

India opens door to digital payment fees

AFP | New Delhi, India

India has opened the door for charging merchant fees for using the vast digital payments system central to its economy, used by nearly 555 million people to transfer trillions of dollars.

Legislation, passed yesterday by the parliament's upper house, paves the way to change

its zero-fee model, with the government saying it could help pay for improving the infrastructure and bolstering cybersecurity.

The government-backed Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is the backbone of how the world's most populous country processes digital payments done through smartphones.

UPI has rapidly grown in scale since its 2016 launch,

with transaction volumes rising fivefold in the past five years -- to 241 billion payments worth about \$3.3 trillion in the last fiscal year, according to finance ministry figures.

The bill by itself does not impose fees -- but provides a legal framework for banks and payment processors to allow charges on UPI transactions by businesses. "It will support

the banks and fintech to invest more on infrastructure, innovation and security," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

Sitharaman told the upper house that the bill "does not impose any tax or transaction charge on UPI users", reassuring that it will only be applied to large merchants for transactions above a certain threshold.

WIDE ANGLE

Homer, Nolan, and the Words in Between



JOEL INDRUPATI

Much debate has been raging online about Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* since its release in July 2026. Its casting, costumes, characters, sets and interpretation are all being argued over. While some laud the writer-director for his magnum opus, others lambast him for taking too much liberty with the epic.

"He's taken his poetic licence too far," say some angry viewers. But that is normal. If Nolan really wanted it to be perfect and true to its source, he should perhaps have made the movie not in English, but in authentic Ancient Greek, in the original dactylic hexameter—the way Homer wrote it. That is the mocking counter-voice.

Some debate its historical accuracy, even mapping out locations that the epic's author might have been referring to. While Ithaca and Troy are real places, we cannot say the same of several other locations in *The Odyssey*.

We know that the story Homer wrote some 2,800 years ago, around 800 BCE, was about happenings roughly 400 years earlier, in the later part of the Bronze Age, around 1200 BCE. So, he may well have created some place-names.

According to The Conversation, a research, news and commentary website, Greek scholars and ancient geographers were already debating where exactly Odysseus had voyaged by 500 BCE. Those writings—showing how ancient communities laid claim to the fabulous places described by Homer—survive even today.

And, of course, *The Odyssey* contains several unreal mythical beings. So, we really cannot call it a true story. It is quite clearly a fantasy of epic proportions. But not real.

Having watched the movie with great attention and interest, and read reviews both for and against it, I first thought I should avoid adding more kilobytes to cyberspace. It is already inundated with enough discussion to have reached saturation point.

But, as an amateur etymologist, which I consider myself to be, I also wish to discuss some English words and idioms that owe their origins, directly or indirectly, to Homer's *The Odyssey*.

The word "mentor" comes from the name of Mentor, a wise man and trusted friend of Odysseus, in whose care he leaves his son Telemachus.

The word "siren" originated from the mythical bird-women called Sirens, who lured sailors with enchanting songs and drew them to destruction.

In English today, "to hector" means to bully or intimidate aggressively. It comes from Hector, the Trojan warrior killed in single combat by the Greek hero Achilles. Hector appears in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

An English idiom for being caught in a no-win situation, between two equal dangers, is "between Scylla and Charybdis." We often say, more simply, "between a rock and a hard place."

Interestingly, "epithet" is also connected to Homer, though in a roundabout way. Homer used phrases such as "wine-dark sea," "rosy-fingered dawn," "swift-footed Achilles" and "gray-eyed Athena." These are called Homeric epithets—descriptive phrases added to a person or thing.

Today, when someone says, "It has been an odyssey," he or she means that, though exciting, it was a long and arduous journey.

James Joyce structured his landmark novel *Ulysses* around the framework of Odysseus's wanderings.

I found it amusing when, in Nolan's movie, King Menelaus looks at Helen and says, "The face that launched a thousand ships—or maybe just 500."

Actually, that famous line is not from Homer. It is from Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1604). Referring to Helen of Troy, it means that a woman can be so beautiful that her looks could start a massive war.

No retelling of an epic can ever be perfect. But if new generations must learn from the old, retelling and reinterpreting it is always good.

