

Nepal flood toll hits 389; rescue work in top gear

Over 800 people rescued after the flash flood, 910 remain missing, say authorities

517 foreign nationals unaccounted for; PM Shah reaches nearest motorable town

Alert sounded along Bhotekoshi river as satellite images show blockage upstream

Probe on to determine the role of glacial lakes in the devastating flood, says Nepal

Sanjeev Satgainya
KATHMANDU

The death toll in the flash flood in Nepal's Rasuwa district bordering Tibet touched 389 on Thursday, with 910 people still missing. Nepal's government issued a fresh flood alert after satellite imagery showed that a lake had formed upstream of the Bhotekoshi river due to a blockage, and warned that it could burst.

Nepal's Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal termed the flood "one of the largest natural disasters we have experienced in recent memory" even as authorities continued a massive search-and-rescue operation. "Towns after towns were wiped out in a span of a couple of hours," he said.

Personnel from the Nepal Army, police, and the Armed Police Force raced against time to rescue sur-

vivors from mountain villages that were swept away by the flash flood on Wednesday morning.

According to authorities, more than 800 people were rescued from flood-affected areas as of Thursday night.

Of the 910 missing, 517 are foreign nationals with people from more than 30 countries remaining unaccounted for, they said.

Raising concerns about another possible flood, the government said "satellite imagery and preliminary analysis indicate that water has accumulated at the site where flooding was reported" on Wednesday. "The lake is continuing to rise, and authorities have warned that it could breach or burst, potentially sending a sudden surge of water downstream." It urged residents, travellers, rescue personnel, and others in the downstream areas to remain alert. "It is



Swept away: Sludge surrounds damaged buildings at Bidur in Nuwakot district of Nepal on Thursday, more than 24 hours after the deadly flood tore through the region. AFP

advised that people stay away from riverbanks and other vulnerable areas... until further notice," it said.

Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah reached Bidur, the district headquarters of Nuwakot, which abuts Rasuwa, by road. With 19 bridges and 40 ki-

lometres of roads damaged, it is the last point up to which vehicles can reach.

It is still unclear what caused the flash flood. According to the Nepal government, satellite imagery indicated that an avalanche in the Himalayan region triggered a

surge of an unusually large volume of water. "Further investigations are under way to determine the role of possible glacial lakes and related events," it said.

EDITORIAL

» PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ON

» PAGE 13

At least 290 Indians missing, says Centre

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

In a "preliminary assessment" of the situation following the flash flood in Nepal, the External Affairs Ministry on Thursday said at least 290 Indian nationals remain "uncontactable".

"Urgent efforts are under way to ascertain the status and well-being of all Indians in the flood-affected areas," said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, adding that India is "working closely with the Nepalese side".

After sending an aircraft carrying relief materials to the disaster-hit neighbour on Wednesday, the Ministry on Thursday said that a



Relatives of those missing waiting near a rescue camp in Trishuli, Nepal, on Thursday. PTI

second consignment of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief materials were handed over to Nepal. Additional support would be extended to the Himalayan nation, it said.

CONTINUED ON

» PAGE 12

Gathering info on travellers: Delhi govt.; 25 return from Mansarovar

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government is currently gathering information about city residents who travelled to flash flood-affected areas in Nepal and beyond, officials said on Thursday.

A group of 25 individuals who visited Mansarovar before the natural disaster struck has returned, the officials said. They added that information is also being gathered about other residents from the national capital who went on personal trips to the affected regions.

“The second consignment of 37.5 tonnes of HADR material, medicines and food packets has been handed over to Mr. Mahabir Pun, Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation to support Nepal’s flood relief and rescue efforts. India remains committed to standing by Nepal and its people,” official spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry, Randhir Jaiswal, said.

On Thursday afternoon, Mr. Jaiswal said that two separate groups, comprising 37 and 49 people from Tamil Nadu who travelled to Kailash Manasarovar, were among the 288 Indians who could not be contacted. Later, the number was revised to 290. Giving a tentative breakdown of the Indians who remain unaccounted for so far, he said, “There is a group of 32 nationals from West Bengal who travelled with the help of Samrat Travels in Timure, which is in Rasuwa district, where this disaster happened. Then, a group of 61 Indian nationals from different States who travelled through Richa Tours, and then a group of 33 Indian nationals from Kerala.”

He said that as rescued people return to Kathmandu, arrangements would be made to facilitate their journey home.

Officials said that 63 Indian nationals employed in the Trishuli-1 project and 21 Indians from Tamil Nadu have been rescued, while the search is on to locate those who have not been heard from for over 24 hours.

The situation in the disaster-hit zone from Rasuwa to Chitwan is difficult to assess because of the absence of a stable telecom network, which was disrupted by the flash flood, officials said, expressing hope that more people would be located in the coming hours.

Jaishankar holds review meeting

As part of the ongoing process, Mr. Jaishankar held a review meeting with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and other senior officials on Thursday. The meeting was also attended through video link by the Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Naveen Shrivastava, and the Indian Ambassador to Beijing, Vikram Doraiswamy.

Meanwhile, family members of several of those unaccounted for so far have taken to social media to express their concern. Government sources said efforts are under way to account for those who remain “uncontactable”.

Four Nagas killed in ambush amid Manipur peace efforts

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

Unidentified gunmen on Thursday morning ambushed and killed four Naga civilians between Makui Ashang and Thanamba Naga villages in Manipur's Kuki-dominated Kangpokpi district.

