered as the time the individual took to complete their academic programme and any post-completion OPT, plus a 60-day grace period.

“Students will need to ensure that their underlying F-1 status remains valid throughout any period of OPT,” says Mumbai-based immigration lawyer Surabhi Singh.

However, OPT itself has not been eliminated by the final rule. Students remain eligible to apply for the existing 12-month post-completion OPT, and STEM graduates may still seek the 24-month STEM OPT extension, say immigration experts, even as they add that “the interaction between the fixed admission period and OPT/STEM OPT has not yet been fully addressed in the final rule”.

There is no indication yet that students will be required to depart the US and re-enter in order to apply for OPT, Singh says, adding that the existing framework governing OPT applications has not been amended and students should continue to be able to apply for OPT from within the US while maintaining valid F1 status.

However, Singh says, “If the student’s fixed period of admission is due to expire before or during OPT, they may need to obtain an extension of stay or otherwise maintain valid F1 status in accordance with future DHS/USCIS guidance.”

Explaining how this will likely pan out for existing international students, an immigration attorney based in New York says: “During the transition period, it appears that existing F-1s who have a pending application for post-completion OPT or STEM OPT employment authorisation when the regulation takes effect, or who file such an application within six months of the regulation’s effective date, will not be required to file a separate extension of F-1 status.”

‘Address fundamental issues’: Mehbooba-led PDP declines Omar’s Jantar Mantar invite

Bashaarat Masood

Srinagar, July 18

SAYING IT would not be in the fitness of things for the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to “participate in a protest whose *raison d’être* is solely and exclusively the demand for statehood”, former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti declined the National Conference’s invitation to join the Jantar Mantar protest.

Mufti said an “honest and meaningful political process can only begin by addressing fundamental issues”. Calling Article 370 the core issue, Mufti, in a letter to NC president Farooq Abdullah, called for convening an all-party meeting to seek the release of political prisoners and revocation of the ban on socio-political organisations, including Jamaat-e-Islami, as a first step.

“It would be a grave injustice, a disservice, and a sheer betrayal to reduce the honourable aspirations of the people of J&K to the petty, myopic, short-sighted, and detrimental demand for statehood alone,” Mufti said in her letter to Abdullah. “Protesting in unison solely for statehood would only legitimise and sanitise the illegal act of revoking J&K’s special status and could be viewed as a direct endorsement of August 5, the darkest day in our collective history”.

The NC is planning a sit-in at Jantar Mantar on July 20, the first day of Parliament’s monsoon session, to press for restoration of statehood. All NC legislators and MPs will take part in the protest. NC MP Aga Ruhullah Mehdi, however, said he had not been invited and would not



PDP president Mehbooba Mufti termed demand for restoration of statehood without focus on special status a whitewash. FILE

be part of a protest that asks for anything short of Article 370.

Mufti termed the demand for restoration of statehood without focus on special status a whitewash. “Not only does this half-hearted demand echo and legitimise the BJP’s odious narrative of relegating Article 370 to the back burner, but it also risks whitewashing the illegal and unconstitutional *harakiri* carried out in stealth on August 5, 2019,” she said. “The overwhelming mandate that the NC earned was not merely to help restore statehood. Had that been the case, the BJP and its proxies would have enjoyed far greater electoral success.”

Calling J&K’s special status an emotive issue, Mufti accused the NC of normalising the constitutional changes of August 5, 2019. “As Kashmir’s senior-most leader, I am certain you realise not only the emotive but also the practical significance of Article 370 for our people...” Asking the National Conference to take a cue from the Ladakhi leadership, Mufti said, “We must rise above partisan politics and come together to fight for Article 370.”

CORE INFLATION NUMBERS SUGGEST CONSUMPTION IS SUBDUED

India's 3 inflations: Clues from prices on consumption, profits & China dependence

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, July 18

THIS WEEK, the government released three different measures of inflation — Consumer Price Index (CPI), Wholesale Price Index (WPI), and Producer Price Index (PPI) — for the month of June.

