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Vol. 1 • No. 18 • Saturday, October 31, 2026 • New Delhi, India • 4 Pages

TOP STORY • SPAIN

Spain Mourns After a High-Speed Train Hits a Stalled Train Near Madrid

At least 68 people died on 28 October; a signalling computer failure is at the centre of the investigation.

Written and fact-checked by AI · News Pebbles

A Renfe high-speed train ran into the back of a stalled Iryo train near Urda, south of Madrid, at about 8:53 am on Wednesday 28 October. Both were travelling from Madrid to Seville, carrying 397 and 147 passengers. At least 68 people died and about 80 were injured, according to Al Jazeera's account. It is the deadliest European rail accident since the 2013 Santiago de Compostela derailment, which killed 80.

To see how two trains ended up on the same track, start a little earlier in the morning. At about 8:30 am a computer failure disabled LZB, the main automatic signalling system, and about six trains on a 63 km stretch stopped automatically. At 8:36 am controllers cleared the Renfe train to resume normal speed. Transport Minister Oscar Puente called that order 'inexplicable'.

When LZB fails, trains may move at no more than 40 km/h. The system dates from the line's opening in 1992, and this is Spain's only high-speed route still using it. A contract to replace it was won in 2021 and is still underway.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez declared three days of national mourning starting Thursday. Adif suspended high-speed services between Madrid and Andalusia, and Renfe suspended ticket sales on the corridor until 13 December. The Civil Guard has sent a disaster investigation team. It is Spain's second deadly high-speed crash of 2026, after Adamuz on 18 January, which killed 46.



Both trains were travelling from Madrid to Seville.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The inquiry will test both the 1992 technology and the control centre's decision.

WORLD • DR CONGO

Ebola Cases in DR Congo Pass 10,000 as the First Vaccine Trial Begins

Government data show 10,060 confirmed cases and 4,887 deaths; no vaccine or treatment is approved for this strain.

Far from Europe's rail tracks, a slower emergency is growing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Government data on 27 October showed 10,060 confirmed Ebola cases and 4,887 deaths, according to Al Jazeera, and this is the fastest-growing outbreak in the country's history.

Size puts it in a small, grim group. Globally it is the second-largest Ebola outbreak on record; only the 2014-2016 West African epidemic, which infected 28,600 people, was larger. The outbreak was declared on 15 May and is caused by the Bundibugyo strain, a type of the virus with its own genetic make-up, and no vaccine or treatment for that strain has been approved.

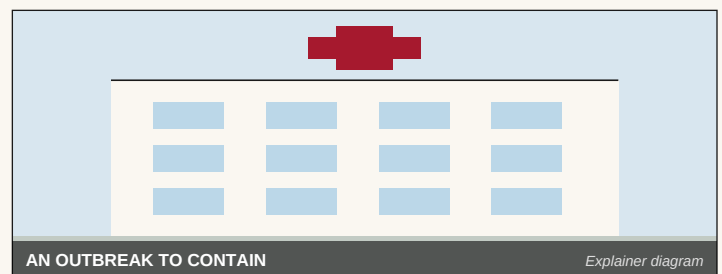
The outbreak was declared on 15 May, and the 27 October figures of 10,060 confirmed cases and 4,887 deaths come from government data. Kenya's nine confirmed cases are few beside the DRC's, yet they show the disease has crossed borders.

That gap explains why a recent announcement mattered. On 23 October the World Health Organization (WHO) said the first clinical trial of a vaccine against this strain had started in the DRC. A clinical trial tests a medicine or vaccine on people to find out whether it is safe and works, so the trial is a first step, not a finished answer.

Meanwhile, the way the disease is moving worries health officials. About 80% of new cases come from outside known chains of transmission, meaning they cannot be linked to earlier patients. Africa CDC says at least 95% must come from known contacts before the outbreak is under control, so the gap between 80% and 95% shows how far the response still has to go.

The geography is widening too. Cases are in 66 health zones across eight provinces of the DRC, and the disease has spread to Uganda, Kenya, which has nine confirmed cases, and Nigeria.

