

COURSE CORRECTION CONVEYED IN WRITING, AND AT MEETING WITH STATE CEOs 'Left out' voters: EC orders special drive in 20 states where SIR over

Form 6, changes to which the two ECs had red-flagged, will be re-entry route for those deleted, without the SIR question

**Vallabh Ozarkar
& Ritika Chopra**
Mumbai, October 1

UNDER FIRE over the scale of deletions from voters' lists in the nationwide Special Intensive

Revision (SIR) exercise, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has directed the 20 states and Union Territories where the exercise has been completed to run a "special drive" to enrol voters "left out" of the rolls, *The*



The Indian Express report published on September 23

Indian Express has learnt.

The instruction was conveyed in writing on September 29 and repeated at a video conference with all state Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) Thursday.

It comes as the Commission faces intense scrutiny over the 13 crore names struck off draft rolls in 30 states and Union Territories, and a week after an investigation by *The Indian Express* (September 23) showed

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

'Left out' voters: EC orders special drive in 20 states where SIR over

that the question of who makes it onto the voters' list and who is left out was being raised inside the Commission itself.

The investigation revealed that Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi had objected on record 14 times in 10 months to decisions taken in the Commission's name without their knowledge, including the change to Form 6 (the form new voters fill) and the centralised control of ECINet, the software on which the electoral rolls were prepared during the SIR and on which every electoral roll now sits.

The September 29 letter from the Election Commission's Secretary to all CEOs states: "In State/UTs where SIR has already been completed, a special drive shall be undertaken by the Chief Electoral Officer, District Election Officers and EROs for the enrolment of left out and young/first time eligible electors under the process of continuous updation."

That drive will run on a Form 6 without the question added to it in July. The online form had begun asking applicants whether they, or their par-

ents, were on the voters' list after the last SIR, and would not let them submit without an answer, which left an 18-year-old whose parents had been deleted with no fruitful way through. Only the government can change the form, by amending the rules; it hadn't. Both Commissioners had said so in May, and Sandhu in August called the change "unauthorised/illegal". The September 29 letter now confines the declaration to "SIR phase only". In the 20 states where the SIR is over, first-time voters and the "left out" will fill the plain statutory form.

At the Commission's video conference with all state CEOs Thursday, the instruction went further, according to officers who attended. The Deputy Election Commissioner present told CEOs to compare the pre-SIR roll with the post-SIR roll, draw up the list of those deleted, and identify any who may have been left out.

"It has been told to visit the houses, in cases especially if the voters are not mapped elsewhere or were not duplicate or not deceased and get their Form 6 filled up," one of the of-

ficers said. The CEOs have been asked to seek assistance of political parties (or booth-level agents of political parties) for this exercise.

All CEOs have been asked to bring people back, if left out unjustly, via Form 6, the form for new voters. It is the same route Goa's Chief Electoral Officer has to use to re-enrol the 97 voters left out of the state's final roll on February 21 despite being found eligible by its own EROs. As *The Indian Express* reported on September 24, the 97 had been deleted at the draft stage, produced documents, and were cleared by the EROs, who then found that ECINet had no option to reverse the deletion. The CEO's eight communications to the Commission over seven days, each copied to DG (IT) Seema Khanna, went unanswered, and the final roll was published without them.

That was the concern Sandhu had put on record on August 14. By law, he wrote, "all the responsibilities regarding Electoral Roll lie on EROs, DEOs and CEOs," yet "the access control has been centralised by DG (IT)," and the DG (IT)

"doesn't have any legal authority to restrict proper and complete access and freedom to operate, as given by law, to the statutory authorities".

In May, Joshi had called it "the gradual centralisation of the electoral roll database" and asked for an audit. Neither note was answered until the Commission's meeting of September 26.

The September 29 letter came three days after that meeting, the Commission's second full sitting since April, which announced that voters served notices for being "unmapped" or for "logical discrepancies" need not appear for hearings, that a committee with an independent IIT/IIT expert would review ECINet, and that "any further flexibility" field officers needed "will be made operational" in the software.

The letter conveys the hearing change to the states, and is copied to the DG (IT) "for making necessary changes in ECINet". It also settles a matter the two Commissioners had raised: the declaration attached to Form 6 "will be used during SIR phase only," and outside the

SIR, "the Forms applicable as per the Registration of Electors Rules 1960 will be used".

Maharashtra: No hasty deletions

Following the ECI's meeting with all state CEOs Thursday, Maharashtra, currently the largest state where the SIR is still under way, has instructed its Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) not to exclude any voter in haste.

A note sent by the Chief Electoral Officer's office Thursday to officials handling Mumbai City and Mumbai Suburban states: "Before taking a decision to exclude the name of the said voter from the electoral roll, sufficient opportunity should be given to the concerned voter to submit the necessary documents, a hearing should be held and the necessary order should be passed."

