

Search continues for 22 from vessel that sunk off Odisha

Satyasundar Barik

M. Kalyanaraman

BHUBANESWAR/CHENNAI

The fates of 22 crew members aboard a Panama-flagged bulk carrier that sank in the Bay of Bengal off Odisha remained unknown on Sunday even after 24 hours of intensive search and rescue operations by the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard (ICG).

According to the latest reports from the Navy and the ICG, two Chinese crew members of the ill-fated *M.V. Ocean Winner*, which was carrying iron ore from Odisha, were rescued, even as Navy ships and aircraft continued to search for the remaining crew.

The ship, with 24 crew aboard – 20 from China, three from Myanmar, and one from Bangladesh – had left Paradip Port late on August 20. The ICG said that 36 hours after its departure, the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre

Stormy voyage

The *MV Ocean Winner* with a 24-member crew had left the Paradip Port in Odisha on August 20

■ The Panama-flagged ship's crew included 20 from China, three from Myanmar, and one from Bangladesh

■ The ship, built in 1998, has changed hands many times and its current owners are located in Fujian, China

■ During the last inspection of the ship in June, Bangladesh authorities reported three deficiencies, including in its magnetic compass



Last leg: The 28-year-old bulk carrier can haul a cargo of around 73,000 tonnes and was in its end-of-life period. FILE PHOTO

received information that communication with the vessel had been lost. It also received a request for a search and rescue operation.

The Eastern Naval Command said on X that it responded to the distress alert by deploying the P8I surveillance aircraft in coordination with MRCC, Sri Vijaya Puram. "The Indian Navy aircraft located a geographically dispersed liferaft in the area and soon

coordinated with *MT Aisopos*, which was transiting nearby, with a request for the merchant vessel to render assistance. By late evening on August 22, *MT Aisopos* had rescued two of the 24 crew members from the liferafts," the Navy said.

The Navy said it continues to coordinate with the ICG in the operation to find the remaining crew.

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Search continues for 22 from vessel that sunk

“Sustained monitoring and focused aerial search by Indian Navy P8I MR aircraft led to the successful detection of two floating liferafts and oil slick near the reported position,” the Navy posted on X.

According to Equasis, a global merchant shipping database, *Ocean Winner* (IMO 9145530) was a 28-year-old vessel that could carry around 73,000 tonnes of cargo.

Built in 1998, it was 225 metres long and 32.26 metres wide, and was in its end-of-life period. Periodic inspections by national authorities uncovered several deficiencies. The last inspection by Bangladesh authorities in Chittagong this June reported three deficiencies, including in the ship’s magnetic compass. *Ocean Winner* was covered by Protection and Indemnity insurance that would compensate for the loss of life. The insurance is up-to-date, starting from August 1, 2026. The ship has changed hands many times, starting with Greek ownership. The current owner is located in Fujian, China.

(With inputs from Saurabh Trivedi in New Delhi)

After Minister, Secy's kin availed of agri subsidy scheme, new rules bar them

Ministers, MPs, MLAs, officers no longer eligible; definition of family changed

Harikishan Sharma
New Delhi, August 23

ALMOST TWO months after an investigation by *The Indian Express* revealed a Union Minister and a serving Central government secretary's kin availing subsidy for their cucumber farms, the Centre has amended the 'Scheme Guidelines of Commercial Horticulture and Cold Storage Schemes' of the National Horticulture Board (NHB). It has revised the definition of 'family' — bringing within its ambit the subsidy applicant's spouse, father, mother, sons and daughters — and has made holders of constitutional posts, serving ministers, MPs, MLAs, mayors, district panchayat chiefs and government employees ineligible for financial assistance under NHB schemes.

The NHB, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, amended the scheme guidelines on August 21.

“With a view to rationalise
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



The *Express* report on cucumber farm subsidies dated June 27

● The new guidelines

Family is now defined as applicant's spouse, father, mother, sons and daughters

Five categories not eligible:

1. Present holders of Constitutional posts;
2. Ministers, MoS, MPs, MLAs, MLCs, Mayors, chairpersons of district panchayats;
3. Serving employees of Central/State govt, ministries/departments, PSUs, autonomous bodies and local bodies, except MTS/Class-IV/Group-D staff;
4. Retired pensioners receiving monthly pension of Rs 10,000 or more, excluding MTS/Class-IV/Group-D employees;
5. Group of farmers

Subsidy reduced from 50% to 35% in general areas.

Maximum subsidy for cold storage **capped at Rs 2 crore**

Doval heads to Beijing, boundary talks with Wang Yi tomorrow

NSA visit comes ahead of BRICS summit in Delhi next month

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, August 23

AHEAD OF a possible visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to India for the summit of the BRICS leaders next month, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval is travelling to Beijing Monday for Special Representative-level talks on the boundary issue with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi.