For now the DRC's 10,060 cases sit well below the 28,600 infections of the West African epidemic.



CONNECT THE DOTS

The West African epidemic of 2014-2016, with 28,600 infections, is the only larger Ebola outbreak on record, so it is the yardstick for judging how large and how fast this one has grown.

INDIA • ANDHRA PRADESH

Arnab Weakens After Landfall at Yanam, but Andhra Counts Rs 4,600 Crore in Losses

Chief Minister Naidu says at least seven people died; evacuations began before the storm and floods hit southern Odisha.

Three deaths were the first number out of Andhra Pradesh. By the time Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu spoke, it had risen: he said at least seven people were killed, against an early NDRF count of three that Khaleej Times had reported. He also put the preliminary loss from Cyclone Arnab at Rs 4,600 crore and warned that it could rise after a detailed assessment.

The storm itself arrived on Wednesday 28 October, crossing the coast near Yanam. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) rated it a 'very severe cyclonic storm' at landfall, the moment a storm's centre crosses the coast, with core winds of 125-135 km/h and gusts of up to 150 km/h. Through the afternoon it weakened into a 'deep depression'.

Rain added to the damage. Kannuripalem, in Anakapalli district, recorded the heaviest fall at 261.5 mm. Konaseema and West Godavari were the hardest hit: crops on about 70,900 hectares, mainly paddy, were reported damaged, around 8,000 electricity poles fell in Konaseema alone, and power was cut in nearly 400 villages.

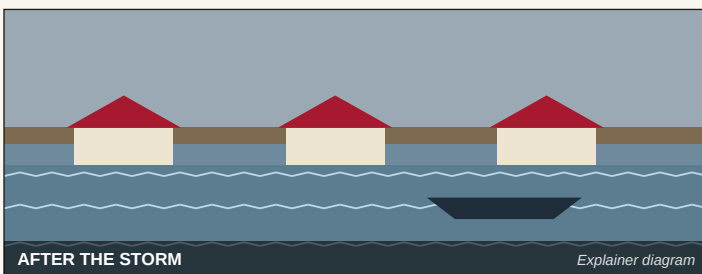
Preparation came first. Authorities told about 50,000 people in Andhra Pradesh and about 48,000 in Odisha to move to safer areas, and at least 609 Andhra schools became rehabilitation centres. Sadiq, a Kakinada resident, said early warnings from the authorities helped people prepare, and many locked their homes and left for safer places.

Two states, two kinds of emergency. In Andhra Pradesh the main figures were the Rs 4,600 crore loss, the damaged crops and the fallen poles. In Odisha the figures were people moved: about 48,000 told to leave before the storm, and later over 100,000 evacuated in the south as floods spread, which suggests how quickly conditions changed there.

Odisha's trouble was flooding. Down To Earth reports that over 100,000 people were evacuated in southern Odisha, among them 2,200 pregnant women. On 29 October the state sent over 300 disaster response teams into Ganjam and eight other flood-hit districts.

Recovery has begun. Families who leave the relief camps in Andhra receive 25 kg of rice and cash. Teams from the Union government were due in the state on 30 October to assess the damage, and their findings, together with the detailed assessment Naidu mentioned, will show whether the Rs 4,600 crore figure holds.

Seen together, the numbers give the story its shape: winds of 125-135 km/h at landfall, 261.5 mm of rain at the wettest spot, at least seven deaths and a loss estimate of Rs 4,600 crore.



Landfall near Yanam on 28 October; floods followed in southern Odisha.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Early warnings and the evacuation of tens of thousands of people before landfall helped limit the harm, while the Rs 4,600 crore estimate shows what the storm still cost in homes, crops and power.

POLITICS & CIVICS • ISRAEL

Israel's Voters Split 53-48-19, Leaving Both Rival Blocs Short of a Government

Final results leave Netanyahu's bloc and Eisenkot's bloc below the 61 seats of the 120-seat Knesset that a majority needs.

