

LS passes paper leak Bill amid Opposition protests

No shots were fired at students during the July 20 protest and 'utmost restraint was exercised' by the police, says Minister; 'I brought before you a boy who suffered pellet gun injury', says Rahul

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday insisted that "no shots were fired" at students during the July 20 protest in Delhi, rejecting Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi's allegation that Home Minister Amit Shah had ordered security forces to open fire on the protesters. He was replying to the debate on the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026.

The Bill, which proposes tightening penalties and introducing time-bound investigations and trials for paper leak cases, was passed amid Opposition protests over the alleged police excesses against students during the NEET-UG agitation. Soon after its passage, Mr. Shah hailed the legislation in a post on X, congratulating students across the country and describing the amendment as



Centre's stand: Union Minister Jitendra Singh speaks in the Lok Sabha on the paper leak Bill on Wednesday. ANI

a measure that would "shield the dreams and aspirations" of the youth.

"The Modi govt. will spare no one who attempts to imperil the future of our students and will leave no stone unturned to ensure that they face the full wrath of the law," the Minister said. However, he did not respond to the charges that Mr. Gandhi sought to raise inside the Lok Sabha in his speech.

Dr. Singh, who is the Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office and han-

dles the Department of Personnel and Training, responded to the charge while replying to the debate on the paper leak Bill.

'Utmost restraint'

He said "utmost restraint was exercised" during the police action and "it was made sure that casualties do not happen". Mr. Singh accused the Congress of attempting to politicise a legislation aimed at safeguarding the integrity of public examinations.

The Minister said the

amendments reflected an willingness to "learn from experience" after the implementation of the 2024 anti-paper leak law. So far, 52 FIRs had been registered since the original law came into force and suicides linked to paper leaks had declined, he informed the Lok Sabha.

Responding to the government's assertion that no shots had been fired, Mr. Gandhi stood by his charge.

"I brought before you a boy who suffered pellet gun injury. He could lose an eye and the pellet gun is a lethal weapon. And the government is saying I am lying. What do you want me to do? Bring the gun?" he said.

The amendments significantly strengthen the 2024 law. They mandate that investigations be completed within two months and empower States and Union Territories to designate sessions courts as fast-track special courts to conduct day-to-day trials.

Rahul Gandhi hits out at Centre, RSS in Lok Sabha over protests crackdown

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the government in the Lok Sabha over the students' protest in the capital last week, drawing sharp rebuttals from the ruling NDA.

Mr. Gandhi could not complete his speech amid protests and objections from the Treasury benches, even as a substantial part of the address was expunged from the records.

Participating in the debate on the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, he took an indirect dig at the BJP and its core supporters by referring to three categories of people – students, those who think they know everything and pretend to be god, and “*andhbhakt*” (blind believers) who believe the second category is god.

The Treasury benches erupted in protest over the remarks, and as the uproar



Vociferous attack: Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi speaks in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. ANI

continued, Mr. Gandhi claimed that he was not being allowed to speak.

He said that Dharmendra Pradhan, who had to resign as the Union Education Minister, was just a symbol and the Education Ministry was actually being run by the RSS.

At this, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh stood up and said that the Leader of the Opposition had the responsibility of not using unparliamentary words.

Mr. Gandhi targeted the RSS, alleging that it was in-

fluencing the education system. “The soul of the system has been captured by the RSS. Mr. Pradhan never ran the Education Ministry. The man and organisation that run the Ministry is called the RSS,” he said.

Mr. Gandhi then trained his guns at Union Home Minister Amit Shah, claiming that he was not present in the Lok Sabha because he was “scared”.

The BJP demanded that Mr. Gandhi apologise for “misusing” the House by making “baseless” allegations.

Rahul seeks Shah's ouster, vows justice for students

Sandeep Phukan

NEW DELHI

Escalating the confrontation with the Narendra Modi government over the use of force and lethal weapons such as pellet guns against protesting students during their March towards Parliament on July 20, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday demanded the dismissal of Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

“There are only two possibilities: either [Amit] Shah ordered the use of lethal weapons or he was not aware of it. He is either culpable or incapable and in both cases, he has to go,” Mr. Gandhi said.

Addressing a press conference at Indira Bhavan, Mr. Gandhi also said that the “balloon” of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “fake image” had already burst.

Seeking to reassure students injured in the protests, Mr. Gandhi said the Opposition would pursue accountability. “We will ensure that every single student gets justice.”

RS passes Bill to criminalise disrespect to *Vande Mataram*

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha passed the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026 on Wednesday, in the absence of members from Opposition parties.

After raising slogans demanding an apology from Union Home Minister Amit Shah for last week's police action against protesting students, the Opposition walked out as Union Minister or State for Social Jus-

tice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale started speaking about the Bill.

The Bill proposes to amend the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, and extend the punishment for acts of disrespect towards national symbols such as the National Flag, the Constitution, and the National Anthem, to acts causing obstruction in the singing of the National Song, *Vande Mataram*.

The Bill will now go to the Lok Sabha for its con-



Nityanand Rai

sideration and passage.

Replying to the brief discussion on the Bill, which largely saw the participation of NDA members, Minister of State for Home Af-

fairs Nityanand Rai said the Congress was engaging in appeasement politics by insulting *Vande Mataram* for many years.