It states that "an eligible voter should not remain excluded from the electoral roll and there should be no obstruction to the voter's right to vote". Officials have been told not to take a negative decision in haste and to ensure "complete scrutiny at the ERO level".

The note implements the Commission's September 26 decision that voters served notices for being "unmapped" or for "logical discrepancies" need not appear for hearings in person. Booth Level Officers, the first interface between citizens and the Commission, will collect documents at the homes of voters who have been served notices and upload them for the ERO to decide; those already sent hearing notices are to be told by phone or WhatsApp that they need not come.

Special camps are scheduled on October 3, 4, 10 and 11. The note adds a safeguard for cases the BLO's visit doesn't settle: another chance to produce documents, then a hearing and an order, before any name comes off.

Maharashtra's draft roll flagged 1.22 crore records for verification: 62.48 lakh for discrepancies in relatives' details, 59.75 lakh that could not be mapped to a relative in the previous roll. The "necessary changes" to ECINet and the BLO App, the note says, are still being made at the Commission level.

CJP set to hold protest in Mumbai today seeking CEC's resignation

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke said on Thursday that the group will hold a protest at Mumbai's Shivaji Park on Friday. The protesters' main demands include the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar and the filing of criminal charges against him.

The CJP has also sought that the special intensive revision (SIR) roll be frozen and that the process to appoint the Chief Election Commissioner be made transparent, with civil society participation. After Mumbai, the group will hold protests in six other cities, concluding at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi by the end of October.

'Illusion of democracy'
"Gyanesh Kumar is a traitor. He doesn't deserve to be the CEC. He is a puppet



Cockroach Janta Party Founder Abhijeet Dipke addresses a press conference at the Press Club in Mumbai on Thursday. ANI

of Amit Shah and Narendra Modi. There have been 13 crore deletions in the voters' list since 2024. The gap between the NDA and INDIA bloc was a mere 2% (in the 2024 elections), whereas they got rid of 14% of the vote share. There is an illusion of democracy in the country, and no actual democracy," Mr. Dipke said.

He added that since a large number of people were affected due to the deletions, many will hit the streets. "If Gyanesh Kumar doesn't resign, they will

seek Narendra Modi's resignation," he said, alleging that Mr. Kumar was winning elections for Mr. Modi.

Expressing apprehension about Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), he alleged that all electronic machines can be hacked and demanded that elections be held using ballot papers.

Responding to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis' statement about three days' police custody for protesters, he said he did not

mind three months' custody either.

Meanwhile, the Mumbai police have not given permission for the CJP protest. The Bombay High Court decides on petitions seeking permission to hold public events at Shivaji Park. The designated area for protests in the city is Azad Maidan.

When asked if the group had approached the High Court to seek permission, Mr. Dipke said: "What will happen in the court? *Taareekh pe taareekh* (referring to prolonged court hearings)."

When asked why the group did not wait for the Supreme Court to hear the pending petitions about the problems with electoral rolls and the SIR, he accused the apex court of being equally guilty. "Which Supreme Court? The same court which did not allow people to vote in the West Bengal elections?" he asked.

ORGANISED BY MINISTRY OF TOURISM

Tawang chosen as venue for tourism meet, China among countries invited

Divya A

New Delhi, October 1

THE GOVERNMENT is set to hold a mega international event in Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh towards the end of this month.

The International Tourism Mart, being organised by the Ministry of Tourism from October 27 to November 1, will bring together delegates from around 20 countries.

Delegates from China have also been invited to the annual event which is held, by

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



EXPLAINED

Tawang not just a tourism hotspot

Tawang is a primary bone of contention between India and China. Beijing refers to Arunachal Pradesh as Zangnan or South Tibet and claims it belongs to China. Delhi rejects China's claim, reiterating that Arunachal Pradesh is an "inalienable and integral part of India".

Tawang chosen as venue for tourism meet, China too invited

rotation, in one of the North-Eastern states. The 2025 edition of the event was held in Sikkim, and was attended by government representatives and industry stakeholders from over 19 countries.

Sources maintained it is a routine rotational event, but the decision to hold the event in Tawang is significant, coming as it does weeks after the government identified 27 places/features in Arunachal Pradesh by standard place and feature names on the official maps of Survey of India for "their accurate recognition and better awareness among the public at large". Tawang in the eastern sector is a primary bone of contention in the boundary dispute between India and China.

Beijing refers to Arunachal Pradesh as Zangnan or South

Tibet and claims that it belongs to China. New Delhi strongly rejects China's territorial claim, reiterating that Arunachal Pradesh is an "inalienable and integral part of India".

While government representatives from China have not attended the tourism event traditionally, there have been instances of private tour operators participating at the event since it offers a lot of scope for B2B tie-ups. At the 2018 edition in Agartala, over 60 tour operator delegates from different countries participated, including those from Bangladesh, Australia, Canada, China and France.