(The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Daily Tribune)

Europe risks lacking space launchers by 2030, ESA head says

AFP | Paris, France

Europe will face a shortage of own-built rocket launchers by the end of the decade, the head of the European Space Agency warned, as growing demand to launch new satellites outpaces the region's limited capabilities.

"Europe has a shortage of launchers around the 2030 timeframe," Director General Josef Aschbacher said in an interview with the Financial Times, a frank acknowledgement of the scale of Europe's challenge in catching up with the US and China.

"If we add up all the satellites

that need to be launched from current and planned constellations and missions... we see that there's a peak of launch requirements around 2029, 2030, 2031," he said.

The US and China have launched hundreds of satellites in the past five years and invested billions of dollars into developing defence and space capabilities.

Elon Musk's SpaceX alone launched 170 rockets last year, while Europe launched just eight. Musk has transformed the market with reusable rockets that have cut costs.

Aschbacher said he planned to raise the issue with ESA's

member states to "ensure that we can launch our satellites with European launchers".

Europe's major space programmes all require numerous launches in the coming years. They include the Iris2 secure communications constellation due to begin in 2029, as well as expansions of the Galileo navigation system and the Copernicus Earth observation programme.

In addition, several European countries are planning their own constellations for civil or military uses.

The rising demand

comes as Europe's launch capacity remains limited. Ariane 6, Europe's new heavy-lift rocket, is gradually ramping up production, while the Vega C light-lift launcher only resumed flights at the end of 2024 after a gap of several years.



DROUGHT DRIES MAJOR EUROPEAN RIVERS TO RECORD LOWS

Europe's biggest rivers hit record-low flows this July, driven by historic heat, drought and climate change.

1 RECORD-LOW RIVER FLOW IN JULY

Average flow rates hit record lows on vast stretches of Europe's major rivers.

THAMES 95% of monitored sections at record-low flows

RHINE 85% of monitored sections at record-low flows

DANUBE ~66% of monitored sections at record-low flows

RHONE ~30% of length at record lows

PO (ITALY) ~40% of length at record lows

Data from the European Flood Awareness System (EFAS), based on records since at least 1992.

2 SEVERE DROUGHT ACROSS EUROPE

Rivers have been in the most severe drought for weeks, according to the European Drought Observatory (EDO).

RHINE Severe drought almost continuously since early June from Switzerland to western Germany.

DANUBE Severe drought, especially in Hungary. Low water nearly forced nuclear plant shutdown.

LOIRE (FRANCE) Several hundred kilometres in extreme low flow from mid-June to end of July.

RHONE Extreme drought along a large part of its course from Switzerland to the Mediterranean.

3 CLIMATE EXTREMES BEHIND THE DRYING

Western Europe recorded its warmest early summer on record, fuelling the crisis.

RECORD HEAT Warmest early summer on record in western Europe.

PERSISTENT DROUGHT Prolonged lack of rainfall dries rivers and soils.

DEVASTATING WILDFIRES Widespread fires across Europe, intensified by dry conditions.

CLIMATE CHANGE Scientists link these extremes directly to climate change.

9,000-year-old remains of pregnant woman found in Sweden

AFP | Stockholm, Sweden

The remains of a pregnant Stone Age woman, believed to be some 9,000 years old, and her foetus have been discovered in a cave on a small island in Sweden, an archaeologist said Monday.

Archaeologist Alexander Roosen Sjostrand, an independent researcher



connected to Uppsala University, said the "very unusual" find was made in a cave on a small island off the coast of the Swedish island of Gotland, which he had been excavating since 2023.

Sjostrand and another researcher had now reached the deepest layer of

the cave, which was from the Stone Age.

"We have now found the remains of a young woman who has been buried in one way or another. With a very well-preserved foetus in her womb," the researcher told AFP.

He said that they estimated the remains to be from 7,000 to 10,000 years ago, but most likely 9,000 years ago due to where the remains had been found.

Sjostrand said the remains would be carbon-dated to de-

termine the age.

According to the researcher, the find of a pregnant woman from so long ago indicated that people were living on the island just after it emerged in the Baltic Sea after the last ice age, and it was not just an exploration party.

"It's really exciting because it gives an insight into how exploration was carried out. How people travelled around during the hunter-gatherer time of the Stone Age," Sjostrand said.