"The *Vande Mataram* Bill is not merely an ordinary Bill, but represents India's soul, national awareness, and cultural heritage, and reminds us of the freedom struggle," Mr. Rai said, asking why the Congress opposed the Bill.

Vande Mataram was penned by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 1875, but only two stanzas were

adopted as the National Song, with Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru making that decision in 1937, years before he became the country's first Prime Minister.

Penal provisions

"Don't know why a few people are opposed to *Vande Mataram*, or why Congress is particularly opposed to *Vande Mataram*," Mr. Rai said. "There has been a discussion about making penal provisions for disrespecting the national song

through this Bill. Opposing *Vande Mataram* means the Congress has been always working to disrespect the pride of this country by adopting a policy of appeasement."

The Aam Aadmi Party's Sanjay Singh said that his party believed that *Vande Mataram* and the National Anthem should not be insulted. The Bill was passed by voice vote. The House was adjourned after Mr. Harivansh allowed some members to place special mentions in the House.

Students return to Jantar Mantar over 'police crackdown'

First protest at the site after CJP's 36-day agitation calls for a halt to police harassment in various States; Dipke seeks action over firing of pellet guns

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Students from various Left organisations held a protest at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday against the "police crackdown" in States such as West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam on protesters who participated in the 36-day stirred by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) in New Delhi.

The protest, the first at Jantar Mantar since the CJP called off its stir on July 25, started at 3 p.m. and continued for around two hours. The call was issued by 13 outfits, including the Students' Federation of India, All India Students' Association (AISA), Krantikari Yuva Sangathan, and All India Students' Federation.

AISA national president Neha, who was on hunger strike for 23 days in the CJP-led stir, was also present at the protest.

Students held up placards and posters that read 'Rise in rage' and 'Stop implicating students on false charges'. Some also called for the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah over "police brutality" during the July 20 'Chalo Sansad' march.



The protest by 13 outfits began at 3 p.m. and continued for 2 hours; barricades welded together at Jantar Mantar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The protesters walked past barricades welded together by the police to create an enclosed space and regulate entry.

'Not terrorists'

Meanwhile, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke on Wednesday demanded action against those responsible for ordering the use of pellet guns on July 20. Asserting that "students are not terrorists", Mr. Dipke warned that a fresh agitation on a "much bigger scale" would be launched if "harassment" by police forces continues. "In many States, police are visiting the homes of students and threatening them with ar-

rests," he told reporters at the Aurangabad airport on his way home.

In a post on X, the CJP accused the Delhi police of issuing takedown notices and registering FIRs to remove social media posts criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

When reached for comment, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations) Vinit Kumar said, "We send notices for content that spreads misinformation, has AI-generated or deepfake content or is misleading in any form. The process is part of our social media monitoring."

(With inputs from PTI)

BS-III vehicles may need some tweaks for E20 fuel, says Centre

Jagriti Chandra

NEW DELHI

Some rubber parts and gaskets in BS-III vehicles may require replacement when using E20 fuel, a blend of 20% ethanol and 80% petrol, the Union government informed Parliament on Tuesday.

“In case of testing done on BS-III vehicles introduced from 1st April, 2005 and manufactured prior to 2016, some rubber parts and gaskets may require replacement, which can be easily managed during routine servicing regime of the vehicle,” Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari said in the Rajya Sabha, citing findings of a study.

Not yet made public

He was responding to a question from the Communist Party of India MP A.A. Rahim on the impact of E20 on vehicle performance, fuel efficiency, engine durability, and maintenance costs. The study is yet to be made public.

The study was carried out by Indian Oil Corporation Limited; the Indian Institute of Petroleum, Dehradun; the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, and the Automotive Research Association of India.

Other than BS-III vehicles, the study showed there was no need to modify car and two-wheeler engines, the Minister said.

There have been widespread anecdotal complaints of vehicles misfiring or breaking down.

Centre 'coercing' automobile manufacturers into silence on E20 fuel issue, says Kejriwal

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday accused the Centre of "coercing" automobile manufacturers into silence over the impact of E20 (petrol blended with 20% ethanol) on vehicles manufactured before 2023.

'Can damage vehicles'

Addressing a press conference on the issue, he claimed that officials from nine automobile firms had, in discussions with him, acknowledged that E20 could damage nearly 30 crore older vehicles and reduce fuel efficiency.

AAP has organised a national town hall on the issue on August 1.

"The Modi government has resorted to outright *goondagardi* (hooliganism)



Aam Aadmi Party national convener Arvind Kejriwal addressing a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI

to force E20 petrol on the public. A few days ago, I wrote to 29 companies that manufacture petrol-powered two- and four-wheelers. In my letter, I asked them to clearly state whether E20 petrol can be used in vehicles manufactured before 2023," the AAP chief said, adding that none of the companies res-

ponded in writing. However, he had detailed phone conversations with officials from nine of those.

"The technical and engineering reality is that if E20 is used in vehicles manufactured before 2023, it will damage the vehicle, its engine and the fuel train system, and fuel efficiency will also decline," he said.

States told to deploy drones to monitor stubble burning

✓ include in lect DRONES'

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and adjoining areas has urged the governments of Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab to adopt drone surveillance for effective monitoring of stubble burning, an official said on Wednesday.