Sources said invitations for the Tawang event have been sent to all participating countries and industry delegations. Participation confirmation will be known closer to the event

date, the sources said.

While a lot of focus is on building travel and tourism ties between the region and its neighbours, particularly the ASEAN and SAARC countries, representatives and stakeholders from other parts of the world also attend the event. Delegates from Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Germany, Italy, France, Thailand and Israel were among those at the 2025 edition in Sikkim.

For the edition in Tawang, the Ministry of Tourism is collaborating with the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. Union Ministers and state ministers will be attending the event over five days. Delegates will also be taken on a visit to Tawang Monastery, Buddha Park, Panga Teng Tso lake and Shernup village.

Shivakumar protests; EC orders probe into Form 7 fraud charge

Rishita Khanna

BENGALURU

The Election Commission (EC) on Thursday ordered a probe into the filing of Form 7s in bulk seeking deletions of names from final electoral rolls following a five-hour protest by Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar and his Cabinet colleagues.

Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Karnataka, V. Anbu Kumar, directed all Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to take action against applicants who “knowingly” make false statements or declarations while filing claims or objections in Forms 6, 6A, 7, and 8.

Mr. Shivakumar withdrew the protest after the announcement.

Earlier in the day, he alleged that “pre-filled” Form 7s were filed in bulk across the State by the Opposition BJP and Janata Dal (Secular) workers, targeting Muslims, and members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, claiming they had either “shifted” or were “absent”.

‘False or forged’

He said many Form 7s were either false or forged.

In at least two instances, in Belagavi and Vijayapura, BJP workers who filed Form 7s in bulk withdrew those after being warned of punitive action if the claims were found to be false. In a written declaration, they said they had made a mistake.

The Karnataka Police registered five FIRs on Thursday over bulk Form 7s invoking the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and not the Representation of the Peo-



D.K. Shivakumar staging a protest outside the CEO's office in Bengaluru. J. ALLEN EGENUSE

ple Act, 1951, as only EC officials can lodge complaints under the latter. Mr. Shivakumar demanded that poll body must take *suo motu* action and lodge criminal complaints.

Mr. Anbu Kumar noted that there were instances of bulk filing of Form 7 applications before the EROs and that some of the forms were “alleged to be not genuine” and directed the EROs to take action under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, “against applicants found to have knowingly made false statements or declarations.”

“However, such action shall be preceded by an inquiry under Rule 20 of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960,” he said.

Earlier in the day, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, took to social media citing *The Hindu's* report on how Form-7 applications were being filed against Muslim names in Belagavi and other districts in bulk, and said it was yet another proof of “vote theft”.

PARLEY

» **PAGE 9**

RELATED REPORTS ON

» **PAGE 5**

Govt. hikes commercial LPG cylinder price by ₹65

Saptaparno Ghosh

NEW DELHI

The price of commercial LPG cylinders was increased by around ₹65 on Thursday. The hike, for the second consecutive month, has come just ahead of the festive season.

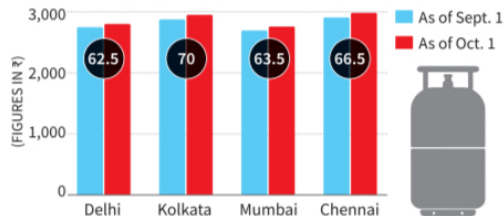
Cumulatively, the price of the 19-kg cylinder has been increased by about ₹75 per refill since September across two tranches.

The price of the 5-kg free-trade LPG cylinder refills was hiked by ₹15 per cylinder on Thursday even as the price of domestic LPG remained unchanged. The price of aviation turbine fuel was increased by about ₹16 to ₹137 per litre.

The latest increase in the price of commercial LPG cylinders follows the

Price surge

In the chart, the bars show the latest prices per commercial LPG cylinder while the circle shows the difference in prices



price cuts in July and August. In July and August, the price was cumulatively slashed by ₹380 per cylinder. The reduction followed a hike of about ₹1,345 in four tranches since March 7.

Among the four metros, Kolkata saw the steepest hike. While a cylinder costs

₹2,810 in Delhi following a ₹62.5 upward revision, in Kolkata, it now costs ₹2,954 after a ₹70 jump.

In Mumbai, a cylinder costs ₹2,764.50 after a hike of ₹63.50, and in Chennai ₹2,983 following an increase of ₹66.50.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Manpreet Singh, treasurer

of the National Restaurants Association of India, said costlier LPG cylinders could prompt restaurateurs to increase the price of food items. "LPG is an important input for restaurateurs. Further, the latest hike coincides with food inflation, and increasing costs of labour, among other things," he said. Mr. Singh apprehended that the pressure on restaurateurs could escalate as U.S. President Donald Trump has said that there will be no peace deal with Iran until the mid-term elections in early-November.