The 25th round of SR-level talks will be held Tuesday. Both Doval and Wang are the designated SRs for the boundary talks mechanism which was established in 2003 to comprehensively address the long-standing boundary dispute between the two countries.

In the last week of June, Wang visited India for a meeting of the BRICS NSAs and met



NSA Ajit Doval is India's Special Representative for boundary talks with China

Doval on the sidelines. Wang, who is also China's Foreign Minister, underlined it is "imperative" for India and China to respect each other's "core interests" and take concrete actions to implement the "important consensus" reached by both sides.

The two countries have been moving to repair ties that plummeted after the military stand-off along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. Since late 2024, both sides have taken steps to ease tensions.

After he met Wang in New Delhi last year, Doval said the India-China border had been

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Doval heads to Beijing, boundary talks with Wang Yi tomorrow

“quiet” and there had been an “upward trend” in bilateral ties.

Earlier this month, responding to a question on reports of some tension along the LAC, the Ministry of External Affairs said the state of the border with China will reflect on the state of the “larger bilateral ties” and that maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the LAC is of “utmost importance”.

Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the MEA, also rejected China’s criticism of New Delhi identifying 27 places and features in Arunachal Pradesh by their standard names, maintaining that the state is an “inalienable and integral” part of India and nothing can change this “indisputable reality”.

This was reiterated at a meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC). “At this meeting, the two sides engaged

in frank discussions and reviewed the situation along the LAC,” Jaiswal said.

On Saturday, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, speaking on the situation with China, said: “I think we went through a particularly bad patch between the summer of 2020 and the autumn of 2024, and that was primarily an outcome of the situation in the border areas.”

“At the end of the day, peace and tranquillity in the border areas is a prerequisite for good relations, and the state of the border, to a very large measure, naturally would determine the state of the relations. Having said that, I think naturally, if assuming things are stable and the needle is more cooperative, obviously, I mean we are both very big economies. In many ways, we are markets to each other. We are part of the supply chain. They industrialised much faster and much bigger and much earlier, largely be-

cause of many of the policies we advocate,” he said.

“The world is competitive. We must build up our strengths. We have to do business with the entire world. That includes China too, but it is important we deal with them confidently. We stand our ground, as we have stood on the border. We develop our strengths, which unfortunately from the 1960s for half a century, we did not do. We have to make up for the shortcomings and the mistakes of the past, and that is really what we are hoping to do. So I think a stronger, more self-reliant India, a more industrialised India, a more manufacturing India will be able to actually compete with China as it will with other major countries of the world,” he said.

Jaishankar said the government had “taken up” with China the problem of business visas being faced by Indian applicants.

Help operationalise women's reservation: Smriti to Rahul

BJP general secretary asks Leader of Opposition to support the PM's initiative on providing 33% reservation for women; she appeals for full rendition of *Vande Mataram* at Cong. headquarters

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) general secretary Smriti Irani challenged the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi to demonstrate his publicly expressed sentiments on women's empowerment by offering support to the government's Bills, which could operationalise the Women's Reservation Act, 2023. Ms. Irani's remarks came after Mr. Gandhi's speech at the Congress's 'Chaatron ki Goonj' (echo of students) event in Pune on Sunday.

Mr. Gandhi had addressed a gathering of mainly women students at the public meeting. He had sharp words for the government's approach on women's empowerment, and the doxxing of women protesters at the Gen Z protests led by the Cockroach Janta Party at Jantar Mantar in the national capital in July.

The Modi government had, in April 2026, brought a Bill for the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats in tandem



BJP national general secretary Smriti Irani during a meeting at the party headquarters in New Delhi on Saturday. PTI

with amendments to the Women's Reservation Act, which would increase seats in the Lower House to 850 based on the 2011 Census, with 33% reservation for women. The Opposition defeated the Constitution amendment Bill, and the Congress Working Committee said that it was in favour of freezing Lok Sabha seats at 543, and 33% reservation for women to be implemented for the 2029 general election.

Ms. Irani, in a statement in New Delhi, spoke of the Bill linking delimitation to reservation for women. "Former national presi-

dent of the Congress party stated at an event that he supports women. Today, I would like to make a request to the former national president. Prime Minister Modi has passed a law providing 33% reservation for women across the country, enabling them to enhance the dignity of the nation's Parliament. Prime Minister Modi has appealed to all political parties to cooperate with him in the swift implementation of this women's reservation law. I humbly ask him to support the Prime Minister's initiative, specifically the swift implementa-

tion of the law providing 33% reservation for women and enabling them to take on leadership roles in Parliament," the former Union Minister said.

