

This week in history: June 22-28

This column profiles important historical events which took place during this week, 25 years ago, 50 years ago, 75 years ago and 100 years ago

21 June 2026

25 years ago: Bridge collapse in India kills 59

On June 22, 2001, the Mangalore-Chennai Mail train was carrying passengers over the Kadalundi River when the bridge collapsed, sending three rail cars into the river below and killing 59 people and injuring over 200, about 80 of them severely.

More deaths would have followed if not for the heroic actions of the area's working class population. Organizing a network of rescue parties, local workers, fishermen, and villagers rushed to the scene, risking their lives to pull victims from the water, clearing roads for ambulances, and donating blood.

An official government cover-up began immediately.

Junior railway minister O. Rajgopal speculated that "geological activity" was the disaster's cause and ruled out a judicial inquiry on the grounds that previous studies had been "extremely time-consuming." He further claimed that the 120-year-old bridge, built under British colonial rule, was stable enough that travel and speed restrictions were unnecessary. But in contradiction to this account, General Manager of Railways Gopal Krishnan blamed the bridge collapse on the train's speed of 60-70 km/h, implicating the train driver for the catastrophe.

For decades Indian authorities and rail officials had denied funding and upgrades to the nation's rail system, even as government reports identified large numbers of deteriorating rail bridges. A 1999 Railway Safety Review Committee had found at least 262 "distressed" rail bridges in need of urgent repair and warned that a comprehensive safety plan for the system was lacking. Another oversight body urged that 150 billion rupees be allocated to modernize the rail network and phase out obsolete infrastructure, but successive governments refused to act.

Earlier studies had already flagged the Kadalundi bridge itself as unsafe. A 1989 Bridge Rehabilitation Committee recommended that the structure be scrapped entirely, rather than patched. When the question of repairs arose, engineers estimated that properly rehabilitating the collapsed bridge would require 113 million rupees in public expenditure. Officials set aside a mere 100,000 rupees—less than 0.1 percent of the required sum

50 years ago: Major strikes rock Poland after Stalinists impose price hikes

On the evening of June 24, 1976, Polish Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz appeared on national television to announce a draconian economic shock program. Facing a mounting debt crisis, the Stalinist

regime declared massive price hikes on basic consumer goods. Overnight, the cost of meat rose by 70 percent, butter by 33 percent, and sugar by 100 percent. The money, to be collected from Polish workers, was owed to the imperialist powers: the Communist Party in Poland (Polish United Workers' Party, PZRP) was now acting as the enforcer of austerity demanded by West German, British, French and American banks.

The Polish working class erupted in response. By the morning of June 25, wildcat strikes had broken out across more than 100 industrial plants. Approximately 80,000 workers walked off the job, bypassing the official state-controlled trade unions entirely.

At the Ursus tractor factory outside Warsaw, nearly 90 percent of the workforce joined the walkout. Striking workers marched to the international railway line linking Warsaw to Paris and Moscow, physically dismantling the tracks and halting the international express train. In Radom, over 20,000 workers from the Walter metal plant and nearby factories marched on the regional party headquarters. Discovering that Stalinist officials had hoarded luxury food inside, the crowd ransacked and set fire to the building. Street battles erupted as workers fought off the heavily armed ZOMO riot police with paving stones and barricades.

Terrified that the uprising would spread, at 8:00 p.m. on June 25—less than 24 hours after the initial announcement—the government returned to television and rescinded the entire package of price increases. But the bureaucracy's tactical retreat was not a working-class victory. Once order was restored, the Stalinist regime, led by PZRP First Secretary Edward Gierek, unleashed the full weight of the repressive state apparatus. Over a thousand workers were fired and blacklisted from their factory jobs. Hundreds more were arrested and beaten by the police.

The June 1976 strikes vindicated the analysis of the Trotskyist movement, that the Eastern European working class was objectively moving toward a revolutionary confrontation with the Stalinist regimes. But without a socialist and internationalist leadership, the bureaucracy would give way to the restoration of capitalism.

Workers had forced the Stalinist bureaucracy to retreat within 24 hours, yet no revolutionary leadership existed to develop the strike into the conquest of political power. In this vacuum the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR) was founded in September 1976 by dissident intellectuals Jacek Kuron, Adam Michnik and others. KOR treated the Stalinist bureaucracy not as a parasitic caste to be overthrown through political revolution, but as a party that could be reformed or replaced through social protests. They never broke with the Stalinist-nationalist framework of "socialism in one country" and ultimately acted as a barrier against an independent seizure of power by the working class.