Israelis voted on 27 October to fill the 120 seats of the Knesset, their parliament, and a government must command at least 61 of them. Final results, published by the Central Elections Committee early on 30 October, show that nobody did. Benjamin Netanyahu's bloc, a group of allied parties, won 53 seats and the opposition bloc led by Gadi Eisenkot of the Yashar party, the party he leads, won 48. The United Arab List (Ra'am) and the Joint List, Arab-led parties, together won 19, and turnout was 77.9%.

Put side by side, the three figures cover all 120 seats, so each bloc is short of 61 and the 19 Arab-party seats are the only ones outside the two blocs. That is why the result is a deadlock rather than a narrow loss for either side. Among the votes counted last were at least 500,000 'double envelope' votes from soldiers and diplomats, counted on 29 October. The inner envelope keeps the ballot anonymous and the outer one lets officials verify the voter.

The arithmetic shows how stuck both leaders are. Netanyahu's 53 seats leave him 8 short of 61, and Eisenkot's 48 leave him 13 short. The 19 Arab-party seats would lift either bloc past 61 on paper, but both leaders have set their positions against that route.

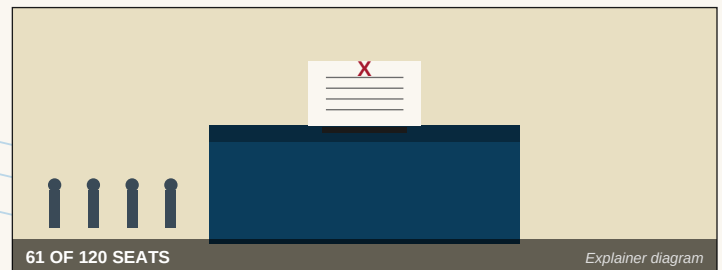
What happens next is set by a sequence of deadlines. President Isaac Herzog first picks the candidate he judges most likely to form a government. That candidate has about 28 days, which can be extended. If the attempt fails, Herzog can pick another with the same type of window.

Each stage has a clock. The first candidate has about 28 days, which can be extended; a second candidate gets the same type of window; and only then does the 21-day route for 61 Knesset members open.

A second failure opens a different route. A 21-day period begins in which 61 Knesset members can ask Herzog to give the task to a Knesset member. If every step fails, Israelis return to the polls for a second election.

Politics may close routes before the clock does. Netanyahu has ruled out a government with the Arab parties, posting on X that it is 'forbidden', and his Likud party accused them of 'stealing' the election. Eisenkot says he would partner only with parties that recognise Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, endorse the values of the Declaration of Independence and commit to national service. Each leader has therefore set conditions before any talks have begun.

Analysts are blunt. Roi Zur of Essex University says 'the numbers don't add up for any side'. Until a candidate finds 61, Israel faces weeks of coalition talks, the bargaining that builds a governing alliance, and possibly another election.



No bloc reached the 61 seats a majority needs.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A parliamentary system turns votes into seats and seats into a government, and this result shows what happens when the seats do not add up to a majority, and why deadlines exist to force a decision.

ECONOMY • OIL

Gulf Oil Is Flowing Again, So Why Is Brent Above \$110?

Brent briefly topped \$117 a barrel on 30 October; detours around the Strait of Hormuz are lifting costs.

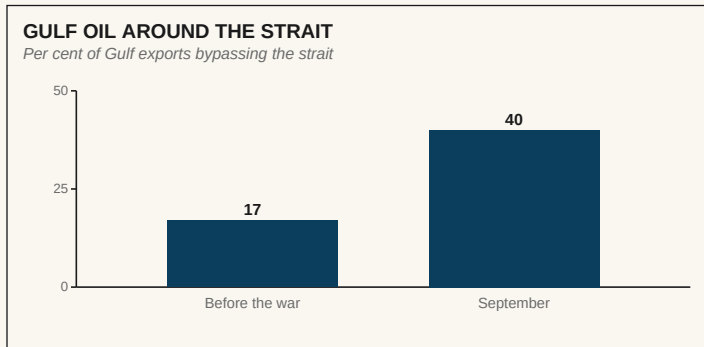
A barrel of Brent crude briefly cost more than \$117 on Friday 30 October, based on December-delivery futures, a contract to buy oil at a set date. That is the highest since April and more than 60% above where it stood before the war, Al Jazeera reports.