“The commission emphasised that UAVs/ drones offer a reliable and effective solution for monitoring stubble burning incidents by providing rapid deployment, high-resolution, real-time imaging and flexible flight patterns that complement satellite imagery and ground inspections,” said the official. Drones can accurately detect active fire locations, identify smoke plumes,



Stubble being burnt in a field in Punjab. FILE PHOTO

map affected agricultural fields and generate time-stamped evidence for prompt enforcement action.

The governments of Delhi and four adjoining States have been asked to ensure that the monitoring area covers paddy cultivation areas, with special emphasis on identified hotspot villages and fire-prone locations.

India getting ready for Xi, Putin visits in September

Both leaders expected to attend BRICS summit in Delhi on Sept. 12, 13; Foreign Secretary holds wide-ranging talks in Beijing as Chinese officials arrive in Delhi to oversee security preparations

Ananth Krishnan
Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India is getting ready for visits by Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, with both leaders planning to attend the BRICS summit to be held in Delhi on September 12 and 13, sources here said on Wednesday. Consultations are continuing with regard to these upcoming high-level visits.

On Monday and Tuesday, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri held a series of talks in Beijing, during which both sides discussed "strengthening high-level interactions". In recent weeks, Chinese officials have also visited India to oversee the arrangements and security preparations for a possible high-level visit.

During Mr. Misri's talks in Beijing with a senior Communist Party of China official Sun Haiyan, who is Vice Minister in the party's



High-level meet: Narendra Modi, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping at the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, in October 2024. REUTERS

International Department, both sides "expressed commitment to working together to follow through on the common understandings reached by the leaders, strengthen high-level interactions, properly manage differences, and make sustained efforts to foster the improvement and development of bilateral relations," according to a readout from the Chinese side.

The Ministry of External Affairs said both sides had "discussed ways to deepen implementation of the gui-

dance of the leaders for bilateral relations, including addressing issues of priority to both sides and by promoting political, people-to-people, academic and think-tank exchanges."

Other preparations for a possible visit by Mr. Xi are also under way.

Mr. Xi did not attend the BRICS summit in Brazil last year, again deputing Mr. Li to represent China in his stead. He did, however, attend the summits in 2023 in South Africa and in 2024 in Russia, where his talks with Mr. Modi paved the

way for the subsequent gradual normalisation in relations.

India intensifies contact

Mr. Putin's attendance at the summit was earlier indicated by the Russian side when Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited New Delhi for the BRICS Foreign Ministers meeting in May and discussed "highest level" contacts with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

India has intensified contact with BRICS member countries both bilaterally and under the multilateral BRICS umbrella.

Official sources here indicated that they expect top leaders of the member countries to attend the summit meeting, though the final details of the visits will be known closer to the date of the summit.

Russia has extended support to India's chairmanship of BRICS and China reiterated its support earlier this week during Mr. Misri's visit.

U.S. fast-tracks Act for 100% tariffs on trade partners of Russia

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

NEW DELHI

The U.S. Senate has voted to fast-track the passage of a legislation that could see a tariff of 100% being imposed on India for its import of Russian oil.

The Senate on Tuesday exhibited a rare display of bipartisan agreement by voting 86-12 to invoke a cloture motion to advance the 'Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026'.

The original version of the Act, introduced in 2025, proposed 500% tariff on those importing Russian oil. However, the Act was revised downwards early this month.

As per Senate documents, the bipartisan Act "is designed to deprive [Russian President] Vladimir Putin of the revenue financing Russia's war against Ukraine" by limiting political leadership, fi-

Trade troubles

The proposed U.S. sanctions seek to use targeted tariffs to pressure Russian energy purchasers to reduce their dependence on Moscow

■ Under the latest version of the Act, a tariff of **'up to 100%'** would be levied on the top five purchasers of Russian crude oil and natural gas

■ Currently, China accounts for about **47-50%** of Russian crude oil exports, while India accounts for another **36-38%**



nancial institutions, energy sector, and sanctions-evasion networks. The sanctions are to be implemented using "targeted tariffs to pressure the world's largest purchasers of Russian energy to reduce their dependence on Moscow".

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U.S. fast-tracks Russia sanctions tariff Act

A cloture is basically a Senate procedure that sets a time limit for the debate and related actions on an issue before it is put to a vote. That is, it is a procedure meant to hasten the vote on a particular issue. The original version of the Act, introduced in 2025, proposed a blanket 500% tariff on those importing Russian oil. However, the Act was revised in early July 2026.

Under the latest version of the Act, a tariff of "up to 100%" would be levied on the top five purchasers of Russian crude oil and natural gas. Currently, China accounts for about 47-50% of Russian crude oil exports, while India accounts for another 36-38%.

As per the latest Indian government data, Russian oil made up a little more than 40% of Indian oil imports in May 2026, and the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has told *The Hindu* that this rose to "more than half" in June. 52%.

"The stakes for India are substantial," Ajay Srivastava, founder of the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative said. "Access to discounted Russian crude has significantly lowered India's import bill, supported energy security, and helped contain inflation."

"Washington is steadily expanding its use of trade and economic measures to pursue strategic objectives," he added. "Reciprocal tariffs, Section 301 investigations, forced-labour measures, sector-specific duties, and now Russia-related sanctions reflect an increasingly broad toolkit of economic pressure."