75 years ago: Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh appeals to US government amid deepening oil crisis

On June 28, 1951, Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh wrote a letter to US President Harry S. Truman, attempting to foster an alliance with America amid the escalating tensions between Iran and Britain.

The letter was written nearly two months after the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) was formally nationalized by the Iranian parliament. The company, previously owned by the UK, had been for decades a principal source of overseas profit for British imperialism.

Mossadegh's letter sought to reassure the Truman administration that the Iranian government was doing everything in its power to continue the flow of oil. The material interest in doing so was bound up with a \$25 million loan from the US Export-Import Bank that was approved in January, yet was dependent on uninterrupted oil revenues.

The sum—equivalent to almost \$250 million in today's currency—was seen by Iran as necessary to stave off economic collapse in the country. Since nationalization, Iran demanded that oil tankers direct payments to the Iranian Oil Company—rather than the AIOC—by signing receipts that named the former as the owners of the oil. Yet the refusal of British captains to do so brought petroleum exports from Iran to a halt.

This action was bound up with British imperialism's attempt to reverse the loss of its control of Iranian oil. The UK government warned Iran of "very serious and far-reaching consequences." The same day Mossadegh wrote his letter to Truman, Britain had withdrawn 130 of its employees from the city of Abadan, further hindering oil production and transport.

This was accompanied by direct military threat. The British cruiser H.M.S Mauritius was deployed off Iran's coast, with fighter jets and paratroopers standing by, in a threat of invasion.

It was under this pressure from British imperialism that Mossadegh appealed to Washington for financial and political support. Mossadegh concluded his letter to Truman with apparent confidence that the US "will not hesitate to support us in achieving our national ideal."

Publicly, Truman postured as sympathetic to the cause of Iranian nationalism. But the real position of US imperialism was articulated by Secretary of State Dean Acheson a day earlier, when he publicly blamed Iran for creating an "atmosphere of threat and fear."

Mossadegh's bourgeois-nationalist outlook found its fullest expression in his response to the British threat. Rather than mobilize the working class and rural poor as an independent force—the only basis on which imperialism could be consistently fought—he sought protection from a rival imperialist power, the US. The 1953 CIA-MI6 coup that ousted Mossadegh succeeded in part because the Iranian working class had been politically disarmed by this outlook.

100 years: Coup attempt in Spain

On June 24, 1926, ranking officers in the Spanish military attempted to overthrow the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera, who had seized power in 1923. The event is also known as La Sanjuanada since it was scheduled to take place on the evening of the traditional feast day of San Juan.

General Francisco Aguilera, one of the two most senior generals in the Spanish Army, was the operational leader of the plot and the man who would head the provisional government if the coup succeeded.

The participation of General Valeriano Weyler, the most senior general in the army, lent prestige to the plot. Rumor had it he was quietly encouraged by the Queen Mother, María Cristina, who feared Primo de Rivera was ruining the reputation of her son, King Alfonso XIII.

Also central to the coup were Colonel Segundo García, who was the primary military coordinator and operational liaison for the rebels, and Melquíades Álvarez, a prominent liberal politician, who was waiting in the wings to form a civilian constitutional government the moment the military forced Primo de Rivera out.

General Aguilera arrived in Valencia on June 23 to lead the local garrison. However, he found the local forces hesitant and heavily reduced. Before they could seize the Captaincy General, key local leader Lieutenant Colonel Bermúdez de Castro was arrested, neutralizing the local rebellion before it started.

In Madrid, on the night of San Juan, a manifesto demanding the return of constitutional rights was read in a "euphoric" atmosphere at the Ateneo de Madrid, a cultural and political club. However, Primo de Rivera's police forces easily controlled the streets and arrested a group of engineering students trying to rebel.

Primo de Rivera had come to power as a Bonapartist figure to quell the escalating social tensions in Spain at a time when there was mass popular opposition to the military intervention in Morocco. From 1918-1921 Spain had passed through the Trienio Bolchevique, a period of intense peasant uprisings and strikes inspired by the Russian Revolution, and the Pistorismo from 1919 to 1923, a period of bitter street fights between anarchist unions and gunmen hired by the employers.

While La Sanjuanada failed, it proved that Primo de Rivera did not have the unconditional support of the army. It opened the floodgates for future conspiracies (like another major coup attempt in 1929) that eventually forced the dictator to resign in 1930, setting the stage for the fall of the monarchy, the birth of the Second Spanish Republic and the beginning of the Spanish Revolution.



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