Prashant Vashisht, senior vice-president and co-group head of corporate sector ratings at ICRA, said the latest hike seeks to factor in the recent increase in the benchmark Saudi

Aramco Contract Price (Saudi CP). "This could be possibly relating to the general increase in price of benchmark Saudi CP prices and not just to have some sort of compensatory mechanism for the larger domestic LPG segment."

Mr. Vashisht observed that the domestic LPG segment is presently incurring under-recoveries of more than ₹300 per cylinder. He added this could escalate further if the prices are not revised.

India's LPG consumption declined 9.2% in September from the comparable period last year, and that of petrol and diesel surged about 7.2% and 4.9% during the same period, according to provisional government data released on Thursday.

HC strikes down Andhra govt's 34% backward class quota for local body polls

Sreenivas Janyala

Hyderabad, October 1

THE ANDHRA Pradesh High Court Thursday struck down two government orders providing 34% reservation for backward classes in local body elections, observing that the quota was against Supreme Court guidelines that total reservation should not exceed 50%.

The development is a setback to the Chandrababu Naidu government, for whom the quota was a major poll promise.

The court then directed the government and the state EC to begin the poll process within six weeks. On August 18, CM Naidu had announced the 34% quota for Backward Classes in local body polls, describing it as 'correcting injustice'. He told the As-

sembly while Backward Classes would get 34% quota in rural local bodies, they would have a 33.33% quota in urban local bodies, calling it a "historic day".

Naidu also said that the Telugu Desam Party-led NDA government was fulfilling its 2024 poll promise of increasing Backward Classes' reservation in local bodies from 20% to 34%. The quota would restore justice for the community, he said, urging the House to approve the hike. "Backward Classes constitute 50.54% of the state's population; justice must be ensured for them," he said.

Earlier, the YSRCP had opposed the announcement, saying it violated the SC guidelines on quota. The HC had also rejected the YSRCP's plea seeking postponement of the polls.

SC bars licence renewal for motorists with unpaid fines

Top court directs that vehicles with unpaid e-challans be blacklisted, preventing their sale or transfer until the dues are cleared; it also calls for greater use of technology in traffic enforcement

Aaratrika Bhaumik

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed the States and Union Territories to block a range of online and vehicle-related services for motorists with outstanding traffic fines, including registration renewals, fitness and pollution-under-control certificates, ownership transfers, and driving licence renewals.

The court was informed that e-challans worth about ₹49,194.05 crore remained outstanding across the country, while ₹26,175.05 crore had been recovered so far.

A Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and K.V. Viswanathan directed that vehicles with unpaid e-challans be blacklisted on the Central Parivahan portal, effectively preventing their sale or transfer until dues are cleared. In cases involving multiple traffic violations, the authorities have also been directed to withhold renewal of driving licences and take steps to suspend existing licences.

“What we want to convey in simple words is that



The court has asked the States and Union Territories to block vehicle-related services for motorists with pending fines. FILE PHOTO

the authorities need to work at the ground level, having regard to the ground realities... We also direct that let there be random checking of the vehicles, and if it is found that the e-challan issued has not been abided or honoured, necessary steps shall be taken to impound the vehicle itself,” the Bench said, in its September 28 order made public on Thursday.

Road safety case

The directions were issued in a road safety case dating back to 2012, in which the top court has been monitoring the implementation

of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, and the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, for nearly 14 years.

The Bench called for greater use of technology in traffic enforcement, directing the States and Union Territories to immediately implement the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) framed by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways on October 28, 2025. The SOP seeks to give effect to Section 136A of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, read with Rule 167A of the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989.

Under the framework, traffic violations are to be

detected electronically through devices such as CCTV cameras, speed cameras, and speed guns. The State governments have been directed to identify and notify locations for electronic enforcement and complete the procurement, deployment, and calibration of equipment.

The court directed the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to set up a public dashboard showing how electronic traffic enforcement is being implemented.

The Bench sought details of the steps taken by the Delhi government to comply with its September 15 directions on pedestrian safety along Mathura Road near the Delhi High Court and the National Zoological Park.

Amicus curiae and senior advocate Gaurav Agrawal informed the court that he wrote to the Delhi Chief Secretary on September 19 regarding compliance with the directions but had received no response. The earlier directions called for measures, including synchronised traffic lights, along the stretch.

GST revenue rises to ₹2.03 lakh cr. in Sept.

An analysis of historical Goods and Services Tax data shows that an increasing share of GST revenues have been coming from tax paid on imports rather than GST collected on domestic transactions; share of revenue from domestic transactions has correspondingly fallen to its lowest-ever level

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The Centre's gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue rose to ₹2.03 lakh crore in September 2026, a growth of 14.7% over the last year. However, the data also points to a changing trend of where India is earning its GST revenue from.