Yet supply is not the simple culprit. The data firm Kpler says Gulf crude exports averaged 24.6 million barrels a day in the week to 18 October, above the average before the war. The International Energy Agency (IEA), however, puts September OPEC Gulf output at 15.8 million barrels a day, 75% of its pre-war baseline.

Ships and pipelines explain how exports recovered. Normally about one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes through the Strait of Hormuz. Now shuttle boats carry oil through it and hand it to tankers outside the danger zone, off Oman and the UAE; over 70% of crude crossing the strait went this way in August, per Kpler. Pipelines add routes: Saudi Arabia's East-West line to the Red Sea port of Yanbu and the UAE's Habshan-Fujairah line. In September 40% of Gulf exports bypassed the strait, up from 17% before the war.

Each detour adds a cost. LSEG data put freight at about \$40 a barrel in recent weeks, roughly ten times the usual rate, as insurance and logistics climb. The risk is real: UKMTO had logged 32 incidents involving commercial vessels in October by Friday, the deadliest month since the war began.

Reserves are thinner too. The IEA says observed global inventories fell by 10 million barrels in September and are 509 million barrels below pre-war levels. October 2027 Brent futures were above \$90 on Friday, a sign traders expect high prices to last. Analyst Isabel Figuerola-Ferretti says \$70 would need lasting de-escalation, normal Hormuz shipping, rebuilt inventories and normal freight costs.



Share of Gulf exports that bypassed the Strait of Hormuz. Source: Al Jazeera.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Oil sets the price of fuel, shipping and many goods, so a squeezed strait raises costs for families far away.

THINK LIKE AN ANALYST

Why can exports rise while the price also rises? Who pays for the \$40-a-barrel freight cost, and who gains? What would you need to see before expecting \$70 oil?

SCIENCE & TECH • SPACE

NASA's Swift Space Telescope Ends Its Mission After 21 Years

The observatory made its final observation on 20 October and will re-enter Earth's atmosphere within a few weeks.

NASA's Neil Gehrels Swift Observatory has stopped working after more than 21 years. It launched on 20 November 2004 with a two-year primary mission, yet operated for more than 10 times that long, and it made its final observation on 20 October 2026. Science operations have ended. NASA's own headline says the mission leaves behind a 'scientific bonanza', a rich store of results.

Swift was built to study gamma-ray bursts, which NASA calls the most powerful explosions in the cosmos. It observed more than 2,000 of them and studied more than 1,400 supernova explosions. Its data contributed to about 7,000 published papers.

The scale of the record is easy to miss. Swift launched on 20 November 2004 and made its last observation on 20 October 2026, so it worked for more than 21 years against a plan of two. In that time it observed more than 2,000 gamma-ray bursts and studied more than 1,400 supernova explosions, and about 7,000 papers have used its data.

The key design feature was speed. Swift could turn its telescopes to a burst's location in about a minute after detecting it. For a mission built to chase explosions, that response time was the heart of the design.

One early catch shaped a theory. In May 2005 Swift saw the first afterglow of a short burst, GRB 050509B, which lasted only 0.03 seconds. The observations supported theories that short bursts come from mergers of two neutron stars.

The end came from orbit. Swift now circles below 275 km, about 171 miles, where stronger atmospheric drag keeps its telescopes from holding steady. It made its final observation on 20 October 2026, and NASA expects it to re-enter Earth's atmosphere within a few weeks.

Its legacy is data. The public archive holds nearly 22 years of measurements and more than 1.5 million ultraviolet and optical images, about 12 terabytes in all. In 2018 NASA renamed the mission to honour Neil Gehrels, its first principal investigator, and because the archive is public, researchers can keep using its observations for years.

Seen together, the figures describe an unusually productive machine: a two-year design, more than 10 times that in service, a response of about a minute, and an archive of 12 terabytes that anyone can open. NASA's headline calls it a 'scientific bonanza' because the results keep accumulating even though the observations have stopped.