USA is "weaponising trade"!

Ukraine hits 2 Russian refineries hours after Zelenskyy's U.S. visit

The overnight attacks started fires at a Lukoil refinery in Russia's Perm region, more than 1,500 km from Ukraine, and a refinery in Ryazan, about 400 km from the border; the war will only come at a higher cost for Moscow, says Zelenskyy

Associated Press

KYIV

Ukrainian forces hit two of Russia's biggest oil refineries overnight in its latest long-range strikes, officials said on Wednesday, as Kyiv deepened its economic, military and diplomatic pressure on Moscow.

Ukraine's almost daily long-range drone and missile strikes using domestically developed weapons have battered Russian oil facilities for months.

The operation has brought a fuel crisis that is embarrassing the Kremlin more than four years after Russia's all-out invasion of



Smoke rises from an oil refinery following a Ukrainian attack in the town of Noginsk outside Moscow on July 18. AFP

its neighbour.

The overnight attacks started fires at a Lukoil refinery in Russia's Perm region, more than 1,500 km from Ukraine, and a refin-

ery in Ryazan, about 400 km from the border, Ukraine's Security Service and General Staff said in separate statements.

The refineries have a

combined annual production capacity of around 220 million barrels of oil, according to Ukraine, and make a vital contribution to Russia's military effort and its government revenue.

It was not immediately possible to independently verify the claims. Ryazan Gov. Pavel Malkov said only that six people were taken to hospital after a drone attack. He said drone debris caused fires at unidentified "industrial sites".

Russian online retailer Wildberries, a major supplier likened to Amazon that Ukraine has targeted in recent days, said it evac-

uated employees from a facility in Ryazan but provided no further details.

American help

The attacks came hours after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited Washington on Tuesday for talks with U.S. President Donald Trump to push for more vital American help for Ukraine's fight against its much bigger enemy.

"Russia must feel that every day of this war will only come at a higher cost for it. We need to weaken the aggressor and keep up the pressure to bring an end to this war closer," Mr. Zelenskyy said on social media.

TEHRAN REJECTS OMAN PROPOSAL FOR REGIONAL MANAGEMENT OF HORMUZ STRAIT, CALLS IT 'UNREASONABLE'

US, Saudi hit Iran's allies in Iraq; Trump vows to punish Tehran

China 'to send' shoulder-fired missiles to Iran

Tehran: Iran is expected to receive within weeks a first shipment out of up to 400 Chinese-made shoulder-fired air-defence missile launchers, three sources familiar with the deal told Reuters, as it rebuilds its defences amid war with the US.

The purchase, valued at \$60-70 million, is one of Tehran's largest-known efforts to strengthen its short-range air defences since the outbreak of its war with the US and Israel, which exposed gaps in Iran's ability to protect military sites and infrastructure.

The contract covers the purchase of between 300 and 400 man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), including Chinese-made QW-12 and FN-16 missiles, sources said. REUTERS

US commander asks troops not to share their videos

Washington: The top US commander for West Asia has warned troops that cellphone videos shared online can help Iran target American bases, and sources told Reuters deployed personnel could soon be ordered to surrender their phones.

Admiral Brad Cooper said Iran was benefiting from being able to see the success or failure of its strikes by searching news reports or online posts by journalists referencing "reactions, photos, and footage from cellphones of our troops." REUTERS

We're going to beat the f*ings out of them: President**

Reuters

Dubai, Cairo, July 29

EXPLOSIONS HIT a natural gas loading port on the Mediterranean Sea in Egypt on Wednesday, and British maritime security company Ambrey said a US-owned floating storage tanker there had been hit by a drone, in a potential spread of the West Asia war.

The drone hit a vessel in the Egyptian port of Damietta, causing a fire that spread to another vessel, three trading sources familiar with the incident said.

The crew were evacuated and the fire had been brought under control, Ambrey said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the incident.

Earlier on Wednesday the United States and Saudi Arabia struck Iran-backed paramilitary groups in Iraq, and US President Donald Trump vowed to "beat the f***ings out of Iran for firing on US troops days after they halted airstrikes."

Iran confirmed overnight that it had fired on US bases in Jordan and at ships in the Strait of Hormuz, and also spurned an Omani proposal to jointly man-



Iraqis inspect the site of a joint US-Saudi airstrike that damaged a Popular Mobilisation Forces base in Mosul, Iraq, on Wednesday. AP

age the strait. Oman, backed by Gulf states, had proposed a plan for joint regional control of the strait this week including voluntary service charges. But a senior Iranian official told Reuters Wednesday that Iran had rejected the proposal as "unreasonable."

"We'll be hitting them hard," Fox News quoted Trump as saying. "We're going to beat the f***ings out of them."

The abrupt resumption of attacks only days after they were suspended saw a return to the volatile on-again-off-again pattern of earlier phases in the war.

Trump had said "Operation Epic Fury" would last only a

few weeks when he launched it in February but fighting has now gone on for five months with no end in sight. The joint US-Saudi attacks also mark the first time Riyadh has publicly joined strikes alongside Washington that could widen the conflict by drawing Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia into combat against Shi'ite proxies of Iran.

Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces, powerful Iran-backed paramilitary groups incorporated into the Iraqi security forces, said at least 20 members were killed and 32 wounded in US-Saudi strikes targeting several bases across Iraq.