Officials said the gunmen opened fire on at least six persons who were travelling from Makui to Senapati, a Naga-majority district. The authorities suspect that some groups are trying to undermine the State government's peace-building measures.

The United Naga Council (UNC), an apex body of

Manipur's Naga communities, blamed Kuki extremist groups for the attack though no outfit has claimed responsibility. It condemned the "barbaric and calculated" attack on the Liangmai Naga civilians and called it a "direct challenge to peace, the Indo-Naga peace process, and to the very existence of Nagas in our ancestral lands".

'Senseless violence'

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnan Khemchand Singh and Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam condemned the "senseless violence" and said it "strikes at our collective efforts to restore peace and

normalcy".

The UNC also appealed to the Nagas to remain vigilant and stand united against "such external threats". The apex Naga body identified the deceased as Tadsongbou Ringkangmai, Mariakdibou Wijunamai, Anil Wijunamai, and Wisobou Charenamai. It said Gaikamang Ringkangmai was injured in the attack, while one Japou M.K. was missing.

UNC alleged that the Kuki National Front (KNF), KNF (Presidential) and Kuki Revolutionary Army were behind the attack.

CONTINUED ON

» **PAGE 12**

Four Nagas killed in ambush in Manipur

The groups had signed the Suspension of Operation agreement with the Centre in 2008. It expressed resentment over the “complete security failure” and demanded that authorities book the perpetrators, form a Special Investigation Team, and deliver speedy justice.

Shutdown observed

Following the incident, people in Senapati district observed a shutdown. The UNC announced a one-day ‘*genna*’, a period of strict prohibition, rest, and community worship, across Manipur’s Naga-inhabited areas on Friday to pay homage to the victims.

The ambush was carried out at a time when the Manipur government is continuing its efforts to restore peace in the ethnic violence-scarred State. The efforts included the resumption of the Imphal-Guwahati bus service via National Highway-2, which was blockaded for more than three years after the conflict between the Kuki-Zos and Meiteis erupted on May 3, 2023.

The highway passes through Kuki- and Naga-inhabited areas.

Series of attacks

In February, the situation in Manipur took another turn following a series of attacks, including arson, involving the Kuki-Zo and Naga communities.

At a high-level security meeting held after the expiry of a 15-day ultimatum asking individuals and groups to surrender illegal weapons, the Chief Minister instructed security officials to nab and initiate action against the perpetrators of Thursday’s attack.

‘Stringent action’

“We decided to take stringent action against any individual, irrespective of community, found in possession of illegal arms and weapons. We also decided that members of outfits under the SoO or peace talks with the government will face action if found to carry weapons beyond their designated camps,” he said.

Mr. Konthoujam, Chief Secretary Puneet Kumar Goel, Security Advisor Kuldiep Singh, Director General of Police Mukesh Singh, and heads of Army, paramilitary forces, and intelligence agencies in Manipur attended the meeting.

IIT Delhi reconstitutes panel to probe student's death as protests enter fourth day

Institute says it is committed to ensuring students' well-being; collecting evidence on 'insensitive' remarks by Dean as well as 'tone-deaf' comments made by faculty on deaths by suicide: students

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Justice Mukta Gupta, a retired judge of the Delhi High Court, will now head the inquiry panel set up to examine the circumstances leading to the death of an IIT Delhi student, officials said on Thursday, even as student protests continued on campus for a fourth day.

The panel was reconstituted a day after former Uttarakhanda Director General of Police Ashok Kumar, who was appointed as chair of the probe panel, recused himself from the committee. Students had objected to his inclusion, citing his purported comments on recent youth-led agitations, linking the protesters with "radicalisation".

"A new panel has been constituted, with Justice Mukta Gupta as the chairperson. The other members include Pratap Sharan, HoD Psychiatry, AIIMS Delhi. Two student representatives and the IIT Delhi Registrar will also be part of the external probe panel," an



Students staging a demonstration at IIT Delhi on Thursday night. They said they will continue their stir as the administration has not fulfilled all their demands. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

IIT Delhi official said.

The death of the 31-year-old MSc student, allegedly by suicide on the campus on August 22, has sparked massive uproar among several student bodies. Students at the institute have been protesting since Monday against "systemic issues", which they claim have led to the deaths of eight students by suicide over the past 30 months, two of them this year alone.

On Thursday, students reiterated their demands that include ₹1 crore as compensation to be paid to

the mother of the deceased and the resignation of the Associate Dean of Student Welfare. The protesters said they were in the process of collecting evidence from other students, both former and present, on alleged "insensitive" remarks made by the institute's Dean to students on multiple occasions as well as collating evidence from student on faculty and staff members allegedly making "tone-deaf and disparaging" comments on death by suicides.

In response to the demands of the students, the

IIT Delhi administration, in a statement, said it is committed to ensuring students' well-being and enhancing its support infrastructure with multiple steps already being implemented.

'For student well-being'

Listing some of the measures, the institute said when it comes to mental healthcare infrastructure for student well-being, it has counsellors available 24/7, psychiatrists (including AIIMS/VIMHANS experts); fully reimbursed external care, emergency response protocol, Academic Unit Wellness Committees and a buddy programme. The institute said it also has grievance redressal channels, including a Board for Student Welfare, specialised SC/ST/OBC cells, hostel wardens, the Internal Complaints Committee, and confidential counselling channels ensuring transparent resolution.