National Song rendition

Ms. Irani added that she was also "aware of" certain remarks made by Mr. Gandhi about the Hindu religion and appealed for the full rendition of *Vande Mataram* at the Congress headquarters.

"I am also aware that remarks regarding the Hindu religion were made at that Congress leader's event yesterday. Given that he has invoked religion, I make one further request to that leader – the lines of *Vande Mataram* that were halted at the Congress headquarters actually contain a reference to Goddess Durga. Regarding Mother Durga, whom we worship as the embodiment of Shakti, the full rendition and singing of *Vande Mataram* should take place at the Congress headquarters. This would reflect the interest and inclination they have shown towards women's issues," she said.

'No new H1N1 strain in India, existing vaccines sufficient'

Influenza strains circulating are well matched with the vaccine strains, and the seasonal flu is self-limiting, ICMR says, adding that people with underlying conditions are at risk of complication

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Sunday said that the Influenza A (H1N1) viruses currently circulating in the country belong to the A/Missouri/11/2025 (H1N1) pdm09-like virus strain. It clarified that no new strain of H1N1 has been identified and there is no cause for panic.

"These viruses belong to clade 6B.1A.5a2a, sub-clade D.3.1.1, and have been in circulation since 2025. The Influenza strains currently circulating are also well matched with the vaccine strains recommended for the Northern Hemisphere," the ICMR said.

"Seasonal influenza, including H1N1, is mostly self-limiting," it added.

Common symptoms of the illness include fever, cough, headache, and body ache, and most people recover with appropriate care and rest.

However, young children, elderly persons, and



Patients wait at the swine flu (H1N1) outpatient department in Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in New Delhi in 2015. V. SUDERSHAN

individuals with underlying medical conditions may be at a greater risk of complications. If symptoms persist, worsen, or become severe, consultation with a doctor is advised, it said.

The Union Health Ministry has said that it is closely monitoring the situation through regular surveillance and is undertaking necessary public health measures.

India has registered a rise in seasonal Influenza A (H1N1) cases, commonly called swine flu, this mon-

soon, especially in major cities. Delhi has reported 1,777 confirmed H1N1 cases so far this year, including 114 new cases on August 20. Karnataka has registered over 4,000 cases, with more than half reported from Bengaluru. Rising influenza activity has also been reported in Mumbai, Chennai and parts of Kerala.

Past trends

The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) data show that H1N1 activity was relatively low in 2021

(778 cases, 12 deaths) after the pandemic period, but rebounded sharply in 2022 (13,202 cases, 410 deaths) and remained substantial in 2023 (8,125 cases, 129 deaths). By June 2024, India had already recorded 7,215 cases and 150 deaths, and year-end numbers were higher. The NCDC's 2025 reporting shows that H1N1 continued to circulate across multiple States.

The NCDC maintains a nationwide influenza surveillance network and publishes State-wise data and H1N1 treatment/prevention guidelines. It recommends seasonal influenza vaccination based on WHO strain recommendations. For the 2025-26 season, India's recommended trivalent vaccine included H1N1, H3N2 and B/Victoria components, with circulating Indian H1N1 strains aligning with vaccine strains.

"People at higher risk should consider annual vaccination and seek medical advice promptly if flu symptoms become severe," Anil Bansal of the Delhi Medical Association said.

PM calls upon space start-ups to make India a talent hub

Jacob Koshy

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called upon India's private space sector to build an ecosystem that can attract global talent, companies, and investment, saying the country should create an "aura" that makes it a destination for people seeking to build careers in the sector.

Mr. Modi's remarks came during an interaction with CEOs and founders of 20 Indian space start-ups in Delhi on Friday, the transcript of which was made public on Sunday, coinciding with the third National Space Day. The day is observed on August 23 to commemorate the Chandrayaan-3 landing on the moon in 2023.

"You have shown courage in entering a new field," Mr. Modi told the entrepreneurs. "We should create such an aura that people around the world feel that if they want to build a future in this field, they should come to India," he said. "India's space sector can become a magnet for the global talent pool."

Mr. Modi highlighted India's cost competitiveness



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with the founders of space start-ups on Friday.

and talent, saying these advantages could help the country quickly establish itself in the global space industry. He urged start-ups to look beyond space applications and work with sectors such as agriculture, livestock, and dairy, as well as with organisations that work for the environment to improve lives.

The entrepreneurs outlined a range of ambitions. Skyroot Aerospace, represented by its co-founder and CEO, Pawan Kumar Chandana, highlighted plans to scale rocket production and launches after its July 18 orbital mission.

He urged the start-ups to work with Atal Tinkering Labs to nurture interest in space among schoolchildren.