Washington and Riyadh said they struck the Iran-backed armed groups in Iraq in retaliation for drone attacks on Saudi oil targets launched from Iraq.

It was the first major US military action in the Middle East since last Friday, when Trump abruptly suspended an intensive bombing campaign after 13 days, having been advised by commanders that the strategy had run its course.

Though Iran denies its forces have directed strikes from Iraqi territory, Iranian newspaper Hamshahri reported that four Iranian Revolutionary Guards advisers had been killed in the

strikes on Iraq. The strikes on Iraq expose a dangerous rift in that volatile country. The Shi'ite-led government is one of the few in the world to balance close military and diplomatic ties with both Tehran and Washington, but those divided loyalties are a constant source of tension and frequent domestic unrest.

The office of PM Ali al-Zaidi, who took power just two months ago, urged the parties involved to avoid escalation and said he wanted to keep the country out of regional conflicts.

The Iraqi presidency denounced the strikes on the paramilitaries as "an unacceptable attack and a flagrant violation of Iraq's sovereignty", while also calling for a halt to attacks by armed groups against Iraq's neighbours. Trump told Fox that the US had coordinated with the Iraqi government in launching the attacks. An Iraqi government spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment on Trump's assertion that Baghdad had cooperated.

Washington has long called on the Baghdad government to crack down on Iran-backed paramilitaries, but efforts to do so in past have provoked unrest.

In a clear challenge to Zaidi's authority, Kataib Hezbollah, said it would give the government until next Thursday to prove it could defend Iraq's sovereignty.

Houthis, under IRGC guidance, planning to impose fees for Red Sea transit: Yemen

Agence France-Presse

RIYADH

A Minister in Yemen's internationally recognised government on Wednesday accused Houthi rebels of working under Iranian guidance to establish a system to impose fees for ships transiting the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

The narrow maritime artery has been a critical waterway for delivering vast quantities of Saudi

crude to the international market, after energy exports were largely choked off by fighting in the Strait of Hormuz.

Information Minister Moammar al-Eryani described "the move as a dangerous escalation aimed at transforming one of the world's most strategic maritime corridors into a permanent source of funding for the militia's military and terrorist activities".

Mr. Eryani said the as-

The narrow artery has been critical for delivering crude to international market, after Hormuz closure

essment was provided by recently obtained "confirmed intelligence" indicating that Iran's Revolutionary Guards were helping manage the effort.

"The intelligence indicates that IRGC experts and advisers are directly

involved in designing the technical and administrative framework of the project," the Minister added in comments exclusive to AFP. He added that this would include "the establishment of a dedicated entity responsible for collecting payments from shipping companies and commercial vessels".

Anxieties are growing across the Gulf that the Houthis are hoping to copy Iran's playbook in the Strait of Hormuz.

Bangladesh ex-premier Hasina vows to return by year-end despite fearing for life

Agence France-Presse

NEW DELHI

Bangladesh's fugitive ex-premier Sheikh Hasina said she was determined to return to her country by December despite fearing for her life.

"I may be killed. I may be arrested. I may be sent to prison," Ms. Hasina, 78, said in an emailed response to questions by AFP.

"I am fully aware of my fate. Still, I want to go back because my people are



Sheikh Hasina

calling me," she added.

Toppled in August 2024 by a student-led uprising that ended her 15-year,

iron-fisted rule, Ms. Hasina left by helicopter to India as crowds stormed her palace.

The United Nations says up to 1,400 people were killed in crackdowns as she tried to cling to power.

In November, Ms. Hasina was found guilty by a Dhaka court of crimes against humanity and sentenced to be hanged – a verdict she described as "political vengeance dressed up as law".

The former Prime Mi-

nister, who has been living in a secret location in India, insisted there was no pressure for her to return.

Relations between India and Bangladesh, strained under the interim administration that took power after Ms. Hasina's fall, have stabilised since Bangladeshi Prime Minister Tarique Rahman took office in February. Dhaka has formally requested Ms. Hasina's extradition – a request New Delhi has said is "under examination".

U.S. and Iran resume fighting in West Asia

Associated Press

Agence France-Presse

CAIRO/WASHINGTON

Jordan intercepted missiles
launched from Iran early
on Wednesday, hours after
the U.S. military said it
knocked down another Ira-
nian barrage launched
against American forces in
the region, ending a brief
pause in fighting between
Tehran and Washington.

The U.S. also said it
worked with Saudi Arabia
to fire on Iran-backed mili-
tias in Iraq that have target-
ed the kingdom in recent
days. The militias said at
least 20 of their fighters
had been killed. Six Iranian
advisers were also killed in
the strikes, Iraqi militia of-
ficials said.

The fighting came after
days in which mediators
said some progress had
been made in negotiations
to end the war.

TEHRAN REJECTS OMAN PROPOSAL FOR REGIONAL MANAGEMENT OF HORMUZ STRAIT, CALLS IT 'UNREASONABLE'

US, Saudi hit Iran's allies in Iraq; Trump vows to punish Tehran

China 'to send' shoulder-fired missiles to Iran

We're going to beat the f***ings out of them: President

Reuters

Dubai, Cairo, July 29

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Washington has long called on the Baghdad government to crack down on Iran-backed paramilitaries, but efforts to do so in past have provoked unrest.