(Those in distress can contact Tele MANAS at 14416 to seek help.)

India, China discuss ways to clarify perceptions on LAC

Differing views on the subject are seen as a key factor behind tensions in some sectors; both sides agree to address 'any situation on the ground through the existing diplomatic, military channels'

Ananth Krishnan
BEIJING

India and China discussed ways to improve their understanding of each other's perception of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the 25th Round of Special Representatives talks on the boundary question held in Beijing on Tuesday.

Officials from both sides see differing perceptions of the LAC in some regions as a key factor behind tensions in both Western and Eastern Sectors of the border.

An eight-point outcome document released on Wednesday, a day after National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi held the talks, acknowledged those concerns. It said the two sides "discussed ways to improve understanding of LAC in appropriate areas, for better border management".

The joint consensus statement noted both sides agreed that "any situation on the ground would be addressed promptly



India has long pushed for clarifying the LAC to reduce likelihood of incidents between patrols in areas where claims overlap. FILE PHOTO

through existing diplomatic and military channels, including the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC), local commander-level meetings and other agreed mechanisms, to resolve outstanding issues and avoid misunderstanding and miscalculation along the LAC."

In another key outcome, the document said, an Expert Group on Boundary Delimitation would "advance discussions on an Early and Substantial Harvest of boundary delimitation". That process, which would start with

both sides agreeing to the terms of reference, is expected to focus on sectors where there are no pronounced differences in alignment.

India has long pitched for clarifying the LAC to reduce the likelihood of incidents between patrols in areas where claims overlap. A 1996 agreement on confidence-building measures noted the need for the two sides "arriving at a common understanding of the alignment of the LAC".

During his first visit to China as Prime Minister in 2015, Narendra Modi made a public pitch to resume

the LAC clarification process. That did not happen, with Chinese officials saying a clarification process on LAC alignment would further complicate attempts to resolve the boundary dispute.

However, the tensions in eastern Ladakh starting in April 2020 sharply underlined the need to address differences over alignment, especially in the Western Sector. In the Eastern Sector in Arunachal Pradesh as well, differing perceptions of LAC alignment were cited for tensions earlier this month.

The outcome document eschewed any reference to clarification, and, given the contested history of the term, a resumption of the process envisaged in 1996 remains unlikely. However, the two Special Representatives did give a political endorsement of the need "to improve understanding of the LAC in appropriate areas", opening the door for both sides to initiate a process of better understanding the other's perceptions.

Conflicting claims made on Pak.-China ties, says Cong.

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Seeking a comprehensive official review of Operation Sindoor, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Thursday questioned what he described as conflicting statements by senior military officials on the extent of cooperation between Pakistan and China during the operation. India had launched the operation in May 2025.

In a post on X, Mr. Ramesh shared two video clips and contrasted the remarks made by Deputy Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Rahul Singh on July 4, 2025, and former Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Anil Chauhan on August 25, 2026.

Mr. Ramesh said Lt. Gen. Singh had revealed the very disturbingly deep nature of the Pakistan-China *jugalbandi* [close ties] during Operation Sindoor.

However, he said Gen. Chauhan's more recent remarks on the same issue were simply opposite to what the Army officer had stated. "The nation is confused," Mr. Ramesh said, asking, "What is going on here?"

India's return to its Central Asian neighbourhood

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to travel to Central Asia in the next few days, the first port of call being a state visit to Uzbekistan, followed by participation in the meeting of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, called Frunze in Soviet times. The change of names is not just symbolic. It represents the birth of a new region.

Central Asia is an evocative moniker. The region lies landlocked, situated between two giants, Russia and China. In most of its countries, the post 1991 generation has largely taken over, engaged in finding a new internal equilibrium. Islam is the main religion, but does not define identity and is therefore not a political project. The fight against radicalisation and terrorism is uncompromising. Occasional catastrophes such as the devastating Crocus City Hall terror attack in Moscow in 2024, China's constant fear of spread of radicalisation in the border regions and export of instability and extremist ideology from Afghanistan are everyday reminders of the challenges.

In Central Asia, there are a multitude of ethnicities, languages, geographies and resource endowments. These influence domestic and foreign policy choices, with Turkmenistan practising rigorous neutrality. Relations among countries are complicated by legacy disputes over borders, water resources and overlapping ethnicities. Türkiye and Iran are dominant influences, while the United States and the European Union are working their way in as Russia's hold weakens and China's grows.

Mr. Modi's 2015 visit to all five Central Asian countries was historic. It marked the end of an unstated Indian policy of deferring to Russia in its periphery – politically keeping away. In 2017, India was welcomed into the SCO as a full member by Russia, as Pakistan was, by China. To mark the 30 years of their interdependence/diplomatic ties, India



Pankaj Saran

Former Deputy
National Security
Adviser, Ambassador
and Convenor,
NatStrat

The Prime Minister's visit is an opportunity for India to deepen its strategic presence, expand economic ties and strengthen its diplomatic influence

made an unprecedented gesture of inviting all Central Asian leaders as chief guests for the Republic Day in 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the event to be held only virtually, but not without it leading to the creation of high-level mechanisms for cooperation, including the India-Central Asia Dialogue.

Beyond geography

If South Asia and West Asia, not to speak of East Asia and the Indian Ocean Region are India's neighbourhoods, Central Asia is no less. A lack of overland connectivity does not take away from the civilisational links India has with the region – in culture, religion, language and architecture. Geographically, India and Tajikistan are separated only by the narrow Wakhan corridor that lies in Afghanistan. India is part of the continuum that is the Eurasian landmass.