An analysis of historical GST data shows the share of revenues from imports has risen to its highest-ever level, while the share of revenue from domestic transactions has correspond-

ingly fallen to its lowest-ever level.

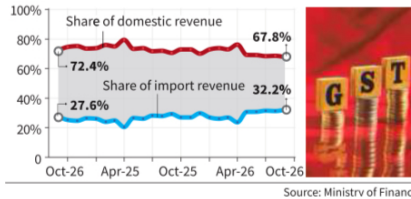
Over the first half of the financial year, spanning the April-September 2026 period, gross GST revenue grew at 11.6%.

"The increased focus on reducing complications and the increasing number of GST audits undertaken this year appear to be yielding results in the form of the gross monthly GST collection once again crossing the Rs 2 lakh crore mark," M.S. Mani, partner at Deloitte India said.

"It is especially remarkable to see the gross GST

Changing composition

A rising share of gross GST revenue is coming from imports



collections growing by 14.7% and the net GST collections growing by 18.1% compared to the same month last year despite

last year being on higher GST rates compared to the current year," he added.

However, within the gross collections, the data

shows that revenue from imports grew by 25.9% in September 2026 while revenue from domestic transactions grew by a relatively slower 10.1%.

While the growth in domestic revenue is among the fastest seen since August 2025, the faster pace of import revenue growth through this period has meant that the composition of the Centre's GST revenues has been changing. That is, revenue from imports in September 2026 saw its share increase to 32.2% of total gross GST revenue, the highest-ever.

Correspondingly, the share of domestic revenues fell to a lowest-ever 67.8%.

"The sharp 25.9% growth in import-linked GST in September, compared with around 10% growth in domestic GST, reflects a combination of currency, commodity prices and import dynamics," Manoj Mishra, Partner and Tax Controversy Management Leader at Grant Thornton Bharat said.

The data also shows that total refunds contracted 3% in September 2026, driven by a contraction in domestic refunds.

Manufacturing PMI touches 7-month high of 55.1 in Sept.

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Manufacturing activity rose to a seven-month high of 55.1 in September, according to a private sector survey. However, activity in the second quarter was the weakest since the COVID-19-impacted Q2 of 2021-22.

That said, September's performance marked a significant recovery as the HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index rose by 2.3 index points from its 52.8 reading in August 2026.

A reading above 50 denotes expansion in activity while one below 50 implies

Stronger demand for electronic, food, pharma products drove a sharper rise in new business

a contraction. "September data showed a recovery in growth momentum across India's manufacturing industry, with faster increases in new orders and output supporting job creation and inventory accumulation," the report said.

"Moreover, business confidence strengthened to a four-month high."

"That said, the average for the second fiscal quar-

ter stood at 53.8, its lowest since the same period in 2021," it added.

Respondents said that stronger demand for electronic, food, pharmaceutical, and textile products drove a sharper increase in new business, with the upturn in total sales the fastest since February 2026.

"New export orders also expanded at a quicker pace, with panel members particularly noting greater demand from clients in Brazil, Europe, the UAE and the U.S," the report said. "This pick-up in demand momentum spurred the sharpest expansion in Indian factory production for four months."

Industry is growing, but isn't creating jobs

INDIA'S FORMAL manufacturing sector continues to chug along at a fairly healthy pace. This is evident across a range of indicators. In 2024-25, the registered manufacturing segment's output grew by 7.8 per cent, employment by 7.2 per cent, and emoluments by 12.08 per cent, according to the Annual Survey of Industries. However, other key indicators also warrant close attention. Wages per worker have grown at a slower pace than net profit, output per worker has remained roughly the same over the years, while invested capital has increased steadily. These developments have had implications for consumption, investment and productivity in the economy.

ASI data shows that total persons engaged in organised manufacturing crossed 2 crore in 2024-25, up from 1.72 crore in 2021-22. But this is only a fraction of the labour force. A substantial share of the labour force is still engaged in the informal economy. In fact, of all non-farm workers in the country, 73.1 per cent are engaged in informal-sector enterprises as per the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2025. The formal sector, both manufacturing and services, simply does not provide enough job opportunities. In 2023-24, while 1.9 crore persons were employed in organised manufacturing, about 3.3 crore were employed in the unorganised segment as per the Economic Survey. Organised manufacturing also continues to be dominated by small firms, whereas, according to the Economic Survey, it's the bigger factories (those employing more than 100 workers) that employ a larger share of workers, pay higher wages and have higher labour productivity.

Successive governments have taken steps to boost the manufacturing sector. But its contribution to GDP and share in employment has barely budged. Manufacturing in India has not emerged as an engine of mass employment, unlike in the development trajectory of Asian economies such as Korea and China. It has not provided avenues for the millions entering the labour force each year, and those wanting to exit the farm sector. And, without such avenues, the low-skilled and unskilled simply have no alternative but to either remain on the farm or engage in gig work. Therein remains India's employment challenge.