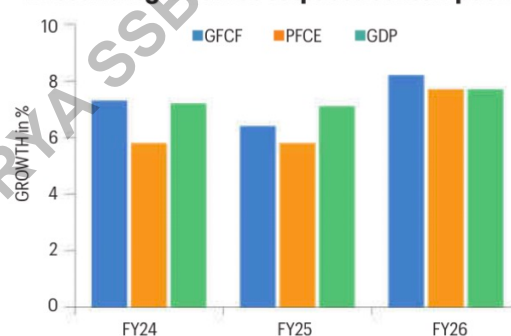
The common theme across all three was that prices rose at a faster rate in June compared to May on the back of higher food inflation and elevated fuel prices, thanks to the weak rains and the West Asia war.

CPI inflation, which is relevant for households, rose to 4.38% from 3.93% in May; WPI inflation, which measures the year-on-year change in wholesale prices, increased to 9.87% from 9.68%; and output PPI inflation edged up to 9.57% from 9.38%. But the price situation in the country is more complex than just an increase in inflation.

Core inflation and consumption

The 4% inflation the Reserve Bank of India targets refers to headline CPI inflation. And while that crossed 4% in June for the first time in 17 months, core inflation was unchanged at 3.9%. Core inflation measures the year-on-year change in prices for items other than food and fuel, which can be volatile. Households also

Investment growth has outpaced consumption



NOTES: GFCF IS GROSS FIXED CAPITAL FORMATION; PFCE IS PRIVATE FINAL CONSUMPTION EXPENDITURE. DATA IN CONSTANT PRICE TERMS; SOURCE: MoSPI

may not drastically change their consumption of food and fuel just because prices rose or fell — people can't give up eating and necessary travel. This is why focussing on the non-food-non-fuel portion of the CPI can provide more useful information. Economists think core inflation suggests consumption is subdued.

The most widely-used core inflation measure has risen only 20 basis points over the last six months from 3.7% in January. A narrower version of core inflation that also excludes gold and silver jewellery — precious metal prices have

rapidly risen and fallen over the last 12 months or so — has edged up to 2.5%. It was as high as 6% in early 2023.

But how did core inflation fall from 2023 to 2026 even as India recorded a world-beating 7%-plus growth? According to ANZ economists Dhiraj Nim and Sanjay Mathur, the answer may lie in what has been driving India's growth in recent years: investments.

"In the last four fiscal years, gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) growth has consistently driven GDP, outpacing private consumption growth. In other words, the productive capacity

of the economy has grown faster than consumption demand," Nim and Mathur said in a note Wednesday.

The China factor

Also pulling down India's non-food-non-fuel-non-precious metal inflation is falling prices of Chinese goods. According to ANZ, movement in Chinese producer prices is the second-most important driver of this narrow core inflation in India. With China's Producer Price Index (PPI) inflation in negative territory from October 2022 to February 2026, India has been importing 'deflation' from China.

"India's increased supply chain dependence on China means price spillovers are becoming stronger. India's goods imports from China now exceed \$130 billion annually, representing close to 3.5% of India's GDP, ranging all kinds of goods," Nim and Mathur said. The GST rate cuts and the subsequent price reductions of last year also explain why core inflation has been subdued over the better part of the last one year. However, this low base effect will vanish in a couple of months.

Dining out gets expensive

One part of core inflation which has risen sharply since the West Asia war started is prices charged by restaurants

and cafes. From 2.73% in February, restaurant and cafe inflation has risen to 6.94% in June because of higher commercial LPG prices.

With eateries passing on higher costs to diners, the second-round impact of the LPG price hikes is clearly visible, although the cut in cylinder prices earlier this month may rein it in.

Profit margin pressures

Restaurants and cafes are especially sensitive to higher costs. But the manufacturing sector has seemingly stomachached the increased input prices, possibly in the face of weak consumer demand.