Pakistan, a historically new piece in the equation, seeks to usurp the historical lineage based on religious affinity. Its tactic to cut India off, physically and otherwise, from these historical connections, like its other India-centric gambits, is, as anecdotal evidence shows, doomed to failure. Yet, India must not allow this to succeed. Countries of the region are today looking beyond Russia and China for partners in their socio-economic development. India's lived experience as a plural, moderate and democratic society is admired not feared in the region.

It is against this background that Mr. Modi's decision to go back to the region must be welcomed. India should build upon the foundations to consolidate its rightful place in the region, whether in the economic, trade, defence, natural resources, technology spheres or in softer areas such as cultural, educational, health and tourism exchanges. The choice of a state visit to Uzbekistan is consistent with the steady improvement of relations under President Mirziyoyev since 2016. It is among the most

dynamic countries of the region, and most forward in the diversification of its foreign policy. Any Indian visitor to Tashkent, Samarkand or Bukhara will vouch for the empathy and resonance between the two peoples.

There are also hardnosed reasons – Uzbekistan has been uncompromising in its fight against terrorism and extremism. Its intimate knowledge of Afghanistan, and pragmatic approach towards the Taliban, are of key importance to India. India has had detailed discussions with it on alternative rail and road connectivity routes through Iran and Afghanistan which need to be revisited in the light of recent developments in these countries.

India and the SCO

Starting from the small beginnings of the "Shanghai Five" in 1996, the SCO, in its 25th anniversary, has grown to 10 members. 15 dialogue partners and two observers. With the exception of 2024, Mr. Modi has been a regular participant in SCO Heads of States meetings. India's SCO engagement is driven by geography, not ideology. Within the SCO chambers, negotiating against a China-Pakistan dyad is demanding but essential. India has kept its head above the swamp by suggesting several ideas to enhance cooperation in the economic, technological and civilisational fields. In Tianjin last year, Mr. Modi put forward the vision of security, connectivity, and opportunity for the SCO. In the instant case, for a country as overwhelmingly dependent on China as Kyrgyzstan, the SCO, and India in particular, offers a valuable geopolitical lifeline.

Taken together with his visits to the Indian Ocean Region last month, Mr. Modi would have traversed far-flung corners of India's maritime and continental neighbourhood in quick succession reflecting India's geostrategic imperatives and opportunities.

Learn from disaster, halt hydropower projects in State: Sikkim group to PM

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

A body of two ethnic communities in Sikkim has advised the Centre to learn from the flash flood disaster in Nepal and scrap all new and proposed hydroelectric projects in the Himalayan State.

According to the Nepal Electricity Authority, at least 13 hydropower projects along the Bhotekoshi and Trishuli River corridors suffered extensive damage.

The mudslide hit Gyirong port in Tibet and slammed into Nepal, creat-



The disaster highlights the vulnerability of the Himalayan region, requiring a fresh assessment of development activities

TSETEN TASKI BHUTIA
SIBLAC convenor

ing high-speed flash floods that washed away entire roads, power projects, and inundated villages. The 111-megawatt Rasuwagadhi Hydropower Plant in Rasuwa district of Nepal was among those affected.

On Wednesday evening, the Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC) urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to halt new hydropower projects in the State and order an independent probe into the existing projects.

SIBLAC convenor Tseten Taski Bhutia, also the chief adviser to the Sikkim unit of the BJP, expressed solidarity with the people of Nepal and hoped for the success of the relief and rescue operations.

“The disaster in Nepal highlights the vulnerability of the Himalayan region, requiring a fresh assess-

ment of development activities,” he said, insisting that the Centre should reconsider plans for new hydroelectric projects on Sikkim’s rivers.

Seeking an independent inquiry into the environmental, geological, seismic, social, and national security implications of all existing and proposed projects, he urged the Centre to publish a White Paper containing the findings of such an assessment.

He said the group was not against development, but not at the cost of the ecological and social security of the area.

Kharge urges PM to share delimitation plan, freeze Lok Sabha strength at 543

Sandeep Phukan

NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday called for the existing strength of the Lok Sabha to be frozen at 543 seats for the next 25 years and sought implementation of one-third reservation for women from the 2029 Lok Sabha election.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr. Kharge urged him to share the government's proposals on delimitation with all political parties and the State governments. "This is an issue that has enormous significance for the country," he said, adding: Please do not again try and bulldoze [the Bill through Parliament] as you attempted on April 16 and 17, 2026."

Mr. Kharge sought an all-party meeting to discuss the delimitation proposals and adequate time for political parties and State governments to study them before any legislation is brought before Parliament in a special session.

Referring to his July 16



Mallikarjun Kharge

letter to Mr. Modi in which he had made a similar appeal, Mr. Kharge said: "I am writing now to reiterate this request since the Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs has publicly stated in a television interview last night that such a special session of Parliament could well be convened."

Three demands

Mr. Kharge said the Congress was clear on three points – maintaining the existing strength of the Lok Sabha at 543 for the next 25 years, retaining the existing State-wise allocation of seats for the same period, and introducing one-third reservation for wo-

men from the 2029 election. "Before you go ahead as indicated by the Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, I wish to reiterate my earlier request to you to – convene an all-party meeting to discuss whatever delimitation proposals you have in mind; give all political parties and State governments adequate time to study such proposals," he said.