President, PM hail pilot for role in averting flight crisis

Modi says without fearing for his own life, Captain Smit Machchhar fought valiantly and prevented another 9/11-like attack from happening; Murmu lauds his 'incredible presence of mind'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday hailed Captain Smit Machchhar, a flydubai pilot, for his role in averting a disaster involving a Dubai-Tel Aviv flight on Wednesday.

An Indian national, Captain Machchhar was stabbed by his co-pilot in an alleged attempt to crash the plane but managed to activate the release to open the cockpit door, allowing passengers to enter and overpower the co-pilot. Two flydubai pilots who were passengers on the aircraft helped the aircraft make a safe landing in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Modi said that Captain Machchhar had shown the world the highest form of courage. Without fearing for his own life, Captain Machchhar fought valiantly and prevented another 9/11-like attack from happening, he said.



Indian Capt. Smit Machchhar seen in the cockpit of a plane in a photo released by Israel's Foreign Ministry on social media. AP

Mr. Modi said that 140 crore Indians saluted Captain Machchhar, who is now recovering at a hospital, and were praying for his well-being. He made the remarks while addressing the centenary celebrations of the Union Public Service Commission.

President Droupadi Murmu also lauded Captain Machchhar's bravery.

"The nation is proud of Captain Smit Machchhar. His heroic courage and incredible presence of mind

have deeply touched us all. Even after being seriously injured in a moment of grave peril, he remained determined to protect the lives of others. His bravery and quick response helped prevent a major tragedy and saved many precious lives. I salute his indomitable spirit. I pray for his speedy recovery and good health," she posted on X.

While addressing the UPSC event, Mr. Modi cautioned that future civil servants would have to navi-

gate entirely new battlegrounds such as information warfare, deep-fakes, algorithmic bias, and climate justice. He instructed recruitment agencies to adapt to these global shifts by prioritising candidates' foresight and complex problem-solving abilities. "In such a scenario, in the selection process, we will also have to give priority to testing complex problem-solving and foresight," he said.

Urgent reforms needed
Highlighting the urgency of administrative overhauls, Mr. Modi insisted that examination agencies must rapidly align with the nation's broader reform momentum by adopting the principle of 'Time Certainty' to shorten exam cycles without lowering standards. He emphasised that prolonged examinations inflicted severe financial burdens, such as coaching fees, rent, and transport, on families. "This will also be an equity reform," he added.

With pride and prayers, Machchhar's acquaintances await news of his recovery

Yohaann Ashish Varghese
MUMBAI

Pride over Captain Smit Machchhar's bravery aboard flydubai flight FZ1073 was tempered by an anxious wait for news of his recovery on Thursday, as childhood friends, neighbours and residents in Mumbai's Tilak Nagar, Chembur West, prayed for his safe return home.

Mr. Machchhar was hailed for his role in helping passengers and crew manage a safe landing.

The pilot was seriously injured during an attack inside the cockpit of the Dubai-Tel Aviv flight on Wednesday. Despite his injuries, he managed to unlock the cockpit door, allowing others on board to intervene.

The aircraft, carrying 174 passengers, was subsequently landed safely at Tabuk in Saudi Arabia. Machchhar underwent surgery before being shifted to Dubai for further treatment.

"It's a proud moment for all of us as Mumbaikars, as people living in the same society, and as fellow



Artist Manas Kumar Sahoo pays tribute to Smit Machchhar's bravery with a sand painting in Puri on Thursday. ANI

Indians," said Yuhan Merchant, Machchhar's neighbour. "At the same time, we are very concerned about his well-being. We just hope that he is fine."

Mr. Merchant, who has known Machchhar and his family, described him as "tremendously dedicated" to aviation. "We just hope that he continues doing what he does best, and that's falling in love with the aviation sector," he said.

For Chintan, a childhood friend of Machchhar, the courage being spoken about across the world was not entirely unfamiliar. "I knew he was a very brave and large-hearted person, and today the whole world

knows it," he said.

Neighbour Shifali Parekh said Mr. Machchhar's response showed considerable mental strength.

"Imagine getting stabbed, then thinking about the flight going down, and then opening the door," Ms. Parekh said.

BJP MLA Parag Shah said the connection was particularly personal for him as Machchhar was not only from his constituency but had also attended the same school as him.

According to Mr. Shah, Mr. Machchhar was stable following surgery and his family was receiving assistance from flydubai and Indian, Saudi and UAE authorities.