SUPREME LEADER SETS THE POLICIES, WE FOLLOW, SAYS IRAN PRESIDENT

US memorandum best path out of war, says Pezeshkian

Will target alternate shipping routes if neighbours join war: Security chief

Associated Press
Tehran, August 23

IRAN'S PRESIDENT defended a memorandum of understanding with the United States as the best way out of a stalled war.

Meanwhile, the new head of Islamic Republic's top security body warned, in a more forceful tone, of retaliation if neighbouring countries support US threats to further sanction Tehran.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian defended a recent memorandum of understanding as the best way for the country to move beyond what he described as a situation of "neither war nor peace."

In a speech published by state-run *IRNA* early on Sunday, he said members of Iran's Supreme National Security Council believed the memorandum represented the best possible agreement based on what he described as dignity, wisdom and the national interest.

"There is not a single provision in this agreement that



Iran President Masoud Pezeshkian during a press meet in Ilam. FILE

amounts to capitulation," Pezeshkian said. "The supreme leader sets the policies, and we will follow that path."

The deal known as the Memorandum of Understanding that US President Donald Trump signed in June set an ambitious 60-day deadline for ending the war with Iran and reaching an accord on its nuclear program.

That period ended last week, but the two sides remain far apart, with no signs of compromise on the crucial issue of reopening the Strait of Hormuz, vital to global shipping.

Pezeshkian also linked the agreement to Iran's economic prospects, saying the country

could not attract investment in this stalled phase.

"Capital and money are extremely sensitive to risk," he said. "We have to remove this risk from the country."

Nearly six months into the war with the United States and Israel, the Iranian economy is suffering under sanctions and a naval blockade.

Meanwhile, the hard-line new leader of Iran's Supreme National Security Council warned Tehran's neighbours against joining the new US effort to hurt Iran's economy.

"If (Trump) wants to do something, we will retaliate in a seismic manner," Mohsen Re-

Pak army chief to visit Iran today

Cairo: Pakistan's army chief Asim Munir will visit Tehran on Monday to continue efforts to bring peace and security to the region, Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said on Sunday, according to a statement by the ministry.

Two Pakistani government sources confirmed Munir's visit to *Reuters*. "He (Munir) will discuss peace under Islamabad's MoU, Trump's warning and the situation after the Pakistan-Turkey-Saudi Arab Agreement and Houthi issues with Iranian leaders," sources said. **REUTERS**

zaei said in an interview with that aired Saturday.

Rezaei was named this month as part of senior appointments widely seen as hardening Tehran's political and military stance. His interview with *IRIB* is his most extensive public statement since then.

Rezaei said Iran would target oil-shipping routes out of the Persian Gulf — alternatives to the Strait of Hormuz — if neighbors join what he described as the economic war against Iran.

Wigs to flags: Trump tariffs hit Canada hard

Ian Austen

Ottawa, August 23

HUNDREDS OF Canadian goods, from anoraks and suit jackets to national flags, Christmas ornaments and 36 types of plywood, face new 50% US tariffs that took effect Saturday.

The tariffs followed PM Mark Carney's decision to end nearly a month of trade talks with Washington. "They asked too much and offered too little," Carney said. He has vowed "dollar for dollar" retaliation.

The new duties cover \$20 billion in Canadian exports, with forest products among the biggest targets. The 36 types of plywood listed have raised concerns among US homebuilders, who say limited domestic supplies could push up construction costs. Alcohol is also prominent, the Trump admin-

• WHAT'S HIT BY NEW 50% TARIFFS?

From plywood and dairy to Christmas ornaments and dog collars, new 50% duties cover \$20 billion in Canadian exports, with Ottawa vowing dollar-for-dollar retaliation.

Wood: Plywood and other forest products

Alcohol: Wine, spirits and unusual beverage mixtures

Industrial: Egg graders, marine buoys, derricks and sandblasters

Clothing: Anoraks, jackets, T-shirts, dresses, gloves and more

Dairy: Canadian dairy products

Festive goods: Christmas ornaments, toys and carnival items

Household: Bedroom furniture, safes and sun blinds

Other: National flags, jewelry and honey



THE ODD ONES

National flags, Christmas ornaments, Painting canvas, Dog muzzles, Hockey sticks, Bookbinding machines, Base metal statuettes, wigs (partial), false beards, eyebrows

istration has been particularly vexed by the fact that eight of Canada's 10 provinces still restrict US wine and spirits from their government-owned liquor distribution system and stores.

Dairy products are another

target. Canada uses production quotas and other tools to protect domestic dairy producers, who sell largely to Canadian market.

Clothing and textiles also take a hit. Like the US, much of Canada's clothing production

moved overseas long ago, and some Canadian online retailers sell goods made abroad to US customers. Simply shipping things from Canada triggers the tariffs, regardless of where the products were made. **NYT**

Beijing postpones Moon exploration mission launch

Associated Press

Haikou, August 23

CHINA SAID on Sunday it was postponing its planned ambitious Chang'e-7 lunar mission, which was set to carry out explorations including searching for water ice on the moon.