On August 19, the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the party's highest decision-making body, called for the Lok Sabha's strength to be frozen at 543 seats, as well as the existing State-wise allocation, for 25 years, while seeking implementation of one-third reservation for women from 2029.

The Congress's latest position is also in line with a unanimous resolution adopted by the Tamil Nadu Assembly on delimitation.

During the Budget Session on April 17, a Constitution amendment Bill involving delimitation for implementing women's reservation was defeated in the Lok Sabha.

Nadda meets anti-quota protesters: 'Talks cordial, will meet again soon'

**Lalmani Verma, Liz Mathew
& Jatin Anand**

Lucknow, New Delhi, August 27

UNION MINISTER J P Nadda on Thursday met members of the "Reservation Hatao Andolan (RHA)", days after hundreds gathered at Jantar Mantar demanding that affirmative ac-

tion be based on economic criteria rather than caste.

In a post on X, Nadda said "cordial discussions" took place with the RHA's Harsh Dubey, Ran Bahadur Singh Chauhan, and Mrityunjay Pathak. The meeting came days after a delegation led by Dubey met Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister

Brajesh Pathak, who assured them he would take up their demands with the BJP brass and arrange their meeting with a Union Minister. Pathak and the delegation also addressed a press conference.

"Following the movement that took place at Jantar Mantar

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Nadda

on 21 August, cordial discussions were held, as per the pre-determined schedule, with Harsh Dubey, Ran Bahadur Singh Chauhan, and Mrityunjay Pathak, members of the team. In this connection, we will meet again soon," Nadda wrote on X.

Dubey said the group held talks with the minister Wednesday too. "Discussions took place over two days, Wednesday and Thursday. There will be a press conference on September 7, where our decision will be announced," he told *The Indian Express*. Dubey, a NEET aspirant, and businessman Abhishek Agnihotri, his relative, were at the forefront of the Jantar Mantar demonstration.

"We presented the demand that reservation should be based on economic status. The minister assured us that the government would consider our demands. We trust him and we are hopeful that the government will act on our demands. We had a discussion with the minister today for two hours and for three hours on Wednesday," said Chauhan, a retired Army officer from UP's Kannauj district.

"But if the demands are not met, we will protest again at Jantar Mantar and with a bigger

crowd," Chauhan said.

The activist said anti-quota movement does not intend to encroach upon rights of SCs, STs, and OBCs. "They are our brothers. Reservation should depend on economic status. Creamy layer should be abolished," he said. Asked about alleged differences in the RHA, Dubey said, "(Some) people are just concerned with the politics of it, but I believe it would be better if they remain with the movement. If they deviate from it and only politicise it, it will be wrong."

In the BJP, the decision to engage with the anti-quota activists is seen as an attempt to placate the upper castes. These communities have been upset with the party of late, especially over the now-stayed UGC equity regulations aimed at preventing caste discrimination in higher education institutions.

The upper castes, a core constituency of the party since 1989, were unhappy with the regulations over their potential "misuse". BJP leaders said the regulations had deeply antagonised the upper castes and recent discussions on caste census had intensified their unease.

The meetings — first with Pathak and now Nadda — were an attempt to "pacify them, assure them that the party would listen to them and to give them confidence that the party would ad-

dress their concerns", said a BJP insider.

"In the past, BJP's top leaders have made assurances that there will not be any change in the quota regime and it is impossible to go back on them. The voice of this (anti-reservation) group, which is getting traction among a significant section, is getting louder in many parts of the country, especially in UP, Uttarakhand, and Bihar. The party has to placate them," said a BJP leader from UP.

He said holding meetings would not satisfy them. "You can buy peace for a while with just a meeting. But you will have to answer their questions. Leaders want to know data-based information on the quota policy and its implications," the leader said. BJP sources said addressing the concerns raised would be the party's "utmost priority" because "if a small section, even if 2-3%, sits at home during the next election, it will damage party's prospects in UP". According to estimates of BJP leaders, upper-caste communities such as Brahmins and Kshatriyas constitute over 20% of the electorate in the poll-bound state.

"They may have more leverage than Gen Z because this group can hurt BJP's prospects in Purvanchal (eastern) and western UP," a party leader said.

Rajnath lays foundation for tank overhaul facility in M.P.

The ₹472-crore project seeks to keep T-72 and T-90 tanks operationally ready; the facility aims at bridging the capacity gap and ensuring faster availability of refurbished tanks to the Army

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday laid the foundation stone for a ₹472-crore project to establish facilities for overhauling T-72 and T-90 tanks at the Vehicle Factory Jabalpur, located in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district. The project is aimed at augmenting the Army's capacity to keep its armoured fleet operationally ready.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav joined Mr. Singh at the ceremony at the Vehicle Factory Jabalpur, a unit of the Armoured Vehicles Nigam Limited (AVNL).

According to the Ministry of Defence, the new facility will have the capacity to overhaul 80 tanks annually. The Army requires around 230 tanks to be overhauled every year, and the Heavy Vehicles Factory in Avadi, a suburb of Chennai, currently has the capacity to overhaul 150 tanks annually. The Jabalpur facility will, therefore, bridge the existing capacity gap and ensure faster availability of refurbished



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav at the Vehicle Factory in Jabalpur on Thursday. PTI

tanks to the Army.

He said the project reflected India's growing technological and industrial capabilities and would strengthen Jabalpur's position as a hub for defence maintenance, modernisation and manufacturing.