ISRAEL PM SAYS OMANI CO-PILOT UNDERWENT ISLAMIST INDOCTRINATION; SAUDI SAYS SUSPECT HANDED OVER TO UAE

Trump talks of Iran link, Netanyahu says flydubai co-pilot was radicalised

Reuters
Washington, October 1

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said Iran may be linked to the flydubai co-pilot who tried to crash an Israel-bound plane.

The President was asked Thursday by reporters at the White House whether he had been briefed about any links between the pilot behind attack and Tehran. He said, "We're working on it right now... I would say the answer, based on what I'm hearing, is yes, but we're working on it right now," Trump said. He did not offer details. Asked if the US would retaliate against Tehran if it was behind attack, Trump said, "Oh they'll be hit, very hard, don't worry."

In a late development, Saudi Arabia said suspect in flydubai plane attack has been handed over to the UAE.

The co-pilot had undergone radical Islamist indoctrination and was clearly suicidal, Israel's Prime Minister said on Thursday. Disaster was averted on Wednesday's flydubai flight FZ1073 from Dubai to Tel Aviv after the wounded captain, Smit Machchhar, managed to unlock the cockpit door, allowing passengers to subdue the attacker. A reserve crew that had been aboard landed the plane, which had over 170 people on board, at Tabuk airport in Saudi Arabia.

"We know that he underwent Islamist radical indoctrina-

tion. That appears to be something we are gathering from his personal information," Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu said in an interview with Fox News.

Two Israeli security officials said Israel's initial assessment was that the co-pilot, identified by Israel as an Omani national, was likely acting alone, though the probe was still ongoing.

Netanyahu said it was clear that the co-pilot was suicidal. "It looks very likely that he was going to down the plane," Netanyahu said. Coupled with "the Islamist tendencies, that radicalization that are found in his background, I think that's... a pretty good clue," he said.

The United Arab Emirates has started investigations seeking to establish the circumstances and motives and determine "whether the incident was linked to any terrorist activity or purpose, or involved prior planning or direction," the UAE state news agency reported Thursday.

An Israeli official said Tel Aviv was not receiving all the information it sought from the Saudis and the Israeli intelligence services, Mossad and Shin Bet, were probing the incident.

The Saudi government's media office did not respond to a request for comment, and Saudi Arabia has issued no statements on its investigations. Omani authorities have not commented.

—WITH AP INPUTS



Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu meets Yaniv Hayun, a passenger on the flydubai flight, at the Ben Gurion Airport on Thursday. Hayun said he pulled the assailant out and stabilised the plane. Asked how he knew what to do, he said, "I watch *Air Crash Investigation*, Mr Prime Minister." REUTERS

Why co-pilot attacked captain remains a mystery, investigators search for motive

Jerusalem: Investigators worked Thursday to determine why the Omani pilot stabbed the captain of a flight to Israel, causing the plane to plummet before others aboard landed it in Saudi Arabia.

"We felt helpless, suspended in midair, and I didn't know who to turn to. But it was all instinct to survive," Asaf Rajuan, who was among those who intervened, said. A regional official said the suspect, an Omani citizen, was under arrest and confirmed that Saudi authorities

were working with countries, including Israel, to try to determine a motive.

He said the UAE, the US and Oman also were involved. "All possible scenarios, from terrorism to mental disorders, are being looked into. Nothing is ruled out for now," said official.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a TV channel the suspect apparently got through a loophole in Israeli aviation rules that normally bar pilots from flying to Israel if they

are from countries that do not have diplomatic relations with Israel—which Oman does not.

The co-pilot has not been publicly identified. Video shot inside the plane by Dr Shota Musayev, a dentist who treated Captain Smit Machchhar, shows the co-pilot on his knees, with his hands tied behind his back.

It was not clear what the co-pilot used as a weapon. Israeli intelligence officials were in Saudi Arabia to help probe the copilot, another regional official said. AP

• Crew Crimes

March 21, 2022: An off-duty Alaska Airlines pilot tried to cut the engines of a Horizon Air jet flying from Everett, Washington, to San Francisco while riding in an extra cockpit seat. The plane was diverted to Portland with over 80 aboard. Joseph Emerson told police he was despondent over a friend's recent death.

March 24, 2015: A China Eastern Airlines flight from Kunming to Guangzhou crashed into a mountain, killing all 132 people aboard. Data released by US investigators suggested the jet's engines were deliberately shut off and there was a cockpit struggle.

February 17, 2014: The co-pilot of a Germanwings jet locked the captain out of cockpit and crashed the jet into the French Alps, killing all 150 people aboard.

December 19, 1997: An EgyptAir flight from Los Angeles to Cairo plunged into the Atlantic Ocean, killing all 217 people aboard. The co-pilot, Gameel Al-Batouti, set the plane on course to crash while the captain was in the bathroom.