Consider this: the output PPI — which measures the change in prices received by producers excluding net taxes at the factory gate — for the manufacturing sector declined 0.3% in June from May. At the same time, the sector's input PPI — currently being released on an experimental basis — jumped 2.1% month-on-month in June. Is it absurd to read so much into inflation data? Perhaps not. According to DSP Mutual Fund, inflation is "by far...the cleanest indicator of the underlying strength of consumption", especially with the CPI series having been updated.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Mount Olympus, home of ancient Greek gods, nominated for UNESCO World Heritage List

**Costas Kantouris
& Elena Becatoros**

Litochoro, July 18

SNOW-CAPPED for much of the year, Mount Olympus, mythological home of ancient Greece's 12 Olympian gods, has captured the imagination through the millennia.

Rising to 2,918 metres from a base practically at sea level, the ancient Greeks believed the throne of Zeus, king of the gods, stood on the highest of its craggy, often mist-shrouded peaks.

Now, modern-day Greeks hope their tallest mountain will be inducted into UNESCO's World Heritage List as a mixed cultural and natural site.

The nomination is to be dis-



A statue of Alexander the Great holding Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, with Mount Olympus in the background. AP

cussed when the World Heritage Committee meets in Busan, South Korea from Sunday through July 29.

"Olympus is our life. It is the place we grew up in," said Evagelos Geroliolios, mayor of Dion-Olympus, based in Lito-

choro, the mountain's main town.

"It is the place we see every day, but at the same time, it is also a place which carries with it myth, history, biodiversity, extraordinary beauty and a very great cultural weight."

It was here that Zeus was said to have established his court after overthrowing his father, Cronus, in a 10-year war that ended the reign of the Titans. Interest in Olympus may receive another boost with the theatrical release this week of Christopher Nolan's "The Odyssey," a new adaptation of Homer's epic, in which the mountain serves as the home of Zeus and the Olympian gods who influence Odysseus' journey. **AP**

Iran 'suspends commitments' to interim agreement with the U.S.

U.S. Centcom says its strikes hit surveillance sites, military logistics infrastructure, underground weapons storage, maritime capabilities; Kuwait reports most damage from Iranian strikes, including hits on a water desalination plant and an oil facility

Associated Press

DUBAI

The U.S. and Iran exchanged strikes aimed at infrastructure and military targets on Saturday as an Iranian negotiator said Tehran had suspended its commitments under the interim deal with the U.S. — snapping another fragile thread as the war shows no end in sight.

The U.S. Central Command said that its seventh straight night of strikes hit “surveillance sites, military logistics infrastructure, underground weapons storage, and maritime capabilities”.

The U.S. has violated its commitments under the deal that was signed about a month ago and now Iran is “no longer implementing them,” Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister, told state TV.

There was no new word on mediation efforts.

The most significant damage from Iranian strikes on Saturday occurred in Kuwait, where a water desalination plant and an oil facility were hit, according to the Kuwait authorities.

The strikes injured several people at the oil facility and caused a fire at the desalination plant, forcing several power generation



Black smoke billows over the town of Mangaf, south of Kuwait City amid reports of an attack on an oil facility on Saturday. AFP

units offline. It was the second attack against a desalination plant in two days in the tiny desert nation that depends on desalination for 90% of drinking water.

U.S. air strikes hit an electricity and desalination plant in Iran’s southern Hormozgan province, Iranian state TV reported. IRNA said the Bonji desali-

nation plant was destroyed, cutting off water supplies to about 10,000 people, and that a desalination plant on strategic Qeshm Island inside the strait was damaged.

Iran acknowledged “attacks on power infrastructure” during the U.S. airstrikes for the first time Friday when its Energy Ministry issued a call for people to use less power in southern provinces “experiencing extreme heat”.

Iranian authorities said at least 50 people have been killed and more than 500 wounded in U.S. strikes in the past three weeks, including eight killed on Friday.