The Chang'e-7 spacecraft was originally set to lift off in the coming days from the Wenchang Space Launch Site on China's southern Hainan island.

The mission does not meet the launch conditions, said the China Manned Space Agency in a brief statement, and "cannot take place during the planned window this year."

The decision was made following a "comprehensive assessment," the agency added, and was based on the principles of "prudence, reliability and absolute mission success." It did not further elaborate on the reasons behind the decision.



China's Chang'e-7 lunar probe and Long March-5 rocket at the launch site in Hainan. FILE

Preparations have been carried out at the Wenchang launch site for the Chang'e-7 mission over the past weeks, the seventh in the Chang'e moon exploration program. It aimed at making breakthroughs in key technologies, the official *Xinhua* news agency previously reported.

The Chang'e-6 probe returned to Earth in 2024 with rock and soil samples from the far side of the moon in a world first.

Dhaka open to joining Saudi-Pak-Turkiye defence pact: Ministers

Press Trust of India

Dhaka, August 23

BANGLADESH IS open to joining the recently formed defence alliance between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye, two junior ministers have said, while stressing that any decision would be guided by the country's national interests.

Signed in Makkah on August 7, the pact establishes a framework for collective deterrence and stipulates that an armed attack on any one of the three countries would be considered an attack on all three.

“Bangladesh maintains a positive approach towards the possibility of joining an economic or defence framework involving Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye, taking into account its own interests and changing dynamics of global economy and trade,” newly appointed state minister for foreign affairs Humayun Kobir said on Sunday.

In an interview with the Bangla service of state-run BSS on Friday, Kobir said the government was pursuing a “Bangladesh First” policy and a balanced foreign policy with national interests at its core, which might lead Dhaka to join the defence pact.

He said Bangladesh would also strengthen bilateral ties

“Bangladesh maintains a positive approach towards possibility of joining an economic or defence framework involving Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye...”

HUMAYUN KOBIR,

STATE MINISTER FOR

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

with Pakistan through normal diplomatic engagement, focusing on trade and people-to-people connectivity.

Kobir, appointed as the second state minister for foreign affairs on Friday, said Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is expected to visit Riyadh at Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's invitation and the tour schedule is likely to be finalised after the summer.

Another state minister for foreign affairs, Shama Obaed Islam, in a separate media interaction on Friday, supplemented Kobir's comments, saying that Bangladesh's national interest and the interests of its people would determine Dhaka's stance on joining the pact.

On battle anniversary, Taiwan leader vows 'never to yield an inch' to China

Reuters

TAIWAN

Peace can only be secured through strength and not even an inch of territory can be sacrificed, Taiwan President Lai Ching-te said on Sunday, visiting a sensitive frontline island to mark a key battle with Chinese forces almost seven decades ago.

Taiwan has controlled the Kinmen and Matsu islands since the Republic of China government fled to Taipei in 1949 after losing a civil war with Mao Zedong's communists.

No peace treaty or ar-



Honouring the fallen: Soldiers pay tribute during the anniversary of the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis in Kinmen, Taiwan, on Sunday. AP

mistice has ever been signed.

In heavy rain, Mr. Lai laid a wreath and bowed at a memorial park for the

ter, Mr. Lai expressed gratitude to those who "stood united and fought a bloody battle to repel Communist totalitarian aggression".

"Our resolve to unite in defending national sovereignty and safeguarding peace across the Taiwan Strait must never waver," Mr. Lai said.

The 1958 battle proves "that peace is secured through strength," he said, adding it was necessary to maintain "the spirit of never yielding an inch" of Taiwan, Kinmen and other group of islands, while continuously boosting military spending.

68th anniversary of the 1958 clash with Chinese forces, known as the start of the second Taiwan Strait crisis.

Addressing veterans la-

New sanctions a sign of 'desperation', U.S. measures will fail, says Araghchi

U.S. expected to announce 'toughest sanctions in history' on Iran today; Iranian Minister says Washington must speak to Tehran respectfully for 'a solution based on justice and honour'; shipping remains at a virtual standstill in Strait of Hormuz

Reuters
DUBAI

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi dismissed the threat of new U.S. sanctions as a sign of desperation on Sunday, and said the expected new measures would fail to defeat Tehran.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who is due to hold a press conference on Monday, has threatened to impose "the toughest sanctions in history" on Iran.

Iran's economy is already under huge pressure from international sanctions, its infrastructure has been hit repeatedly and



Passing facade: A woman walks by a mural depicting Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran. REUTERS

thousands of people have been killed in air strikes on the Islamic Republic since the U.S. and Israel launched attacks on February 28.