August 21, 1994: A Silk Air flight from Jakarta to Singapore crashed near Palembang, Indonesia, killing all 104 people aboard. The pilot, Tsu Way Ming, "was in the process of, or intending to, leave the cockpit" before the cockpit voice recorder cut out.

AP

Pakistan says it killed 22 militants in 'precise' strikes in Afghanistan

Information Ministry says forces carried out 'well-planned and calibrated aerial strikes' targeting Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan hideouts, destroying large quantities of weapons and ammunition; Taliban regime says the strikes killed 9 Afghan civilians

Press Trust of India

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Thursday said it killed at least 22 militants in air strikes in Afghanistan as part of a campaign to eliminate their hideouts across the border.

Afghanistan's Taliban regime, meanwhile, said that Pakistani strikes killed nine Afghan civilians, including women and children, and injured 11 others.

This comes amid a sharp escalation in already strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the two sides trading allegations over militant sanctuaries, cross-border attacks, air strikes and bor-



Afghan men inspect the wreckage of a car at the site of an air strike in Helmand province in southwestern Afghanistan on Thursday. AP

der incursions.

Pakistan's Information Ministry, in a statement, said that the country's security forces conducted "well-planned and calibrated aerial strikes"

against the hideouts and safe havens of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), killing multiple militants.

It said that "selective targeting" of terrorist camps

and hideouts at two locations in Afghanistan was carried out based on credible intelligence with "precision and accuracy".

"Targets were destroyed with precision and initial reports suggest killing of twenty-two terrorists," it said. The statement added that large quantities of weapons and ammunition stored at these hideouts were also destroyed.

The Ministry said Pakistan has always strived for the maintenance of peace and stability in the region. However, "the safety and security of our citizens remains our foremost priority".

Meanwhile, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mu-

jahid condemned the attack, calling it an act of "aggression and crime in violation of all accepted principles".

Separately, Pakistan's Army accused Kandahar's Governor, Mullah Shireen, of hosting senior figures from groups with different ideological objectives for talks on escalating attacks inside Pakistan.

Army spokesperson Lt. Gen. Ahmad Sharif said the meeting took place on August 26 in Kandahar.

Mr. Sharif said those represented included the outlawed Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), and the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group.

Iraq PM Zaidi sets deadline for Shia militias to disarm

Agence France-Presse

BAGHDAD

Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi on Thursday announced June 30 as a new deadline for armed factions to turn over their weapons to the state, following the end of the U.S.-led coalition's mission in the country.

"October 1 is considered a serious beginning to address the issue of weapons outside state control... according to a clear roadmap and agreed timelines extending no later than June 30, 2027," Mr. Zaidi said in a statement, having backed away from an original September 30 deadline.

The Iraqi government believes the withdrawal of coalition forces will deprive the armed factions, many of which are backed by Iran, of the excuse they



Ali al-Zaidi

have used to retain their arsenal.

But many fear the pull-out might boost the factions instead, and draw the country deeper into the West Asia war.

"Based on the constitutional principle, the decision of war and peace should be left to the constitutional authorities, banning all military action to the contrary," Mr. Zaidi said on Thursday.

Iran's Revolutionary

Guards welcomed on Thursday the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq as a "historic victory" and called for American troops to leave West Asia.

The Guards "congratulate the proud nation of Iraq, the united front of the Islamic Resistance, and the revolutionary fighters of the Islamic world on this historic victory," it said.

Mr. Zaidi had originally set September 30 as the deadline for factions to disarm, but later withdrew it as talks to "regulate" weapons continued.

While some factions have already handed over their weapons to the state, others have refused to disarm. Iraqi armed factions backed by Tehran said that they were "not bound by any timeline or agreement" to surrender their weapons to the state.

Pentagon creates new 'Autowar' command to expand AI, drone use

Reuters

Washington, October 1

US DEFENCE Secretary Pete Hegseth Wednesday announced creation of a new military command that would be dedicated to building and providing autonomous and robotic capabilities across US military.

The command, which Hegseth said would be called "Autonomous Warfare Command," highlights the rapidly changing nature of warfare and the need to make progress on systems like drones and the use of artificial intelligence.

Creating a new command is not common — the last one was US Space Command in 2019 — and the move reflects the Pentagon's push to shift from costly conventional weapons platforms to cheaper, AI-driven autonomous systems that have

proved decisive in recent conflicts. Speaking in front of hundreds of junior officers and enlisted personnel at Quantico, Virginia, in a speech peppered with attacks on the media, Hegseth said the command would be led by a four-star officer.

"The pace of war is changing faster than the process to support it," Hegseth said in a speech called the "State of the Force," in which he announced other changes, including the creation of the office of religious affairs.

"Cheap compute, superintelligence, and advanced commercial manufacturing have enabled the proliferation of low-cost, high-precision strike," Hegseth added.

The US military currently has 11 combatant commands, which are responsible for different parts of the world and specific tasks.