In a clear challenge to Zaidi's authority, Kataib Hezbollah, said it would give the government until next Thursday to prove it could defend Iraq's sovereignty.

Tehran: Iran is expected to receive within weeks a first shipment out of up to 400 Chinese-made shoulder-fired air-defence missile launchers, three sources familiar with the deal told Reuters, as it rebuffs its defences amid war with the US.

The purchase, valued at \$60-70 million, is one of Tehran's largest-known efforts to strengthen its short-range air defences since the outbreak of its war with the US and Israel, which exposed gaps in Iran's ability to protect military sites and infrastructure.

The contract covers the purchase of between 300 and 400 man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), including Chinese-made QW-12 and FN-16 missiles, sources said. REUTERS

US commander asks troops not to share their videos

Washington: The top US commander for West Asia has warned troops that cellphone videos shared online can help Iran target American bases, and sources told Reuters deployed personnel could soon be ordered to surrender their phones.

Admiral Brad Cooper said Iran was benefiting from being able to see the success or failure of its strikes by searching news reports or online posts by journalists referencing "reactions, photos, and footage from cellphones of our troops." REUTERS

Japan quake toll rises to 18 as rescue efforts continue

Associated Press

Kumamoto, July 29

SOLDIERS AND emergency workers combed through a badly damaged shopping mall and collapsed houses looking for trapped survivors Wednesday after a powerful earthquake that killed at least 18 people in southwestern Japan.

The magnitude 7.1 earthquake that hit a day earlier in the Kumamoto area on the southern main island of Kyushu, also left at least 62 people injured, six of

them seriously, the prefectural government said. The tally has been steadily growing, fanning fears it may continue to rise.

The sweltering weather heightened worries about the survivors as rescuers braved the heat. It was unclear how many people might still be missing.

Some of the most serious damage was at the Aeon Mall shopping centre in Kashima city, which was bustling with thousands of people when the quake happened. The company said some 3,000 customers were



Rescuers work at the damaged Aeon Mall in Japan's Kumamoto prefecture on Wednesday. AP

evacuated to a parking lot before a gas explosion happened in another part of the mall, where

some people were still working.

The mall's second floor collapsed, trapping people. Witnesses said the explosion shook the area as much as did the quake. Three people remained missing, while four deaths were confirmed at the mall site, according to Aeon.

"We take it seriously that an explosion happened and precious lives were lost," Aeon President Akio Yoshida told a news conference in Kumamoto, where he bowed deeply along with two other executives.

Japanese media footage of the mall showed that part of a ceiling had caved in, and metal parts and other debris were scattered about as helmeted and masked rescue workers searched the area.

In nearby Yatsushino, a chimney collapse at a Nippon Paper Industries factory killed five people while seven others were rescued from the debris, according to the Kumamoto prefectural government disaster team. Four people were still believed to be trapped there, it said.

PoK protesters 'enemies' like India, says Pak. Defence Minister as toll rises to 37

Press Trust of India

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has termed the protesters in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as "enemies" like India and ruled out dialogue with them, even as the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) on Wednesday claimed that security forces have killed 37 people in the last two days.

"There will be no dialogue with the protesters. I bracket them with India. I put them in the same category as India and consider them as enemies of Pakistan," Mr. Asif told presspersons on Tuesday.

However, the Prime Minister's Adviser Rana Sanaullah told presspersons that the JAAC held a meeting with him and presented its 38 demands. Alleging that the protesters want to seize Muzaffarabad and Mirpur through force, Mr. Sanaullah on Tuesday claimed that they were currently engaged in an "India-like attack".

Mr. Sanaullah claimed that no one was killed in clashes between the law enforcement personnel and protesters.

Violence erupted when JAAC launched a long march, coinciding with the first phase of polls in PoK

However, the JAAC, a collective of activist groups, on Wednesday said that 37 unarmed peaceful protesters and people, including women and children, who were not even protesting, have been killed by Pakistani forces in the last two days. The party's claim could not be independently verified.

'Many injured'

It said the violence erupted on Monday when the JAAC launched a long march, coinciding with the first phase of polls for the legislative assembly in PoK.

In a statement, the JAAC said that a large number of people are critically injured with bullet wounds. "Hospitals are under forces' control, doctors have been removed, medical stores have no medicines left. Volunteers who try to pick up the dead or injured are also being fired upon," it said.

Private R&D spends cross govt.'s in FY24

A level last seen in 2009-10, official data reveal a structural shift: private industry accounted for 45.5% of national R&D spending in 2021-22, rising further to 51.8% in 2023-24, the first time businesses have contributed more to India's research effort than all levels of government combined

Jacob P Koshy

NEW DELHI

India's spending on research and development (R&D) surged to 0.83% of GDP in 2021-22, the first time that the country crossed the 0.8% threshold – a level last seen in 2009-10, according to newly disclosed government data.

The figures also reveal a structural shift in India's innovation landscape: private industry accounted for 45.5% of national R&D spending in 2021-22, rising further to 51.8% in 2023-24, the first time businesses have contributed more to India's research effort than all levels of government combined.