Swift launched on 20 November 2004 and observed for the last time on 20 October 2026.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Swift's public archive means its record of bursts and supernovae stays available long after the telescope itself is gone.

ONE-LINE BRIEFS

- Brazil: Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva won the 25 October runoff against Flavio Bolsonaro with about 51.75% of the vote at 98.76% counted, and Bolsonaro has not conceded.
- United Kingdom: Chancellor John Healey's first Budget on 28 October doubles the surcharge on bank profits to 6% for 15 months from January and sends a one-off 100-pound payment to 20 million households.
- Cryptocurrency: Binance said on 29 October that a breach affected an estimated \$6.3 billion in assets and that it had recovered or frozen about \$3 billion.
- Climate: the COP31 summit runs from 9 to 20 November in Antalya, Turkey, with Australia's Chris Bowen presiding over negotiations.

VOCABULARY BUILDER

Words that unlock today's news

Signalling

The system of lights, signs and electronic messages that tells train drivers whether the track ahead is clear. Today: LZB is the automatic signalling system on the Madrid-Seville line, and a computer failure disabled it.

Strain

A variant of a virus with its own genetic make-up. Today: the DRC outbreak is caused by the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola, for which no vaccine or treatment is approved.

Bloc

A group of parties or countries that act together. Today: Netanyahu's bloc won 53 seats and Eisenkot's bloc 48, short of the 61 a majority needs.

Gamma-ray burst

A short, extremely powerful flash of high-energy light from a distant explosion. Today: NASA's Swift observed more than 2,000 of them during its mission.

DID YOU KNOW?

Swift was designed for a two-year primary mission, but it kept working for more than 10 times that long, making its final observation on 20 October 2026.

EXPLAINER

Why a signal failure matters on a high-speed line

Signalling tells each driver whether the track ahead is clear. On a high-speed line such as Madrid-Seville, LZB is the main automatic signalling system, and it dates from the line's opening in 1992. It is Spain's only high-speed route still using it, and a contract to replace it was won in 2021 and is still underway.

In the Spanish case, when a computer failure disabled LZB at about 8:30 am, about six trains on a 63 km stretch stopped automatically. When LZB fails, trains may move at no more than 40 km/h, yet at 8:36 am controllers cleared the Renfe train to resume normal speed. Transport Minister Oscar Puente called that order 'inexplicable'. The Civil Guard's investigation will examine the decision, and the age of a system dating from 1992.

QUIZ

Eight questions on this issue

1. What is the main automatic signalling system on the Madrid-Seville line called?
(a) LZB (b) IEA (c) WHO
 2. What is the speed limit when LZB fails?
(a) 40 km/h (b) 140 km/h (c) 400 km/h
 3. How many confirmed Ebola cases did DRC data show on 27 October?
(a) 1,006 (b) 10,060 (c) 100,600
 4. Where did Cyclone Arnab make landfall?
(a) Near Yanam (b) Near Chennai (c) Near Kolkata
 5. How many seats does Netanyahu's bloc hold after the final results?
(a) 53 (b) 48 (c) 61
 6. What share of Gulf exports bypassed the strait in September?
(a) 17% (b) 40% (c) 75%
 7. What did Swift's first short-burst afterglow in 2005 support?
(a) Neutron-star mergers (b) A new planet (c) A new comet
 8. Who put the preliminary Arnab loss at Rs 4,600 crore?
(a) N. Chandrababu Naidu (b) Isaac Herzog (c) Oscar Puente
- Answers:** 1 a, 2 a, 3 b, 4 a, 5 a, 6 b, 7 a, 8 a.

TOMORROW'S WATCHLIST

- What the Civil Guard's disaster investigation finds about the control centre's order in Spain, and whether the Madrid-Andalusia corridor reopens before ticket sales resume on 13 December.
- Whether President Herzog names a candidate to form Israel's government, starting the 28-day window.
- Whether the share of new Ebola cases from known contacts rises towards the 95% Africa CDC says is needed.

You are not just reading the news — you are learning to think about it. See you tomorrow.