Mr. Singh said the changing character of warfare, marked by drones, precision-guided weapons, missiles, satellites, artificial intelligence and cyber capabilities, had not diminished the relevance of tanks, but had changed the way they would be employed.

"Modern warfare demands combined capabilities

rather than dependence on a single platform," he said, stressing the need to integrate tanks with infantry, artillery, drones, air power, surveillance and precision weapons.

Mr. Singh also called for existing tanks to be equipped with superior sensors and modern battlefield capabilities.

He said the government's focus was to provide the armed forces with modernised tanks alongside drones, missiles, artillery, electronic warfare and energy weapons.

He highlighted the contribution of the Heavy Veh-

icles Factory in Avadi, which has supplied around 4,400 tanks to the Army over four decades. The AVNL, he said, had 25 years of experience in overhauling T-72 and T-90 variants and should set higher benchmarks in quality, productivity and innovation.

Big boost for MSMEs

The project is also expected to generate opportunities for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) supplying mechanical, electrical, electronic and hydraulic components and services, creating a wider local defence-industrial ecosystem.

Mr. Singh said India's defence production had risen to around ₹1.80 lakh crore in 2025-26 from ₹46,000 crore in 2014, while defence exports increased to approximately ₹39,000 crore from less than ₹1,000 crore.

He said the government's objective was to reduce dependence on foreign supply chains by manufacturing, repairing, maintaining and upgrading defence systems domestically.

A.P. to become third subsea hub on data centre buildout

The State is witnessing investments from tech giants Microsoft and Google, which are building fresh subsea cable infrastructure, currently concentrated in Mumbai and Chennai

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

As a result of data-centre buildout in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the former's coastline will soon hold new landing stations for subsea cables, which connect global internet with India.

On one hand, Microsoft is participating in a consortium with firms like Lightstorm and Singaporean telco Singtel to land the 3,600 km India-Southeast Asia (I-2SEA) Submarine Cable System, and Google has the globe-spanning America-India Connect system, which will land in Visakhapatnam, where the tech giant's datacentre complex is being built.

"As part of this AI hub... we're bringing in multiple new subsea cables that will land on the coast of Andhra Pradesh around the Vishakhapatnam area," Alexander Smith, a Google executive who oversees several of the firm's physical infrastructure projects in the Asia Pacific region, told *The Hindu* in an interview on Thursday.

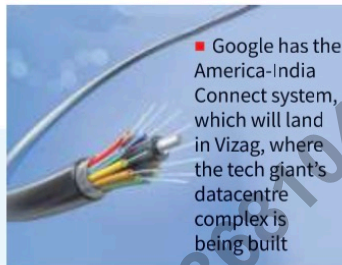
"That will mean that essentially India will have, after Mumbai and Chennai, a third digital international subsea gateway... connecting India directly with Southeast Asia, so Singapore and a couple of the other main markets, down into Australia and right around into the Middle East and Europe and

Network busy

A.P.'s coastline will soon hold new landing stations for subsea cables, which connect global internet with India

- Essentially India will have a third digital international subsea gateway connecting India directly with Southeast Asia

- Microsoft is part of a consortium with firms like Lightstorm and Singtel to land the 3,600 km I-2SEA Submarine Cable System



beyond. So this will... make India and Vizag in particular one of the most connected places in the world," Mr. Smith added.

Lightstorm CEO Amajit Gupta said in an interview with *The Hindu* in June that I-2SEA "connects South-east Asia, specifically Singapore and Malaysia, to the east coast of India," and that the cable system, which also connects to Chennai, "provides a brand new corridor to South Asia" from South East Asia, where a lot of infrastructure serving Indian enterprises and consumers continues to reside.

The cable system is set to be ready for service in Q4 2029. Mr. Gupta said that new cable buildout in a fresh location was key to preserving Indian internet connectivity from a strategic standpoint.

"If you peel the onion and look at the cables which connect the east coast of India... most of these are pretty old cables," he said. "They are easily about 8, 10, 12, 15

years old... [they] are filled with capacity and are also rapidly running into end of life." Mr. Gupta said that there were geopolitical de-risking tailwinds driving these investments. "I don't need to tell you what's happening in West Asia, which means people are beginning to think, hey, now this is getting so dangerous, why can't we flush the traffic out to the eastern coast of India so that at the least I have resilience and at the best I have an alternate path [in case connectivity is lost]."

On top of the subsea cable landing, both projects require significant infrastructure further inland. "This is a pan-India project," Mr. Smith said.

"We're needing to install and then light and operate thousands of kilometres of new fiber ... I think what's kind of underappreciated is that this will really create a robust new layer of digital connectivity... that will go between some of the mainline metros." Taking a cue from

landside fiber built on top of electrical transmission lines, Mr. Gupta said that Lightstorm is "likely to build a terrestrial corridor ... which will connect Machilipatnam to Mumbai, Hyderabad and similarly Chennai to Hyderabad and Mumbai with the same bandwidth".

"Fiber itself is out of stock across the globe," Mr. Gupta said, adding "including from Indian manufacturers. And then the fiber sub-components, the fiber raw material, the inputs are all in short supply. So that has never been the case for the last 10 to 15 years."

Google facility

Mr. Smith said that Google's Visakhapatnam facility will focus on inference, with no immediate plans for performing power-hungry training runs. He added that the firm was trying to acquire as much renewable power for the project as possible – pointing out that Google is among the biggest buyers of renewable energy in the world – and that water use minimisation was also on the agenda with air cooling technologies.