The figures were disclosed by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in response to a Lok Sabha question on Wednesday. They form part of the latest Research & Development Statistics 2025-26,

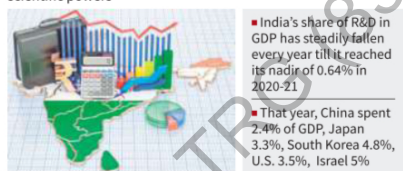
although the full statistical report itself has not yet been publicly released.

The numbers are significant because India, despite possessing one of the world's largest scientific workforces and ranking among the top countries in scientific publications, has long spent a much smaller share of its economy on research than major scientific powers. The share of R&D in GDP – long considered a bellwether of progress – has, in the case of India, steadily fallen every year till it reached its nadir of 0.64% in 2020-21.

That year China spent 2.4% of GDP, Japan 3.3%, South Korea 4.8%, United States 3.5% and around 5% in Israel. Successive governments have also repeatedly argued that India's innovation ecosystem is constrained because industry contributes a much smaller share of national R&D spending than in advanced economies, where

Science wins

The numbers are significant because India has long spent a much smaller share of its economy on research than major scientific powers



business routinely accounts for over 70% of research expenditure.

DST compiles India's official R&D statistics through its National Science and Technology Management Information System (NSTMIS), which has conducted national science surveys since 1973 using UNESCO and OECD definitions. The surveys gather expenditure data from central and state government agencies, universities, public sector enterprises and private

industry. The 2022-23 edition explicitly stated that its coverage had been expanded to include multinational companies and enterprises outside the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research's recognition scheme. There were 2,397 DSIR-recognised in-house R&D centres as of December 2022. Until Wednesday's parliamentary reply, the latest publicly available DST publication was the 2022-23 edition, released in 2023, which contained

data only up to 2020-21. The parliamentary reply is therefore the first official disclosure of India's R&D expenditure for 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24, even though the corresponding statistical reports have yet to be published.

The fresh data point to an abrupt discontinuity. Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) fell from ₹1.33 lakh crore in 2019-20 to ₹1.27 lakh crore in 2020-21 (a COVID-year slump), before jumping 53% to ₹1.95 lakh crore in 2021-22. It subsequently rose to ₹2.13 lakh crore in 2022-23 and ₹2.45 lakh crore in 2023-24.

However, budget documents from the period do not suggest a commensurate surge in government science spending. Union allocations to the Department of Science and Technology, Department of Biotechnology, Department of Atomic Energy, ISRO and other major science agen-

cies rose only incrementally across these years, making it unlikely that the increase was driven solely by public expenditure.

The sharp rise in GERD coincided with a dramatic increase in the private sector industry's contribution to India's research spending. Private industry accounted for 38.5% of GERD in 2017-18, 37.7% in 2018-19, 33.8% in 2019-20 and 36.4% in 2020-21, before jumping to 45.5% in 2021-22, 48.0% in 2022-23 and 51.8% in 2023-24 – the first time private industry has contributed more than half of India's total R&D expenditure. In absolute terms, Industry R&D spending increased from about ₹43,800 crore in 2017-18 and ₹46,700 crore in 2018-19 to ₹44,800 crore in 2019-20 and ₹46,400 crore in 2020-21, before almost doubling to ₹88,600 crore in 2021-22 and rising further to ₹126,800 crore in 2023-24.

FIR registered over 'defamatory' posts against PM, police seek details from X

Alok Singh

New Delhi, July 29

THE DELHI Police has registered an FIR in connection with "objectionable and defamatory" content posted on social media against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other constitutional heads.

It has also written to X and other platforms to remove the content and provide details of users who posted them, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

According to sources, the content was mostly posted during the Cockroach Janta Party's protest at Jantar Mantar.

A case under charges of criminal intimidation, public mischief, and defamation has been lodged at the Special Cell IFSO (Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations) unit in connection with the matter.

On Sunday, *The Indian Express* reported that the Delhi Police has started asking social media platforms to take down such content.

According to sources, in one of the notices sent to a social media platform, the Delhi Police said the circulation of such "objectionable and defamatory content has caused serious harm to the PM's reputation, dignity and public image".

"The continued availability of such content has the potential to disturb public order, create unnecessary political controversy and erode public trust. Such acts also facilitate misuse of social media platforms for defamation and objectionable content and cyber-enabled offences.

"Therefore... you are hereby directed to remove or disable access to the aforesaid accounts as well as URLs immediately, within three hours of receipt of this intimation, while ensuring that the relevant data, logs and subscriber information are preserved for evidence purposes," the notice said.

Police have also identified around 500 social media accounts that allegedly shared deepfake and AI-generated content related to the protests. A police officer said these accounts have been recommended for blocking through the respective social media platforms.

On July 20, clashes broke out between Delhi Police personnel and CJP protesters, including students, leaving several injured. Police later registered 15 FIRs in connection with the violence, but subsequently decided to withdraw them.

Despite heightened global uncertainties, the ministry said India's economic outlook remains underpinned by resilient domestic fundamentals, continued policy support, and strengthening structural drivers of growth.

"Structural reforms of the last decade and infrastructure investments are contributing to growth resilience as is evident in the data for the months of March to June 2026," the review stated.

On the external sector front, the ministry said strong export performance, a sustained services surplus and robust remittance inflows have supported the current account, while recent policy measures are expected to strengthen capital inflows in the coming months. Along with comfortable foreign exchange reserves, these devel-

opment, it said.