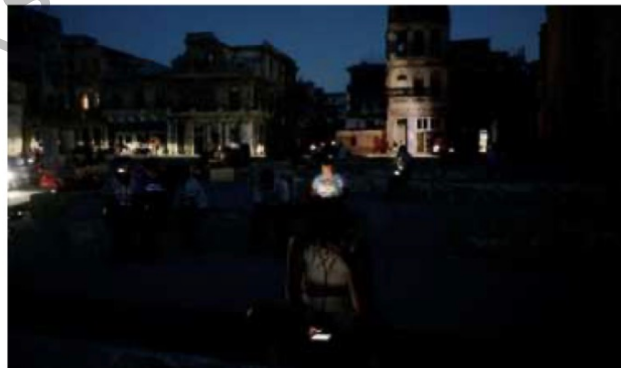
Cuban Ambassador calls for lifting of energy blockade imposed by the U.S.

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

The oil blockade that the United States imposed against Cuba has affected all sectors of the its economy and has delivered a “collective punishment” against its population, Cuban Ambassador to India Juan Carlos Marsan Aguilera said on Saturday.

In a written response to questions from *The Hindu*, Mr. Aguilera said the blockade has created a humanitarian crisis for Cuba, where frequent power cuts have led to cascading effects on all sectors of the economy, like agriculture and the medical sector, where more than a lakh critical surgeries have been



People gather at a park to escape the heat inside their homes as Cuba's power grid collapses for the third time in 10 days. REUTERS

postponed because of the collapsing health system.

“The oil blockade has become a collective punishment to the Cuban population because the shortage of oil is affecting the Cuban economy, especially in electricity supply –

why Cuba is suffering frequent blackouts – in the healthcare system, in water supply, food production, transportation, education and many other sectors,” he said.

Mr. Aguilera's remarks come against the backdrop

of Iran once again blocking the Strait of Hormuz after renewed hostilities with the U.S. since the funeral of former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

The Cuban Ambassador said the curbs have imposed “unprecedented suffering” on Cuban society.

“In health, we are facing more than 1,00,000 pending medical surgeries, with 11,000 children among them; infant mortality has increased from 4.0 to 9.9 per 1,000 live births in the last year; the survival rate for children with cancer has declined from 85% to 65%,” Ambassador Aguilera said, arguing that no country had the right to impose unilateral energy blockades.

Venezuela quake toll crosses 5,000 as IMF supports relief efforts

Agence France-Presse
CARACAS

The twin earthquakes that struck Venezuela last month killed over 5,000 people, officials said, while announcing they drew hundreds of millions of dollars from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for reconstruction.

The 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude quakes struck within a minute of each other on June 24, decimating the coastal state of La Guaira, located north of Caracas.

The disasters killed 5,069 people, National Assembly chief Jorge Rodriguez posted on Telegram, with most casualties occurring in the coastal region.



Jorge Rodriguez

The number of people injured remains unchanged at 16,740, with most of them already discharged from the hospital.

Later on Friday, Interim President Delcy Rodriguez said the country tapped \$346 million from the IMF for earthquake reconstruction.

Mulling Netanyahu's arrest during UN meet, says Mamdani

Agence France-Presse
NEW YORK

New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani is in talks over whether to try to arrest Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during an upcoming UN summit, he said in an interview published on Saturday – prompting a sharp rebuke from Mr. Netanyahu's camp.

"I believe that Prime Minister Netanyahu belongs in The Hague," Mr. Mamdani told *The New York Times*.

"He's a war criminal who has been charged by the International Criminal Court," he added.

Mr. Mamdani admitted

he was not sure if he has the power to order the New York Police Department to detain a foreign leader but is discussing the matter with the city's legal team.

"Whatever the law allows me to do in New York City, that's what we will do," he said.

Danny Danon, Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, quickly called out Mr. Mamdani.

"Instead of focusing on his responsibilities as mayor and confronting the rising wave of antisemitism in his city, he has chosen to incite hostility and generate headlines by attacking the State of Israel," Mr. Danon wrote on X.

TEHRAN

IRGC says two oil tankers explode after hitting mines in Hormuz



REUTERS

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DUBAI

Two troops dead, one missing after Iran hits Jordan base: U.S. military



REUTERS

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