But Tehran remains defiant after nearly six months of war and has brought shipping to a virtual standstill in the Strait of Hormuz.

Describing what he said were "repetitive scenarios", Mr. Araghchi said in a video posted on Telegram: "The fact that they (U.S. leaders) have moved on from military operations... to bring up the same old plans shows that they are desperate."

He said Washington must speak to Iran respectfully to find "a solution based on justice and honour."

"We have never been afraid. All of their actions - whether blockades or other military moves they have made - have failed, and this new issue of theirs will fail as well," he said.

U.S. President Donald

Trump has warned of economic consequences against any country that provides "any type of lifeline to Iran".

Meanwhile, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said on Saturday that Tehran had received "numerous messages" from neighbouring countries about establishing new regional security arrangements and economic cooperation.

Munir to visit Tehran

Iran said Pakistan's Army chief, Asim Munir, would visit Tehran on Monday as part of efforts to restore peace and security in the region.

Putin wants to draft 3,00,000 new troops, says Zelenskyy

Reuters

Kyiv, August 23

UKRAINE THINKS Russia is planning to draft an additional 300,000 troops for its war effort after Russian parliamentary elections in mid-September, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

Moscow's forces are pressing ahead with an effort to capture rest of eastern Ukraine's industrialised Donbas region, where its troops have ground forward at what Kyiv says is a great cost.

In comments to reporters released on Sunday, Zelenskyy said Russia could draft more troops in 2027 to reach an overall goal of 500,000, part of what he described as a "peripheral mobilisation" targeting Russia's far-flung regions.

"We believe it will not take



(From left) Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Norway PM Jonas Gahr Stoere, Lithuania's President Gitanas Nausėda and Denmark's PM Mette Frederiksen in Kyiv on Sunday. REUTERS

place in the central cities," he said. "But I don't think they will be able to hide it very well."

As fighting rages around the strategic city of Kostiantynivka, Zelenskyy said Russia was losing a "maximum" amount of troops

in its bid to advance into Ukraine's so-called fortress belt of eastern cities. He also hailed recent gains by Kyiv's troops in southeastern Ukraine, adding the amount of territory occupied by Russia and liberated by

'Wartime election will destroy Ukraine'

Kyiv: Holding a wartime election in Ukraine while active fighting with Russia continues would "destroy" the country by splitting Ukrainians, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

His comments, released to reporters on Sunday, were Zelenskyy's first on the subject since ousted former Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov called for a wartime poll in a bombshell address last week.

"I believe that if we want to destroy the country, then we can move towards elections during this kind of war," Zelenskyy said.

Echoing his previous comments on the matter, Zelenskyy said a wartime election might be possible if Kyiv's partners could guarantee security, but that no one has proposed such a plan.

"Elections right now are a tsunami for the state, which will split Ukraine," he said. REUTERS

Ukraine in 2026 would be equal.

Russia is bolstering its battlefield offensive with an escalating air war on Ukrainian cities made worse by a shortage of US-designed Patriot interceptors.

Zelenskyy said the 264 in-

terceptors Ukraine is expecting to have received in 2026 represent a significant drop from 2025 adding that Russia was aiming to develop a capacity to produce up to 1,300 ballistic missiles per year.

5 years on, how India has warmed up to the Taliban



SHUBHAJIT ROY

THE AFGHANISTAN embassy in New Delhi celebrated "victory day" on August 15, marking the Taliban's takeover of the country five years ago. Much has changed in these five years when it comes to the Indian position on the Taliban dispensation.

On August 17, 2021, New Delhi had hurriedly evacuated its entire embassy from Kabul. Now, it is conducting business with the Islamist regime, albeit without granting it official diplomatic recognition.

The "victory day" celebration, attended by Indian diplomats and about two dozen foreign diplomats, was the latest sign that the India-Taliban relationship is now increasingly moving away from the shadows.

While Indian officials have called this a case of "cautious engagement", others have criticised it as "opportunistic".

Why India is deepening ties

India has stepped up diplomatic exchanges with the hardline Islamist group. Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi made a high-profile visit to New Delhi in October 2025. The Afghan embassy has been under the control of the Taliban since around that time. And the Taliban-appointed Charge d'affaires, Mufti Noor Ahmad Noor, has been part of multiple key events in Delhi — the Prime Minister's Independence Day address, the President's At Home reception, and even a diplomatic event at the Norwegian embassy. So, what's behind all this?

India invested for years in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. In August 2021, the Ashraf Ghani-led government collapsed — a head of the August 31 deadline set by President Joe Biden for withdrawal of US troops from the country.

In the months and years since, the Indian government came to the conclusion that it was time to upgrade the level of engagement without giving official recognition — or watch it or watch its USD 2-3 billion investment go down the drain. That was meant for the people of Afghanistan, and to create some kind of leverage and influence in the country.

• ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO ENGAGEMENT

AUGUST 31, 2021: Hours after the last US military aircraft flies out of Kabul to mark the end of its 20-year war in Afghanistan, India makes its first official contact with the Taliban. Its ambassador to Qatar, Deepak Mittal, meets head of the Taliban political office in Doha, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, at the embassy.



SEPTEMBER 2021: India recognises the Taliban as "those in positions of power and authority across Afghanistan", the first clear acknowledgement of the group as a state actor.

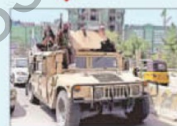
DECEMBER 2021: India sends its first consignment of medicines to Afghanistan under the new Taliban regime.

JANUARY 2025: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri holds a substantive meeting with Muttaqi in Dubai.



JANUARY 2024: Muttaqi (pictured to the left) meets diplomats from 11 regional nations. India is among them.

LATE JUNE 2022: In an incremental step, the Indian government sends a technical team to the embassy in Kabul to coordinate delivery of humanitarian aid.



MAY 2025: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar speaks to Muttaqi on the phone on May 15, days after India and Pakistan agree to stop military strikes. The Taliban condemned the Pahalgam terror attack that had triggered the conflict.



APRIL 2025: India sends M Anand Prakash, Joint Secretary in charge of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran division in the Ministry of External Affairs, to Kabul.

OCTOBER 2025: Muttaqi makes a high-profile visit to India. The two sides decide to upgrade their missions to the level of embassies, and appoint charge d'affaires.

A key factor has been the fact that the Taliban's once-benefactor and ally, Pakistan, has turned into a deadly adversary. Both sides have seen multiple clashes along their contested border. For New Delhi, this has been a window of opportunity.

Another factor hastening India's engagement is China. Beijing has started building bridges with and eyeing natural resources in Afghanistan — filling the vacuum left behind by the West. Russia, too, has been engaging with the Taliban, and is the only country to have established diplomatic ties with them. Delhi has been working with Moscow on Taliban to keep track of the Chinese influence.

New Delhi started sending signals back in December 2021, when it sent a consignment of medicines to Afghanistan. The government was choosing to distinguish the Taliban regime from the Afghan people.

The security concerns

New Delhi has operated on the simple principle that Afghanistan's territory

Eroding rights

Since taking control, the Taliban has been eroding the rights of Afghanistan's 22 mn women.

It barred access to school for girls over 12, curbed travel without a male chaperone and brought a law implying legal approval for child marriage.

should not be used for anti-India activities and support for terrorist groups.

An August 10 report by the UN Security Council's 1267 sanctions committee states: "The terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan remained largely unchanged. The ability of numerous terrorist groups to operate in Afghanistan constituted an enduring threat to neighbouring countries and the Central Asian region. Despite efforts by the *de facto* authorities to combat Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) and contain other terrorist groups, the authorities were unable to suppress the terrorist problem." It also said that the Al-Qaeda's status and strength in Afghanistan remains unchanged.

New Delhi would be relieved that the report contains no mention of anti-India terrorist groups, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, among others. But it is keeping its fingers crossed.

So far, New Delhi's engagement has been "limited" and the Taliban has indicated that it will be "reasonable" in the way it "handles"

In August 2021, the last US plane flew out of Kabul. The years since have been marked by India's deepening engagement with the Afghan regime

Indian concerns. The security provided to Indian diplomats in Kabul has given some confidence to the Indian establishment.

At the victory day event, Charge d'affaires Noor delivered a 21-minute speech where he addressed the security concerns on everybody's mind. "A peaceful, stable and responsible Afghanistan creates new opportunities for regional connectivity, trade, investment and economic cooperation, while also playing a constructive role in preventing shared security threats."

Noor said: "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan believes that Afghanistan's geography should not be a field for negative competition, but rather a bridge for connectivity, cooperation and shared prosperity. Therefore, Afghanistan has continued its practical efforts to expand regional economic and transit cooperation, facilitate trade, and strengthen relations based on mutual interests."

This was seen as a message to India and Pakistan, which have long battled for influence in Afghanistan.

Rights issues

Since August 2021, India delivered substantial humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, including 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat, over 445 tonnes of essential life-saving medicines, vaccines and disaster relief material. But the issue of rights — for minorities and women — is not part of either Taliban's or India's publicly stated red lines anymore.

Shortly after the Taliban takeover, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution about the need for upholding human rights and women's rights in Afghanistan. The August 30 resolution was adopted under India's rotating presidency. In December 2022, India expressed concerns over reports that the Taliban had banned women from universities in Afghanistan.

Now, the Indian side has not insisted on any of those old red lines. It has agreed to move forward with development cooperation on Indian-funded projects and visas for Afghans visiting India for medical treatment, business and even education.

It's a telling silence. India's strategic embrace of the Taliban is nearly complete. The Afghan missions in Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad are now manned by Taliban-appointed diplomats; they only lack official diplomatic recognition. Until that happens, the main flagpole of the Delhi embassy will continue to fly the old Afghan Republic's tricolour.

FROM ACS TO SMARTPHONES, MEMORY CHIP SHORTAGES ARE PUSHING UP PRICES

Chipflation: Electronics see years of price hikes replicated in 6 mths

Consumers are increasingly looking out for promotional offers because of rising electronics prices, say analysts

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, August 23

THE GLOBAL artificial intelligence (AI) investment boom has created an acute shortage of the memory chips used in the manufacture of everyday consumer electronics.

This has led to manufacturers raising rates they charge to such an extent that years of price hikes that occurred in the past for products such as smartphones and TVs have taken place in just six months in 2026.

According to Consumer Price Index (CPI) data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), prices of a variety of consumer electronics goods in July were up 3-5% compared to January.

The price movements were far more sedate in 2025.

Take mobile handsets. Compared to a 4% rise from January 2026 to July 2026, the same period in 2025 had seen its CPI price index decline by 0.7%. Or take air conditioners. While they normally do see higher prices in the summer, the extent of the increase this year has been 4.8% compared to 1.1% between January-July 2025. Go back further and 2026's price hikes become even

more striking. Since January 2026, the CPI index of TVs is up 3.5%. If one counts back from December 2025, matching this magnitude of increase took 54 months, or four-and-a-half years. The numbers are similarly large for other consumer electronics: 46 for ACs, 45 for fridges, 41 for mobile phones, 32 for washing machines, and 31 for computers and laptops.

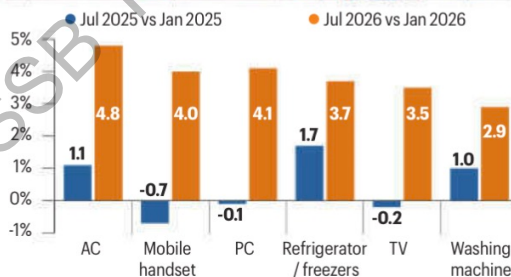
The increase in price indices over 2026 of the aforementioned six consumer electronics is calculated as per the new CPI series which has 2024 as the base year. For the period prior to 2026, price index changes are computed using the old CPI series which had 2012 as the base year. Only consumer electronic items present in both the old and new CPI baskets have been compared.

'Chipflation'

Back in June, analysts at American investment bank Morgan Stanley had coined the term 'chipflation' to describe how "AI's appetite for memory chips is boosting the cost of everything from data centers to smartphones, with consequences that may reach far beyond the tech industry."

The global AI boom has led to key chipmakers such as

•CHIPFLATION PUSHING UP PRICES OF CONSUMER ELECTRONICS



NOTE: FIGURES ARE CHANGE IN EACH ITEM'S PRICE INDEX AS PER NEW CPI SERIES. SOURCE: MOSPI

TSMC, Samsung, and SK Hynix making the more in-demand and advanced chips used in data centres sprouting up all over the world.

What is being sacrificed are DRAM (Dynamic Random Access Memory) and other chips used in everyday electronics goods such as refrigerators, washing machines, ACs, smart-

phones, laptops, TVs, and earphones. The result of the supply shortage of the chips essential to consumer electronics is a massive rise in their prices, with JPMorgan Global Research estimating DRAM prices will have risen more than 400% from the start of 2024 to the end of 2026. This is in stark contrast to the Moore's Law driven cost reduc-

tion seen over the second half of the 20th century and the first 20 or so years of the 21st century: DRAM prices fell 90% every five years over this period. "New memory capacity takes years to build, qualify and ramp up. Supply relief is a process, not a switch. And that creates a two-tier market. Large AI and cloud buyers can sign long-term agreements, prepay and secure priority access. Traditional buyers, including PC makers, smartphone makers and industrial hardware companies, must compete for what remains," Shawn Kim, Head of Morgan Stanley's Europe and Asia Technology Team, said in a podcast in June.

Eyes on promotions

According to Kim, the shortfall in memory chips in 2027 is equivalent to what is needed to make 134 million phones. Already, in the April-June quarter, global smartphone exports were down 11% - their second-lowest level since 2013 - as per Counterpoint Research.

In India, smartphone sales fell for three weeks in a row after online promotional events in July. "...rising device prices are making consumers increasingly value-conscious and more dependent on promotional offers," said Prachir Singh, Senior Analyst at Counterpoint Research, who added that this trend has become more visible over the past few months.

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