"Global developments related to AI and weaponisation of supply chains in general are reminders of the distance India needs to travel to achieve long-term resilience and strategic leverage...recent years have been a time for hunkering down and batten-

Commodity prices, crude oil

Commodity prices, particularly crude oil, which had declined below pre-conflict levels, have risen again this month. However, the increase remains contained compared with the sharp spike witnessed during the initial phase of the conflict, the ministry said.

India's crude oil import bill

country's oil consumption-to-GDP ratio and crude oil imports-to-GDP ratio has declined from FY14 to FY26, a trend partly attributable to accelerating EV adoption and broader structural factors such as energy efficiency gains and a shift in the composition of GDP growth.

Average monthly EV registrations increased to 2.3 lakh in March-June, around 1 lakh higher than the 2025 monthly average. EV penetration—which has crossed 8% of total vehicle registrations in 2026 so far — could reduce India's annual oil import bill by around Rs 1 lakh crore once it reaches 20% by 2030, the review said citing the SBI note. Higher commodity prices are expected to interrupt the global disinflation process, the ministry said. **FULL REPORT ON**

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

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Gulveer braves weather and competition to bag silver

He becomes the first man from the India to win a medal in the 10,000m event in the Games' history, finishing with a timing of 27:49.78s; Australia's Robinson clinches gold (27:48.93s)

C'WEALTH GAMES

K. Keerthivasan
GLASGOW

While much of the spotlight was on India assuring itself of medals in the boxing ring at the Commonwealth Games here, a few kilometres away at the Scotstoun Stadium, a middle-distance runner from the country was quietly scripting history.

In challenging track conditions with heavy rain and sun making frequent appearances, Gulveer Singh won silver (27:49.78s) in the men's 10,000m on Tuesday to become the first Indian man to win a medal in the event in the Games' history.

Ky Robinson of Australia won gold in a time of 27:48.93 while David Mulroney of the Isle of Man bagged bronze in 27:50.28.

Gulveer was one of the favourites to bag a medal. Before the race, he was in the top three in season's best and his personal best of 27:00.22 (a National record) was at the top in the field.

Gulveer ran a tactical



Final push: Gulveer broke away from the pack with around 900m left, even as Australia's Robinson claimed gold. GETTY IMAGES

race, being among the leaders till the last before accelerating. He stayed in sixth position at the 8,000m mark with five more laps to go. With around 900m left, he broke out of the pack.

Gulveer, who has improved since joining hands with coach Scott Simmons

in the USA three years ago, brought out his best in a strong field that also included Daniel Ebenyo, the 2023 World championships silver medalist.

Ebenyo ended up sixth while the other Kenyans, Edwin Kurgat and Ishmael Kipkurgu finished fourth and 10th respectively.

Wrapping himself in the Indian tricolour, Gulveer was gasping for breath when he came to the mixed zone. "It was not easy to run in the conditions. I take this opportunity to thank my family, coaches and the Athletics Federation of India for their support," he said.

Six Indian pugilists march into semifinals

K. Keerthivasan
GLASGOW

Sakshi Chaudhary, one of India's brightest boxing prospects, led the charge as six pugilists from the country advanced to the semifinals at the Scottish Event Campus here on Wednesday, assuring themselves of at least a Commonwealth Games bronze.

With the exception of Narender Berwal's hard-fought contest, the Indian boxers won their bouts with a fair degree of comfort.

Sakshi outclassed Caitlin Fryers of Northern Ireland to register a 5-0 victory in the women's 51kg category. Arundhati Choudhary defeated New Zealand's Morgan Henderson 3-1 in the women's 70kg last-eight encounter before Jaismine Lamboria won through a 4-1 split decision against England's Elise Glynn in women's 57kg.

Sachin Siwach overcame Moremi Treasure from Botswana with a unanimous 5-0 verdict in the men's 60kg clash while Ankush Panghal was confidence personified in his 5-0 triumph over Jade Micoek of Seychelles in men's 80kg.

In the men's 90-kg quarterfinal battle, Narender had to dig deep before edging past Samoa's Michael Seko 3-2 in a split decision. India is now as-



Punching a medal: Narender (red) had to stretch every sinew while Sachin (blue) was hardly tested by his opponent. Sakshi (blue) and Ankush (red) sailed smoothly into the next round. PTI & AP



Arundhati and Jaismine joined the party. PTI & SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

sured of 10 boxing medals.

Sachin was never really stretched. It was a cagey affair with both boxers adopting a cautious approach and reluctant to commit to attack.

For much of the bout, they waited for each other to make the first move so that they could create an

tained body attacks as both preferred to be patient before launching attacks.

Ankush, however, looked the sharper of the two, displaying lightning-quick reflexes to slip and evade the 19-year-old's jabs before responding with crisp right-left combinations.

The Narender-Seko quarterfinal was easily the closest and most physical contest of the day.

The bout came alive after a caution-filled opening round as both of them traded punches with greater intent. Narender forced Seko into two standing counts – one each in the second and third rounds – which may have proved decisive in earning him a place in the semifinal.

opening for a counter. Sachin did just enough in every round, eventually securing a comfortable unanimous decision.

Ankush's duel with Micoek, too, was a tactical one, with neither willing to overcommit.

There were few close-range exchanges or sus-