He added that the Google facility will focus on inference for domestic enterprises and government agencies, as there has been "pretty deep AI adoption across the delivery of government services at the State levels as well as Union level."

Zee's Chandra to pay ₹6.5 cr. under IBC vs. ₹22,000-cr. due

15 of 20

MUMBAI

Top banks may face a 99% haircut via the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) ordering Zee Media Group founder Subhash Chandra to pay ₹6.5 crore against ₹22,006.57 crore due to creditors in personal insolvency proceedings.

The NCLT went by the decision of 80.81% creditors who okayed Mr. Chandra's offer. The matter involved Indiabulls Housing Finance and personal guarantor Mr. Chandra.

The tribunal went by the decision of a majority of Committee of Creditors (CoC) who chose the offer.

Allegedly they were related party and associated with Mr. Chandra and a large segment of creditors from Haryana whose claims were admitted by the Resolution Professional without examining the manner in which the alleged debts had arisen.

"The Repayment Plan submitted by the Personal Guarantor is required to be approved ...subject to exclusion of the claims submitted through Anil Kumar on behalf of 960 individuals and Sunil Jain on behalf of 300 individuals from the final list of creditors and consequential redistribution of the repayment amount among the remaining eligible creditors...", NCLT order read.

"The approved Repayment Plan will be binding on all the creditors," it said.

In this case, the more than 88% creditors who willingly approved Mr. Chandra's proposal saw their credentials questioned by other creditors.

The creditors who opposed the repayment plan included Axis Bank, RBL



Subhash Chandra

Bank, IndusInd Bank, IDBI Trusteeship (for Franklin Templeton), LIC Housing Finance and Union Bank of India with a collective vote share of 19.186%.

Those who approved Mr. Chandra's plan included Appearance Corpcall Capital Advisors LLP, Catalyst Trusteeship, World Crest Advisors LLP, Direct Media Distribution Ventures Pvt. Ltd., Lemonade Capital Advisors LLP and Veena Investments Pvt. Ltd. allegedly associated with Mr. Chandra.

Multiple objections

It was submitted multiple creditors raised objections against the inclusion and voting rights of some associate and related entities of the personal guarantor who together held about 61.78% voting share in CoC.

As per RP Shiv Nandan Sharma, the personal guarantor's (Mr. Chandra's) estate, in the event of bankruptcy, may not be enough even to cover the expenses of the process. Therefore, the creditors may not be able to get any dividend from the bankruptcy trustee so they had accepted it.

However, a net worth certificate submitted by RBL Bank Ltd. in 2017 showed Mr. Chandra's net worth at \$7.17 billion,

(₹45,888 crore). Also, separate certificate to Canara Bank in 2018 assessed his net worth at ₹40,562 crore. Suddenly, how he turned poor, wondered creditors.

Canara Bank had opposed the plan stating it constituted only about 0.028% of the value of Mr. Chandra's assets. In 2022, Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. moved the NCLT in a case involving personal guarantee given by Mr. Chandra for loans of Essel Group companies.

Anil Kumar and Sunil Jain submitted claims on behalf of 960 and 300 individuals from Haryana, Mr. Chandra's native and it was alleged the RP admitted the claims without undertaking any due diligence or inquiry into the relationship of the concerned individuals with Mr. Chandra or examining the manner in which the alleged debts had arisen. After admitting 'unverified and unsubstantiated' claims of entities alleged to be related/associate parties, the RP permitted them in Repayment Plan voting process.

'Related parties'

It was submitted the documents showed the related-party status of Veena Investments, Direct Media Distribution Ventures, World Crest Advisors, Lemonade Capital Advisors and Corpcall Capital Advisors with Mr. Chandra. Despite such material, the RP disregarded the same and instead relied upon Mr. Chandra's contention that following a "family settlement", the entities no longer were related to him.

Meanwhile, Mr. Chandra said he did not borrow money from any lender and was only a personal guarantor.

Modi to begin four-day visit to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan tomorrow

Express News Service

New Delhi, August 27

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi will go on a bilateral visit to Uzbekistan from August 29 to 30 and the Kyrgyz Republic for the 26th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, to be held from August 31 to September 1.

Announcing the visit, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, "At the invitation of the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Prime Minister will undertake a state visit to Tashkent on 29–30 August 2026. This will be the Prime Minister's fourth visit to Uzbekistan."

During the visit, the Prime Minister will hold delegation-level talks with President Mirziyoyev to further strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries.

"The two leaders would review cooperation in trade and investment, defence, digital connectivity, energy, education and people-to-people domains and set the agenda for the road ahead. They will also share perspectives on advancing the shared developmental visions of Viksit Bharat 2047 and Uzbekistan-2030," the MEA said.

Prime Minister Modi is also expected to visit the Shastri Memorial in Tashkent and the



PM Narendra Modi. FILE

Mahatma Gandhi Centre at the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies.

From Tashkent, MEA said, at the invitation of the President of Kyrgyz Republic, Sadyr Zhaparov, the Prime Minister will travel to Bishkek to participate in the 26th SCO Summit on August 31 – September 1.

The summit marks the 25th anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, of which India has been a full member since 2017. "The Prime Minister will address the summit where he will highlight India's priorities of security, connectivity and opportunity at the forum," it said.

Modi will also hold bilateral meetings with SCO leaders on the sidelines of the summit. In addition, he is also expected to attend the opening ceremony of the sixth World Nomad Games, a celebration of the cultural heritage of Central Asia.

Economy is resilient, but risks remain

LEADING ECONOMIC indicators indicate that the country's underlying economic growth momentum has held up in the first quarter and beyond. This view has been reinforced in the State of the Economy report prepared by economists at the RBI as well as in the finance ministry's monthly economic review. However, the outlook remains clouded with risks to growth emanating from continuing geopolitical and trade-related uncertainties, supply-chain pressures, volatile energy prices, and a strengthening El Niño.

Domestic household consumption remains healthy — there are several markers to that effect. As the report shows, e-way bill generation has been firm, and GST revenues are healthy. Passenger vehicle sales are strong, as are tractor and two-wheeler sales. At the same time, the index of industrial production was up 5.8 per cent in the quarter, aided by the manufacturing sector. Electricity demand has also been steady. Firms in both manufacturing and services sectors have also witnessed an improvement in their operating profits as per the report. Bank credit growth has also been growing at a brisk pace across sectors, which bodes well for both production (credit to industry) and consumption (retail loans). The optimism has been strengthened by the recovery in the monsoon, which has helped with kharif sowing. And despite an uncertain external front, non-oil exports have seen an uptick, growing at 12.8 per cent in the first four months of the year, perhaps aided by the currency's depreciation. Public sector capex, too, has held up, with the Centre's expenditure growing by roughly 24 per cent in the quarter.

In the August Monetary Policy Committee meeting, the central bank had projected the economy to grow at 7 per cent in the first quarter. This is in line with assessments by agencies such as Crisil and ICRA. Early next week, the National Statistics Office will release its estimate of GDP growth. Growth may well surprise on the upside. But the external environment will continue to weigh heavy. This calls for a careful and calibrated approach. As the economic review notes, "recent years have been a time for hunkering down and battening down the hatches. Coming years will be no exception." Policymakers will have to deftly navigate this challenging period.

THE CEA RECENTLY CALLED FOR A LOWER ETHANOL-PETROL BLEND OPTION

'No reversal to E10, choice for old vehicles being explored'

Sukalp Sharma

New Delhi, August 27

• THE E20 DEBATE

AMID THE public debate around E20 petrol — 80% petrol and 20% ethanol — being the only standard petrol variant in the country, the option of additionally offering petrol with 10% ethanol blending, or E10, is being explored specifically for older vehicles, Sanjay Khanna, chairman of the country's second-largest fuel retailer Bharat Petroleum (BPCL), said Thursday in an interaction with reporters.

But no concrete decision has been taken yet as discussions are on regarding supply chain and logistical challenges that selling two variants of base fuel are likely to pose.

Khanna also said that there is no proposal to fully replace the E20 blend with E10.

"One of the options being explored is can we have E10 fuel for the older vehicles, which is what is being pursued right now. What are the challenges related to the supply, can we handle another grade of MS (motor spirit, or petrol) simultaneously? Yes, those challenges are there and they are being debated, they are being worked out right now. That is the reason why we don't have

INDIA ACHIEVED 20% ethanol blending in petrol last year, five years ahead of the deadline

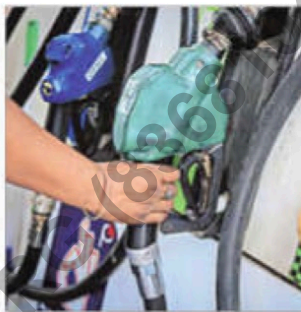
THERE HAS been opposition over the E20 fuel from various quarters, with claims ranging from notable reduction in mileage and engine component wear in older vehicles

ON ITS part, the government has been trying to allay fears, saying that the drop in mileage in older vehicles would be 3-5% at most,

any ready answer. But definitely, it was one of the options that was being pursued. In what form it would come, to what extent it would come, the details are being worked out at this juncture at different levels," Khanna said in response to a question from *The Indian Express*.

On August 19, *The Indian Express* had reported quoting sources that early exploratory discussions within the government and the industry were underway on whether E10 petrol can also be retailed for older vehicles alongside the E20 fuel.

Any decision on the matter



and would be outweighed by E20's benefits as it is a superior fuel

is likely to be taken at the government level, and will be binding on all fuel retailers.

India achieved 20% ethanol blending in petrol last year, five years ahead of the ordinal deadline. There has been opposition over the E20 fuel from various quarters, with claims ranging from notable reduction in mileage and engine component wear in older vehicles whose engines were not designed for higher ethanol blends.

On its part, the government has been attempting to allay fears, saying that the drop in mileage in older vehicles would

be 3-5% at most, and would be outweighed by E20's benefits as it is a superior fuel.

It has also consistently rejected claims that E20 fuel could damage engine components. Questions have also been raised on why motorists aren't being offered the choice of pure petrol, E10, and E20 fuels. According to sources in the know, the discussions — described as preliminary — are being held on various technical as well as non-technical aspects of the country's complex fuel retail supply chain.

They said that the backlash from certain quarters against E20 and the lack of choice for consumers, specifically those with older vehicles — particularly two-wheelers — that were certified for E10 petrol, led to the initiation of these discussions.

In July, the government had said that offering multiple grades of base fuel across the country would create an "enormous logistical challenge", apart from raising costs and reducing operational efficiencies in India's complex fuel retail network. It also said that the current base fuel E20 is cleaner and superior than pure petrol and lower ethanol-petrol blends.

FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM