

**OPINION 6**THE US MILITARY INC:  
PROFITING FROM WAR**WORLD 8**FRENCH AUTHORITIES ARREST  
SYNAGOGUE EXPLOSION SUSPECT**MONEY 10**NEXT ROUND OF INDIA-AUSTRALIA  
TRADE PACT TALKS IN NOVEMBER

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SHRI KRISHNA  
JANMASHTMI**WOMAN POWER FINDS VOICE PAN INDIA****Kolkata probe deepens**

Security personnel stand guard during a raid on the premises of former principal of RG Kar Medical College Sandip Ghosh by CBI in connection with alleged financial irregularities at the institute during his tenure, in Kolkata, on Sunday PTI

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bahut kuch mila (many things have been found), a senior official of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said on Sunday regarding the searches conducted at RG Kar Medical College Hospital, where a young female doctor was allegedly raped and murdered on the night of August 9, sparking a nationwide outcry over women's safety at workplaces in West Bengal.

The brief remark from the investigator came hours after polygraph tests were conducted on the prime accused, Sanjoy Roy, former RG Kar principal Sandip Ghosh, and five other junior

doctors. According to sources, the subjects were asked 17-18 questions, ranging from simple queries about their names and the colour of a tomato or the sky, to more pertinent questions about their possible involvement in the crime. Sources said Ghosh showed no hesitation when submitting himself to the test. "He was confident and cooperative," an official remarked. However, officials declined to comment on whether Ghosh was questioned about the alleged multi-crore corruption scheme that ran through RGKMH during his tenure, which some striking doctors at the college believe could be

linked to the brutal rape and murder of the postgraduate trainee doctor earlier this month. The tests were conducted amid allegations that around ten senior doctors, who are reportedly close to influential figures in the State Government, held a long meeting on August 9 inside the seminar hall where the victim's body was later found. "The CCTV footage if they are not destroyed can reveal everything... how 10 doctors of other medical colleges came at the crime scene and conducted a meeting inside the seminar hall... this was well before the family of the victim doctor was informed or they arrived in the

hospital," said Sajal Biswas a doctor raising doubts regarding the fact that whether the crime was committed inside the seminar hall or inside the adjacent doctors' rest room. A parallel theory circulating within the hospital suggests that the doctor's body was moved to the seminar hall after the crime. A protesting resident doctor said "the haste in which the wall separating the two rooms was demolished and the 3-4 hours that separated the time of discovery of the body and the entry of the police... constituting the missing links... can all be explained through the meeting that took place inside the hospital that day... now the question is whether these doctors would be called for interrogation". The polygraph tests were necessitated following CBI allegations that persons being grilled were evading replies regarding the chronology of events and trying to mislead the investigation process. The tests were conducted a day after a CJM Court granted permission to the CBI officials to do so. While Ghosh and others were subjected to the test on Saturday Roy was tested inside the Presidency Jail hospital on Sunday afternoon.

**PM Modi assures action**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during an interaction with Lakhpati Didis, in Jalgaon, on Sunday PTI

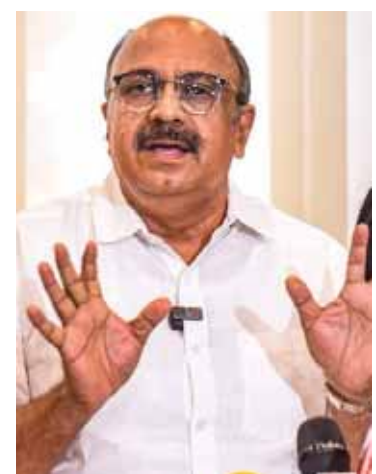
TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In an indirect message to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee regarding the recent shocking rape and murder of a junior doctor, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that the safety and empowerment of women are top national priorities. He reminded all State Governments and political parties that atrocities against women are an "unpardonable sin" and that the perpetrators and their accomplices must not be spared. "Every public institution, whether a hospital, school, office, or police system, must be held accountable for ensuring the safety of women working there. Any negligence in this regard is unacceptable. Governments may change, but our foremost responsibility as a society and Government is to protect the life and dignity of women," Modi said. The Prime Minister made these remarks while addressing a "Lakhpati Didi Sammelan" in Jalgaon, North Maharashtra, after distributing certificates to 11 lakh women who recently became "Lakhpatis."

**Men run for cover in Kerala**

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Disclosures by two actresses that they were victims of sexual misconduct by higher-ups in the film industry led to the resignation of two industry veterans on Sunday. Filmmaker Ranjith and actor Siddique submitted their resignations as chairman of the Kerala Chalachitra Academy and general secretary of the Association of Malayalam Movie Actors, respectively. An allegation by Bengali film actress Sreelekha Mitra that CPI(M) leader Ranjith had "misbehaved" with her in 2009 has caused an "earthquake" in the State's political and cultural landscape, with many calling for the filmmaker's resignation. Although Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Cultural Minister Saji Cherian insisted that no action could be taken based solely on the actress's oral disclosure, some party leaders and industry veterans were firm that the Chalachitra Academy chairman should either step down or be removed from his position. This made Ranjith to resign from the chairmanship of Kerala Chalachitra Academy, the Government-run institution entrusted with holding the State's yearly International Film Festival. Ranjith sent his letter of resignation to Minister for culture Cherian on Sunday morning and he told his friends in the film industry that he would rather face any probe ordered by the Government against the disclosures made by Mitra than



continuing in the post. While speaking to a TV channel, the Bengali actress had claimed that the movie maker had touched her with ulterior motives when she approached him for a role in the movie to be made by him. Mitra said she just rushed out from the room where Ranjith was staying and was informed by the latter's associates that she has not been selected for the role. On Sunday news surfaced of actor Siddique resigning from the post of general secretary of AMMA (Association of Malayalam Movie Artistes), a collective of artists in the Malayalam film industry, following a complaint by a fellow artist. Rohini Sampath, a popular Malayalam actress, had accused Siddique of sexually assaulting and abusing her during a meeting.

**Israel flattens Lebanon**

A damaged house is seen following an attack from Lebanon, in Acre, north Israel, on Sunday AP/PTI

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel launched a wave of airstrikes across southern Lebanon early Sunday in what it said was a preemptive strike on Hezbollah. The militant group responded that it had launched hundreds of rockets and drones to avenge the killing of one of its top commanders last month. The heavy exchange of fire does not appear to have ignited a long-feared war, but the situation remains tense. Meanwhile, Egypt on Sunday is hosting high-level talks aimed at brokering a cease-fire in the 10-month-old Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, which diplomats hope will tamp down regional tensions. The Israeli military said it struck because Hezbollah was planning to launch a

heavy barrage of rockets and missiles toward Israel. Soon after, Hezbollah announced it had launched an attack on Israeli military positions as an initial response to the killing of Fouad Shukur, one of its founding members, in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut last month. By mid-morning, it appeared that the exchange had ended, with both sides saying they had only aimed at military targets. At least three people were killed in the strikes on Lebanon, while there were no reports of casualties in Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking at the start of a Cabinet meeting, said the military had eliminated "thousands of rockets that were aimed at northern Israel" and urged citizens to adhere to directives from the Home Front Command.

"We are determined to do everything to defend our country, to return the residents of the north securely to their homes and to continue upholding a simple rule: Whoever harms us — we will harm them," he said. Air raid sirens were reported throughout northern Israel, and Israel's Ben-Gurion international airport closed and diverted flights for approximately an hour due to the threat of attack. Israel's Home Front Command raised the alert level across northern Israel before later lifting restrictions in most areas. Lt Col Nadav Shoshani, an Israeli military spokesman, said Hezbollah had intended to hit targets in northern and central Israel. He said initial assessments found "very little damage" in Israel, but that the military remained on high alert. He said around 100 Israeli aircraft took part in Sunday's strikes. Lebanon's Health Ministry reported that two people were killed and another two wounded in the strikes in southern Lebanon. Separately, a fighter for the Amal group, which is allied with Hezbollah, was killed in a strike on a car, Amal said. Hezbollah said its attack involved more than 320 Katyusha rockets aimed at multiple sites in Israel and a "large number" of drones.

**Raksha Mantri Rajnath in America**

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with others during a visit to the Naval Surface Warfare Centre, in Carderock, Maryland, USA PTI

**Parties racing against time in Jammu and Kashmir**

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The National Conference-Congress alliance stitched only four days ago amidst cordial relations is showing signs of strain in the run-up to the final date of nominations for the first round of polling on August 27. Despite holding several rounds of talks the alliance partners are yet to finalise the seat-sharing formula. The trust deficit between the allies and the absence of consensus on some of the seats going to polls in the first round of polling on September 18, is turning out to be a major roadblock. Inside reports suggested

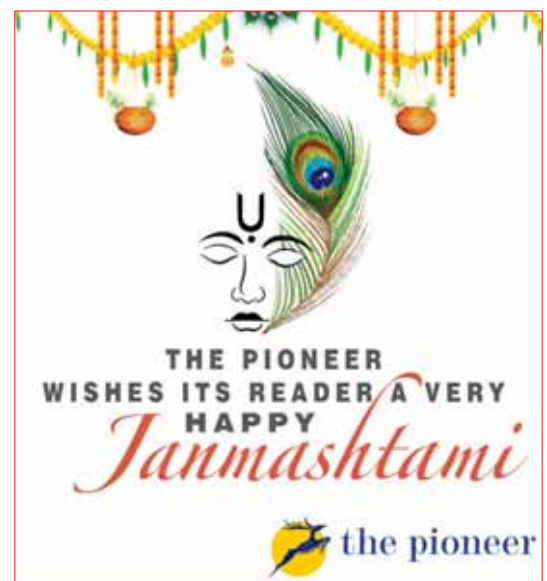
some of the senior National Conference leaders from the Jammu region expressed their discomfiture over offering seats to the Congress party without making a genuine assessment of the ground realities. Since National Conference leaders threatened to contest the elections as an independent candidate if the decision was not reversed the party's high command decided to put on hold the final list of candidates. Following these reports, the National Conference leaders went into a huddle and also reached out to the Congress leaders to put on hold their final list as well. Efforts were on to pacify the



angry leaders. At the same time, the local unit of the Congress party has already submitted a list of 90 candidates for approval to the Election Screening Committee of the party. The Congress leaders took this

decision to avoid further flare-ups during negotiations. "We have submitted a list of the party candidates to the election screening committee of the party at the national level after we failed to iron out

differences over some of the crucial seats in the erstwhile district of Doda in Jammu province and south Kashmir seats from where a senior Congress leader was keen on contesting," a senior Congress leader told *The Pioneer*. "The top brass of both parties may have decided to ally but resistance shown by the foot soldiers over the seat-sharing formula is emerging as the biggest roadblock," the Congress leader said. A team of the Central party leaders was also camping in the valley to hold a fresh round of talks with their counterparts in the National Conference on Monday.

**Moscow says, Phir Bhi Dil hai Hindustani**

GYANESHWAR DAYAL ■ MOSCOW

On August 23, the grand opening of the first Moscow International Film Week took place at the Khudozhstvenny cinema, marking the beginning of a significant event in the world of cinema. The ceremony featured the Russian premiere of the Indian film "Laapataa Ladies". Yesterday, the Moscow International Film Week officially commenced, and it will run in the capital until August 28. The opening ceremony at the Khudozhstvenny cinema was attended by Government officials, prominent figures from the film industry, journalists, and

influencers. Among the distinguished guests were the ambassadors of the Film Week: Actor Milos Bikovic, director and screenwriter Zhora Kryzhovnikov, actor Nikita Volkov, and other celebrity attendees. On the first day of the Film Week, screenings of both foreign and domestic films took place, including the nationwide premieres of the Indian sports drama Field and the philosophical-mystical drama Alzheimer from Iran. This year it is an Indian-themed week with focus on Indian cinema and celebrating Indian art of storytelling on celluloid. The film



festival is hosting films from more than 40-countries but the flavour of the festival is completely Indian. At the exclusive screening, guests were treated to the premiere of the Indian comedy-drama "Laapataa Ladies", which received enthusiastic reviews from both audiences and international critics. The success of "Laapataa Ladies" and "Kalki" at the Moscow International Film Week highlights the growing appeal of Indian cinema in Russia. These films, while rooted in Indian culture, address universal themes that resonate with audiences across the world. The Russian viewers have found a

connection with the characters and their stories, appreciating the films for their depth, creativity, and the way they tackle complex social issues. On the first day of the Film Week, screenings of both foreign and domestic films took place, including the nationwide premieres of the Indian sports drama Field and the philosophical-mystical drama Alzheimer from Iran. Interactive journeys were organised for both guests and city residents. On mobile film sets, visitors had the opportunity to engage directly with the art of filmmaking by recording video introductions, attending lectures, and

participating in master classes with well-known actors. These activities will continue throughout the entire Film Week across various locations in the city. During the course of the week the Moscow International Film Week will be held in more than 100 venues, hosting over 200 unique events each day, including film screenings, master classes, and creative meetings. This internationally significant event will welcome delegations from over 40 countries, including Government officials and representatives of the global film industry, who will participate in the business programme.



# HP Cabinet Slashes Power Royalty Slabs, Introduces E-Taxi Subsidy, Welfare Schemes

PNS ■ SHIMLA

The Himachal Pradesh Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, on Sunday unveiled a series of crucial initiatives aimed at driving social welfare, economic growth, and sustainable development across the State. Key decisions include the launch of the 'Mukhya Mantri Sukh Shiksha Yojana' to support vulnerable women and children, a 50 percent subsidy for purchasing e-taxis under the Rajiv Gandhi Swarojgar Start-Up Yojana, the reduction of free power royalty slabs to ease financial pressures on entrepreneurs, and substantial investments in public safety, education, and healthcare infrastructure.

## Support for Widows and Destitute Women

One of the major decisions was the implementation of 'Mukhya Mantri Sukh Shiksha Yojana' — a welfare scheme designed to support widows, destitute women, divorced women, and disabled parents in raising and educating their children. Under this scheme, eligible children will receive a monthly grant of Rs 1,000 to cover their educational, health, and nutritional needs until they turn 18. Additionally, the scheme provides financial assistance for higher education, covering costs for undergraduate, postgraduate, diploma, and vocational courses, including hostel fees.

## Promotion of Eco-Friendly Transportation

In line with its commitment to sustainable development, the Cabinet approved a 50 percent subsidy for the purchase of e-taxis under the Rajiv Gandhi Swarojgar Start-Up Yojana-2023. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to promote eco-friendly transportation in the state. Eligible



candidates can avail of this subsidy within three months after depositing a 10 percent margin, with UCO Bank designated as the nodal bank for loan sanctioning. The loans, offered at an interest rate of 7.9 percent per annum, aim to make electric vehicles more accessible to aspiring entrepreneurs, contributing to the reduction of the state's carbon footprint.

## Educational Reforms

Recognizing the importance of early education, the Cabinet approved a six-month age relaxation for students already enrolled in nursery, LKG, and UKG during the 2023-24 academic year, allowing them to advance to the next grade.

## Public Safety and Infrastructure Improvements

The Cabinet took decisive steps to enhance public safety by approving the establishment of new police offices and posts across the State, including a Sub-Divisional Police Office at Dadasiba, a police post at Alampur, and the upgradation of Police Posts at Sansarpur Terrace and Moin to full-fledged Police Stations in Kangra district. These initiatives are expected to improve law enforcement and response times, thereby enhancing public safety in these regions.

Additionally, the Cabinet decided to increase the monthly charges for concessional travel in HRTC buses from Rs 110 to Rs 500 for police personnel up to the rank of inspector, jail officials, and security guards of the HP Secretariat, reflecting the Government's commitment to improving the welfare of its employees.

## Infrastructure Developments in Water and Power Sectors

In another significant move, the Cabinet approved the opening of a new Jal Shakti Vibhag Circle at Dehra in Kangra district, along with new sub-divisions and sections in Khad, Una district. This expansion is aimed at improving water management infrastructure in these regions. Furthermore, the Cabinet reviewed and revised the free power royalty slabs from 20 percent, 30 percent, and 40 percent to 12 percent, 18 percent, and 30 percent, respectively. This reduction in royalty rates is expected to provide substantial relief to entrepreneurs in the power sector, encouraging further investment and growth.

## Healthcare Enhancements

The Cabinet also focused on improving healthcare services by approving the filling of Assistant Professor positions in

## Key Cabinet Decisions:

- Free Power Royalty Slabs: Reduced to 12%, 18%, and 30% for entrepreneurs
- E-Taxi Subsidy: 50% subsidy with 7.9% loan interest under new scheme
- Sukh Shiksha Yojana: Rs 1,000 monthly grant for children of widows and destitute women
- Age Relaxation: Six-month extension for nursery to UKG students to advance grades
- Travel Charges: Increase: HRTC concessional travel fees raised to Rs 500 per month
- New Police Units: New police office and upgrades in Kangra district
- Fire Post Opening: New fire post in Ubadesha area, Shimla
- Healthcare Boost: New MRI machines and emergency vehicles for hospitals

the ENT and Psychiatry departments at Dr Yashwant Singh Parmar Government Medical College, Nahan. The procurement of three TESLA MRI machines for IGMC Shimla, AIIMS Chamiyana, and Dr Radhakrishnan Government Medical College, Hamirpur, was also approved, along with the provision of electric vehicles for emergency services at AIIMS Chamiyana and IGMC Shimla, boosting the state's healthcare infrastructure.

# BSF Requests Additional Battalion to Combat Drone Threats on Punjab Border

More troops sought due to surge in intercepted drones, rising to over 120 this year from 107 in 2023

PNS ■ JALANDHAR/NEW DELHI

Facing escalating challenges from cross-border drones that are fueling drug trafficking and arms smuggling, the Border Security Force (BSF) has called for the deployment of an additional battalion to strengthen its operations along the Punjab stretch of the India-Pakistan international border. The move comes amid growing concerns about drone-related activities and infiltration attempts.

Currently, the BSF has approximately 20 battalions stationed along the extensive 500-kilometre-long border, with 18 actively deployed at various points along the front. The remaining two battalions are assigned to critical security tasks at the Attari integrated check

post in Amritsar and the Kartarpur corridor in Dera Baba Nanak, Gurdaspur. The force's current focus is on addressing the persistent drone menace, which began to intensify around 2019-20, particularly affecting the border districts of Amritsar and Tarn Taran.

According to a senior BSF officer, the request for an additional battalion is currently under "active consideration" by the Union Home Ministry. This additional battalion, comprising approximately 800-900 personnel, aims to enhance the BSF's ability to secure the border more effectively. The reinforcement is also expected to bolster surveillance and response capabilities against the drone threats and associated smuggling operations.

The challenge posed by drones has been substantial, with official data indicating that security agencies have intercepted over 120 drones this year alone. This is a significant increase from the 107 drones seized throughout 2023. These drones, often used to transport drugs and ammunition, have

prompted the BSF to seek more resources to control the situation effectively.

BSF's Punjab Frontier Inspector General Atul Fulzele highlighted that the majority of drugs coming into Punjab are now arriving via drones, rather than through traditional land routes. This shift underscored the urgent need for enhanced security measures and additional manpower to address the evolving threat landscape.

In addition to the call for more troops, the BSF is also seeking to strengthen its intelligence operations. The force's intelligence branch, or "G branch", operates within a 50-kilometre radius of the border, playing a crucial role in identifying and intercepting drone activities and associated smuggling operations. Increased personnel and resources in this area are expected to improve the effectiveness of these operations.

The BSF's ongoing efforts include the construction of 48 culverts over the Ravi and Sutlej rivers along the Punjab border, with work on 25 already com-

pleted. These culverts are equipped with sewage gates and locks and are regularly monitored by BSF patrols to prevent illegal crossings and smuggling activities.

The BSF has also been actively engaging with local communities, rewarding informants who provide crucial information about drone activities and drug traffickers. To date, rewards have been issued in about 50 cases, and the BSF has shared intelligence on approximately 75 drug smugglers with the Punjab Police.

Moreover, the BSF is innovating its patrolling methods, including the formation of a mounted unit of female troops to enhance border surveillance. This initiative reflects the force's commitment to adapting and strengthening its operational capabilities.

Recent deployments have also extended to the Punjab-Jammu border, with increased troop presence in Gurdaspur to counter potential infiltration from Pakistan into Jammu via Punjab.

# Pastor, 8 others Beat Man to Death in Gurdaspur to "Exorcise Devil"

PNS ■ GURDASPUR

In a shocking incident from Gurdaspur, a 30-year-old man was beaten to death by a pastor and eight others who claimed that they were performing an exorcism to rid him of a devil. The victim, Samuel Masih, a resident of Singhpura village, had been suffering from seizures and frequent outbursts, which led his family to seek the pastor's help. The brutal attack, which took place on Wednesday, ended in Samuel's death, and has since led to a police investigation and public outrage.

Samuel, a daily labourer, had reportedly been experiencing severe health issues that led his family to invite local pas-

tor Jacob Masih to conduct a prayer session at their home. According to the police, the pastor declared that Samuel was possessed by a devil. Misguided by this belief, the pastor and his accomplices began to violently assault Samuel, asserting that this would drive the supposed devil out of him. Despite their assurances that nothing would happen, Samuel succumbed to his injuries almost immediately.

The following day, Samuel's family buried him, believing that the pastor's assurances were genuine. However, two days after the incident, Samuel's mother and wife decided to lodge a formal complaint against the pastor. Authorities intervened by exhuming Samuel's body on Saturday for a post-mortem examination, supervised by duty magistrate Inderjit Kaur.

The police have registered a case against Pastor Jacob Masih and eight other individuals involved under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The tragic incident

highlighted the dark side of superstitious practices and underscored the need for greater awareness and education on mental health and medical care. The community and law enforcement officials are now grappling with the implications of this senseless act of violence.

# SAD rallies behind Dimpi Dhillon amid speculation of Gidderbaha exit

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

As Punjab prepares for by-elections in four assembly seats, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) faced a potential setback in Gidderbaha on Sunday. Speculation is rife that senior SAD leader and constituency in-charge Hardeep Singh 'Dimpi' Dhillon, might leave the party due to his dissatisfaction over not being announced as the candidate for the upcoming by-election. Grapevine is that SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal may enter the poll arena from Gidderbaha, which was once used to be SAD stronghold until 2012.

Despite Dhillon's strong presence in Gidderbaha, where he narrowly lost the 2022 election by just 1,349 votes to Congress' sitting MLA Amarinder Singh Raja

Warring, SAD has yet to officially name him as its candidate. This delay has reportedly caused friction, leading to rumours of Dhillon's possible exit from the party. However, Dhillon has previously dismissed such rumours, asserting his loyalty to SAD.

Responding to rumours, SAD spokesperson Daljit Singh Cheema dismissed it as baseless, reiterating the party's full trust and support in Dhillon. He emphasized that SAD has no intention of fielding any other candidate from a different party in Gidderbaha and urged Dhillon to disregard any misleading propaganda.

Cheema also highlighted that SAD president has consistently advocated for Dhillon as the best candidate, and the delay in the official announcement is merely due to ongoing feedback collection from party workers.

# Amritsar NRI Shooting: Punjab Police Arrest Five, Including Father Of Victim's First Wife

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH/AMRITSAR

In a rapid response to the shooting of an NRI in Amritsar a day before, Punjab Police on Sunday arrested five individuals, including the father of the victim's first wife. The shocking incident, which took place on Saturday, saw Sukhchain Singh, recently returned from the United States, shot at his home in Daburji village. The attack has sent shockwaves through the community, with authorities working relentlessly to apprehend the remaining culprits.

The assailants, identified as Sukhwinder alias Sukha and Gurkirat Singh alias Guri, ambushed Sukhchain Singh as he was about to leave for a morning walk. They forcibly entered his home, firing three

shots, two of which struck him in the head and chest. Although critically injured, Sukhchain Singh is now reported to be out of danger. The attackers, however, remain at large, and a manhunt is underway to ensure their capture. As per information available, the assailants' pistols malfunctioned and they fled the scene.

Amritsar Police Commissioner Ranjit Singh Dhillon disclosed that the attack was orchestrated by the family of Sukhchain Singh's first wife, who had committed suicide in December 2022. The family, holding a grudge against him, allegedly plotted this deadly act. Police have arrested Sarwan Singh, the father of the deceased wife, along with Jagjit Singh and Chamkaur Singh from Tarn Taran, who

assisted the assailants before the crime. Hotel owner Digambar Attri and manager Abhilash Bhaskar were also arrested for providing accommodation to the criminals without verifying their identities.

Investigations revealed that the assailants had stayed at Attri's hotel both before and after the attack, with the hotel staff failing to follow standard procedures. Additionally, three USA-based NRIs — Sukhchain's brother-in-law Sukhwinder Singh, sister-in-law Kuljinder Kaur, and her husband Jasvir Singh — along with the mother-in-law, Nishan Kaur, have been implicated in the conspiracy and booked by the police.

The attack was carried out in the presence of Sukhchain Singh's current wife, his mother, and his two children from his first marriage. Footage from CCTV cameras inside the home captured the horrifying scene, with the family pleading for mercy as the gunmen carried out the attack. This footage has become a key piece of evi-

dence in the ongoing investigation.

Dhillon said that both the suspects were identified and a manhunt was launched to nab them. One of the suspects had 10 criminal cases, including murder bid, theft, loot and NDPS cases. One suspect came out of Kapurthala jail on bail in February this year while his accomplice, who had a couple of NDPS cases against him, was released from the same jail in September last year.

Special Director General of Police RN Dhoke, overseeing Internal Security, visited Sukhchain Singh's family to assure them of the authorities' commitment to bringing all involved parties to justice. The case underscored the dire consequences of personal vendettas and highlights the need for stringent security measures to prevent such tragedies.

As the hunt for the main shooters continues, Punjab Police are determined to deliver justice and bring some semblance of peace to Sukhchain Singh's grieving family.

# Sisodia Pays Obeisance at Golden Temple, Denounces Political Conspiracy

Says Punjab Govt, under Mann, working efficiently

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

Delhi's former Deputy Chief Minister and senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Manish Sisodia on Sunday embarked on a significant visit to Punjab, marking his first trip to the State since his release on bail from the Supreme Court. Accompanied by Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and other key AAP figures, Sisodia's visit to the Golden Temple and Durgiana Temple was both a personal and political statement.

The visit followed Sisodia's recent bail after spending 17 months in jail over allegations related to an excise policy case. As he arrived in Amritsar, Sisodia was warmly welcomed by Chief Minister Mann, who joined him in paying respects at the Golden Temple. This pilgrimage is significant not only for its spiritual value but also as a symbol of Sisodia's resilience and continued commitment to his party and its principles.

Addressing the media outside Sri Darbar Sahib, Sisodia expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity to visit the sacred site. "It is a profound honour to have had the chance to bow down at Darbar Sahib," Sisodia remarked. He acknowledged



the support he received during his imprisonment and emphasized that even from jail, he prayed for the triumph of truth and justice. "Despite the difficulties and challenges, I remained hopeful and steadfast in my belief that the truth would prevail."

"During my time in jail, I missed the people and my team in Punjab. The Punjab government is working efficiently under CM Bhagwant Mann's leadership... Truth must prevail. With God's grace, I am out of jail and I wish that Arvind Kejriwal ji too would be released soon," he added.

Chief Minister Mann echoed Sisodia's sentiments and provided context to their visit. "Today's visit is not just a political gesture but a personal pilgrimage. Manish Sisodia's

return to Punjab and his visit to Darbar Sahib underscore his commitment to justice and his enduring faith," Mann stated. He further asserted that the ongoing legal battles against AAP leaders are part of a broader attempt to undermine the party's integrity and unity.

Mann pointed out that the cases against AAP leaders were baseless and part of a deliberate strategy to weaken the party. "We always believed that these false charges would not withstand judicial scrutiny. Our expectation is the same for Arvind Kejriwal's case. The BJP's attempts to destabilize AAP by jailing our leaders are designed to break our spirit, but we remain resolute," Mann asserted.

Sisodia also reflected on his time in jail, describing it as a

period marked by a concerted effort to discredit him and his party. "The charges were always part of a larger conspiracy aimed at undermining the AAP. I am grateful to God and the Constitution for delivering justice. Even during my imprisonment, my faith in truth and justice never wavered," Sisodia stated. He expressed optimism about Kejriwal's eventual release, reinforcing his belief that justice would ultimately prevail.

Following their visit to the Golden Temple, Sisodia, Mann, and their delegation proceeded to the Attari-Wagah border. There, they attended the evening parade, an event that draws significant crowds and symbolizes the nation's unity and pride. This visit to the border was both a show of solidarity with the nation's defense forces and a gesture of continuing support for the people of Punjab.

The day's events highlighted not only Sisodia's personal and political resilience but also the broader narrative of AAP's struggle against what they perceive as politically-motivated attempts to discredit and destabilize their leadership. As Sisodia and Mann concluded their visit, they reaffirmed their commitment to their party's principles and to continuing their work for the people of Punjab and Delhi.

# Punjab Health Minister Appeals for Eye Donations to Combat Corneal Blindness

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Urging the public to contribute to a noble cause, Punjab Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Balbir Singh on Sunday called on the citizens to pledge their eyes for donation during the launch of the 39th National Eye Donation Fortnight. Running from August 25 to September 8, the campaign seeks to address the severe shortage of corneas needed for transplantation.

Dr Balbir, who is also a renowned eye surgeon, emphasized the life-changing impact of eye donation. "Eye donation can restore sight to individuals suffering from corneal blindness, a condition that can be effectively treated through a procedure known as Keratoplasty. This transparent layer, the cornea, is crucial for clear vision," he explained.

Highlighting the urgency of the issue, Dr Balbir noted that corneal blindness predominantly affects children and young adults. "In India, around 1.1 million people suffer from corneal blindness,

## FAQs, Facts, and Myths About Eye Donation

- What is an eye bank?** An eye bank is an organization recognized by the government that collects and distributes human eyes for corneal transplantation.
- Who can be an eye donor?** Anyone, regardless of age, sex, or blood group, can be an eye donor.
- Is the whole eye used for transplant?** No, only the cornea, the thin transparent layer at the front of the iris, is used for transplantation.
- What is corneal transplantation?** It is a surgical procedure where a diseased cornea is replaced with a healthy one from a donor to restore vision.
- How quickly should the cornea/eye be removed after death?** It should be removed within 6 hours of death.
- Can patients with diabetes or hypertension donate eyes?** Yes, they can.
- Who cannot donate eyes?** Eyes cannot be collected from donors with AIDS (HIV), Hepatitis B or C, Sepsis, Leukaemia, Rabies, Meningitis, Encephalitis, Tetanus, or other viral diseases.
- What should relatives do after death?** They should inform the nearest eye bank or eye collection center immediately.

with 25,000 new cases annually. Yet, only 25,000 corneal transplants are performed each year, showcasing a significant discrepancy between need and availability," he said.

Punjab currently has 10 registered eye banks and 27 corneal transplantation centers. Despite the availability of skilled surgeons and modern facilities, the shortage of eye tissues remains a significant barrier. In 2023-24, 940 transplants were carried out in Punjab, with 275 successful surgeries reported by July 2024.

Dr Hitinder Kaur, Director of Health and Family Welfare, outlined the planned IEC activities for the fortnight, aimed at educating the public and dispelling myths about eye donation. Registration forms are available at district hospitals, sub-divisional hospitals, and community health centers, and can also be completed online at [www.nhm.punjab.gov.in/Eye\\_Donation/form1.php](http://www.nhm.punjab.gov.in/Eye_Donation/form1.php) or [http://www.nhm.punjab.gov.in/Eye\\_Donation/form1.php](http://www.nhm.punjab.gov.in/Eye_Donation/form1.php).

# PM Modi urges youth to join politics in Mann ki Baat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his 'Mann ki Baat' address on Sunday asserted that India is making significant strides in 21st century towards building a 'Viksit Bharat'. In his latest monthly broadcast 'Mann ki Baat', he reflected on his Independence Day appeal for one lakh young people without political experience to join politics, highlighting the positive response it has garnered. PM Modi said just as youth from a cross section of society came together for Independence and contributed to India's freedom struggle, bringing youth from non-political backgrounds into mainstream politics will help pave the way for a developed India.

"This year from Red Fort, I have urged one lakh youth who are not from a political background to connect with the political system. This point of mine has garnered tremendous response. We thus come to know that a large number of our youth are eagerly ready to enter politics," Modi said. All they are looking for is the right opportunity and apt guidance, he added. "I have also received letters from youth across the country on this subject. Enormous response is being received on social media as well. People

have sent me many kinds of suggestions. Some youth have written in their letters that it is truly inconceivable for them. On account of the absence of a political legacy on part of their grandfather or parents they could not enter politics despite wanting to," the Prime Minister said.

Some youth have written that they possess a good experience of working at the ground level and hence they can be helpful in solving people's problems, he said.

"Some youth have also written that dynastic politics crushes new talent. Some youth have mentioned that such efforts will lend more strength to our democracy. I thank each and everyone for sending in suggestions on the subject," PM Modi said.

He hoped that with collective efforts, youth who do not possess a political background, will also be able to come forward in politics. Their experience and their fervour will prove useful for the country, PM Modi said.

"Even during the freedom struggle, many such people had come forward, who did not have any political background. They took the plunge for the sake of India's freedom. Once more, we require the same spirit to attain the goal of Viksit Bharat," he said. He urged the



youth to positively join this campaign.

"This step of yours will be transformative in terms of your future and the country's future," PM Modi said. During the programme, Modi also spoke to young entrepreneurs, who were IIT-Madras alumni and helming space start-up GalaxEye, as they highlighted their work. They praised the growing vibrant space ecosystem in the country.

The Prime Minister said the youth of the country has benefited a lot from various reforms in the space sector. On the occasion, he noted that India celebrated its first National Space Day on August 23 to mark the first anniversary of the successful landing of its spacecraft on the Moon.

The Prime Minister also noted

Pradesh. On similar lines, in other States of the country as well, people of all ages participated in such Tiranga Yatras," PM Modi said. This campaign wove the entire country into a thread of togetherness and this is exactly what 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' is, he said.

In his radio broadcast, PM Modi also cited the example of Barekuri village in Assam where people of Moran community have a deep bond with Hoolock Gibbons. "When they realised that Gibbons love bananas a lot, they started growing bananas on their farms. Besides, they decided that they would perform rituals connected with the birth and death of Gibbons, exactly as they would have performed for their near and dear ones. They have also named the Gibbons," he said.

"Recently, the Gibbons were facing hardships on account of electric wires passing through, in the vicinity. In this scenario, the villagers put forth the problem to the government and a quick solution was found out too," he said.

He also cited another example of human-animal bond, saying young people in Arunachal Pradesh have started using 3-D printing technology to protect wild animals from being hunted for their horns and tusks. The Prime Minister

also lauded the efforts of people behind a park in Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua where wonderful artworks out of waste have been created.

The Prime Minister also batted for toy recycling, saying this is another such field where "we can work together". "You too are aware of the fact that whereas many children get bored of their toys within no time, there are children as well for whom such toys are a pipedream. Toys that your children no longer play with... You can give them away to spaces, where they continue being useful," he said.

PM Modi also urged people to connect with campaigns pertaining to awareness about nutrition. "A tiny effort on your part, will help a lot in the fight against malnutrition," he said. He also noted that August 29 is Telugu Bhasha Diwas. "It's truly an amazing language. I extend good wishes to Telugu speakers across the world on Telugu Bhasha Diwas," PM Modi said.

Modi also urged people to be a part of the Catch the Rain Movement.

"Paralympics are about to begin in Paris. Our divyang brothers and sisters have reached there. 140 crore Indians are cheering for our athletes and players. You too also encourage our players with #Cheer4Bharat," he said.

# India, Indonesia condemn use of terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Indonesia have condemned the use of terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism amid Pakistan's support to terror groups carrying out terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir.

The issue of cross-border terrorism figured at the sixth meeting of the India-Indonesia joint working group on counter-terrorism that was held in Jakarta on Friday.

The two sides focused on ways to effectively combat terrorism, including how to stop the use of new and emerging technologies by terrorists, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

"India and Indonesia strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and emphasised the need for strengthening international cooperation to combat terrorism in a comprehensive and sustained manner," it said in a statement on Sunday.

The MEA said the two sides also condemned the "use of terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism." "The two sides exchanged views on the



domestic, regional and global terrorism threat assessment," it said.

"They discussed counter-terrorism challenges related to the use of new and emerging technologies by terrorists, misuse of internet for terrorist purposes, terror financing, and the nexus between organised crime and terrorism," the MEA said. It said the two sides also exchanged views on cooperation in regional, global and multilateral fora such as the UN, ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to combat global terrorism.

The Indian delegation at the meeting was led by K D Dewal, Joint Secretary (Counter-Terrorism) in the MEA. The Indonesian team was headed by Andhika Chrisnuyudhanto, Deputy for International Cooperation at the National Counter Terrorism Agency.



# Rajnath Singh tours US Naval Surface Warfare Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, as a part of his ongoing tour to the US, visited the William B Morgan Large Cavitation Channel (LCC) in the Naval Surface Warfare Centre (NSWC) at Memphis, Tennessee, Defence Ministry said here on Sunday.

Giving details, officials said the LCC is one of the world's largest and most technically-advanced water tunnel facility for testing submarines, torpedoes, naval surface ships and propellers.

The Defence Minister was briefed at the facility and he witnessed an actual tunnel experiment.

He was accompanied by Ambassador of India to US, Director General, Naval Operations from the Indian Navy and DRDO Defence Technology Counsellor, among others. He was received by the US Deputy Under Secretary of the Navy for Policy, and briefed by Commander and Technical Director of the NSWC.

The discussions also intend to support the ongoing proposal for establishment of similar facility for indigenous design and development in India.

Earlier, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh interacted with the senior leadership of US defence companies in Washington DC in an industry round-table organised by US India Strategic Partnership Forum. He outlined the various

emerging co-development and co-production opportunities in the defence sector in India. The progressive reforms undertaken by the Government of India have encouraged many foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers, including from the US, to set up manufacturing units in India, develop Joint Ventures, and also to make India their alternate export base. The planned co-production of GE 414 aero-engines in India shall be a significant milestone in India-US bilateral relations.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh highlighted that 'Partnership' and 'Joint Efforts' are the two keywords that differentiate India's defence industry partnership with other nations.

The event saw the attendance of senior leadership from prominent US defence and technology companies such as Boeing, GE, General Atomics, General Dynamics Land Systems, L3 Harris, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon Technologies, Rolls Royce, and ThayerMahan.

In addition, few Indian companies such as ideaForge, Tata Sons and Tsecond, along with senior leaders from The Cohen Group attended the interaction with him.

During the interaction, the business leaders briefly outlined their ongoing projects and future plans for India, and provided valuable feedback.

# Great Nicobar Project will not displace indigenous tribe, says Environment Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav on Sunday stated that the Great Nicobar Project will not displace the Shompen, an indigenous tribe of the Nicobar Islands and, instead, it would counter expansionist action by China in the region, curb the stealing of marine resources by Myanmarese poachers, bridge infrastructural gaps, and promote global trade.

Amid criticism from the Opposition regarding the Rs 72,000 crore mega project, Yadav was responding to an August 10 letter from Rajya Sabha MP and former Minister Jairam Ramesh, who requested the suspension of all clearances granted to the project and a review by a

parliamentary panel.

The project involves construction of a transshipment port, an international airport, a power plant, a township and allied infrastructure in the Greater Nicobar island. It was given nod by the Environment Ministry two years ago. The move invited criticism from the Opposition that said the mega project posed grave threat to indigenous tribal groups and flora and fauna.

"It is only after due deliberations and after incorporating exemplary mitigation measures that the decision on the project was taken by the Central Government keeping the strategic, national and defence interests in mind and without compromising with the environmental and social aspects,"



Yadav stated in a detailed seven-page response on Sunday. Ramesh had raised concerns that the project would divert 13,075 hectares of forest land, about 15 per cent of

the island's area, and encroach on prohibited coastal zones. He also alleged that the project proceeded without proper consent from the Shompen and Nicobarese tribes and violated laws intended to gauge tribal consent.

Ramesh further noted that the project is located in an earthquake-prone area that experienced significant ground shifts during the 2004 tsunami and criticised the opaque findings of a high-powered committee established by the Government to address these concerns. In response, Yadav stated that the committee's reports were not made public due to the project's strategic and defense importance.

Addressing Ramesh's concerns about forest diversion, Yadav explained that despite the project's impact, 82%

of the Great Nicobar area remains protected as forests, eco-sensitive zones, and biosphere reserves, exceeding the required two-thirds forest cover. He also noted that consultations with tribal councils had been conducted through the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti, and the Chairman of the Tribal Council had participated in these meetings.

Regarding compensatory afforestation, Yadav acknowledged that while local plantation options were limited, planting native species in non-notified forest land outside the island and urban areas would provide significant ecological value. He added that the Haryana government had already notified 24,353.72 hectares as protected forest for the p565 project.

# PM Modi's plane flew over Pakistan airspace on way back from Poland

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly utilised Pakistan's airspace, while coming back from India to Poland, according to media reports of Pakistan.

Citing sources from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the report of news.com.pk revealed, that the plane entered Pakistani airspace at 10:15 am and remained there for about 46 minutes.

Further, the flight passed over Chitral and traversed the air control zones of Islamabad and Lahore before exiting into India at 11:01 am via Amritsar.

Speaking to The News, an official from the CAA clarified that the flight was allowed under the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of international civil aviation. "International laws dictate that in such circumstances, no No-Objection Certificate (NOC) is required. The country's CAA concerned only needs to be informed in



advance," the official explained.

The newspapers said, quoting sources, that Indian PM Narendra Modi has crossed Pakistan's airspace four times after becoming the Prime Minister of India for the third time.

On August 21, Modi entered Pakistan's airspace at a height of 36,000 feet near Kasur at 10 am on his way to Poland's capital Warsaw in his special India One plane from Delhi. His plane remained in Pakistan's airspace for 48 minutes. He entered the Afghan airspace from Chitral. On July 8, on his way from

Delhi to Moscow, the Indian Prime Minister's plane India One flew at a height of 36,000 feet and entered Pakistan's airspace near Chitral at 11:26 am. It entered the airspace of Afghanistan at 12:10 pm.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently visited Poland from August 21-22. This marked the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Poland in 45 years.

Pakistan fully closed its airspace to India in February 2019 after Indian fighter jets violated its international boundary. Although the airspace was partially reopened in March of that year, it remained closed to Indian flights. Notably, Pakistan denied Modi's request to use its airspace for a flight to Germany later that year amid heightened tensions over the Kashmir issue. However, in 2021, Pakistan granted permission for Modi's non-stop flight to the US to pass through its airspace.

# SC to hear Vijay Nair's bail plea in excise policy scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on August 27 the bail plea of former Aam Aadmi Party communication in-charge Vijay Nair in a money laundering case related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam.

A bench of justices Hrishikesh Roy and SVN Bhatti issued a notice to the Enforcement Directorate on August 12 on the plea of Nair while noting that he has been in custody for two years.

Appearing for Nair, senior advocates Abhishek Singhvi and Vikram Chaudhary submitted before the Court on August 12 that he was arrested on November 13, 2022, and he has challenged the trial Court's July 29 order dismissing his default bail plea. Earlier, on July 3 last year, the High Court refused to grant bail to Nair and other co-accused in the money laundering case.

The money laundering case stems from a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) FIR lodged after Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena recommended a probe into the excise policy 2021-22 which was later scrapped.

The CBI has alleged that Nair met some other co-accused, liquor manufacturers and distributors at various hotels in Hyderabad, Mumbai and Delhi for arranging "ill-gotten money through hawala operators" that was given to the AAP as a kickback in return for favours.

It was also claimed that businessman and co-accused Abhishek Boipally was part of the meetings and was involved in the conspiracy to launder money along with another accused liquor businessman Sameer Mahendru.

# Slow wage growth, inflation cause decline in real wages: Cong

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday claimed that a combination of slow wage growth and "back-breaking" inflation has caused an unprecedented decline in real wages and said that like the "proverbial ostrich," the Government continues to remain blind to the most fundamental challenge faced by the Indian economy.

Congress General Secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said a new report by a noted brokerage firm has once again shed light on the truth that the Union Government has consistently denied — real household incomes in India are facing a persistent decline.

"A combination of slow wage growth and back-breaking inflation has caused an unprecedented decline in real wages (wages adjusted for price rise) and therefore incomes," he said in a statement.

Ramesh pointed out that several surveys and data sets - including the Annual Survey of Unregistered Enterprises (ASUSE), the Reserve Bank of India's KLEMS data, and the Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (HCES) - have demonstrated financial distress among working class Indians. Multiple data sources, including the Government's own official statistics, have even shown clear evidence that workers can buy less today than they could 10 years ago, he said.

"Labour Bureau's Wage Rate Index (Government Data): Real wages for labourers stagnated between 2014-2023, and in fact declined between 2019-2024. Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Statistics at a Glance (Government Data): Under Dr Manmohan Singh, real wages for agricultural labourers grew at 6.8% each year. Under Mr. Modi, real wages for agricultural labourers declined by minus 1.3% each year," he



said.

Citing periodic labour force survey series, Ramesh said average real earnings over time have stagnated between 2017 and 2022 across all employment types - salaried workers, casual workers, and self-employed workers. Citing Centre for Labour Research and Action data, he said real wages of brick kiln workers have stagnated or declined between 2014 and 2022.

Brick kilns involve intensive labour and are a low-paying work of last resort for India's poorest, he added. "In my intervention on the Finance Bill in the Rajya Sabha on August 8, 2024, I had asked four straight questions on the state of the economy," he said.

"The non-biological PM hasn't yet broken his silence on them, so they are worth repeating: Why does private investment continue to be sluggish? Why has the private sector's share in overall investment declined to its lowest level in four years?" Ramesh said.

"Why is consumption growth so weak and why did private final consumption expenditure - the largest component of the GDP - grew at only around 4% in FY24," he asked. Why are real wages and incomes stagnant or falling, Ramesh further asked. "Why has manufacturing as percentage of GDP fallen from 16.5% in UPA to 14.5%? Why has this decline been particularly sharp in labour-intensive manufacturing like textiles? Why have India's garment exports fallen from USD 15 billion in 2013-14 to USD 14.5 billion in 2023-2024?" the Congress leader said.

# Opp slams Govt's new unified pension scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Union Cabinet approved a new Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) for Central Government employees, Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge hit out at the move, saying 'U' in UPS stands for the 'U-turns' that the Narendra Modi-led Government takes on various issues.

Fulfilling long pending demands of Government employees ahead of Assembly elections in Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra and Jharkhand, the Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS), which assures

guaranteed pension. The dissatisfaction among some Government employees was noticeable during the Lok Sabha polls, although it was less pronounced than in state elections.

Observers suggested that this discontent could be influential in upcoming election battles.

Taking a dig at the Government, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said, "The 'U' in UPS stands for Modi Govt's U turns! Post June 4, the power of the people has prevailed over the arrogance of power of the Prime Minister." "Rollback in the budget regarding Long Term Capital Gain/Indexation. Sending Waqf Bill to JPC. Rollback of Broadcast Bill. Rollback of Lateral Entry," Kharge said.



"We will keep ensuring accountability and protect 140 crore Indians from this despotic Government!" the Congress chief said in his post on X.

The new pension scheme also guarantees an assured minimum pension of Rs 10,000 per month on

superannuation after a minimum of 10 years of service. This option scheme will benefit 23 lakh central Government employees, he said, adding that the number would rise to 90 lakh if state Governments want to join the scheme.

Announcing other features of UPS, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had said an assured family pension will be provided to the spouse of a deceased employee. In addition, there would be inflation indexation on assured pension, assured family pension, and assured minimum pension.

With the addition of all these features, it marks the transformation of the National Pension System (NPS), which promised

pensions based on the contribution made by employees and the Government.

The announcement came against the backdrop of several non-BJP states deciding to revert to the DA-linked Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and employee organisations in some other States raising demand for the same.

Although the Government asserts that the announcement is not politically motivated, political experts suggest that its timing, just weeks before multiple state Assembly elections, is not a mere coincidence.

Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Haryana, and Jammu and Kashmir will all go to the polls in the coming weeks.

# 'Bigger intention' of grabbing land, threatening Assamese identity behind crimes against women: CM

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has claimed that the recent incidents of crimes against women in the state are being committed with a "bigger intention of grabbing land and threatening the identity of the Assamese people". He hinted at 'political patronage' behind the crimes, while also claiming that financial power is shifting out of the hands of the Assamese people. "No society is perfect. Crimes against women are a reality. These crimes had come down in the state in the last three years. But the real intention in the recent incidents is much bigger, through crimes such as rape the target is our land, civilisation," Sarma said at a press interaction late on

Saturday evening. "In Assam, this design is on for the last 30-35 years. That is why the Assam Agitation happened. We have identified the radicals now, but in 1975 itself, the Assamese society was warned that this would happen," he said, referring to the six-year-long movement from 1979 against illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Claiming that a "big conspiracy of grabbing land" is being hatched through such crimes, Sarma said, "The survivor's family in Dhing told me that they don't want to stay there anymore... People sell off their property and leave for other places. For a plot of land worth Rs 5 lakh, they are offered Rs 50 lakh." A 14-year-old girl was allegedly raped by three persons in Nagaon's Dhing area on



Thursday evening, with the incident sparking widespread protests. One of the accused was arrested by the police the next day, but he died when he jumped into a pond while purportedly trying to escape from custody. Sarma claimed that there is a "pattern" in which first, one or two persons enter and set up their houses in a village, then they start eating beef in their homes and neighbours, uncomfortable with it, start leaving the area. "It is happening in Barpeta, Mangaldai and other places. Previous chief ministers didn't say these things, but I have said it. There could be threat to my life someday, but I am saying it as it is my duty," Sarma asserted. "It is all a game of money. Financial power is shifting out

of the hands of Assamese people. They are taking advantage of it," he said, without naming any community. He claimed that criminals get the services of the best of lawyers in the court as the "community comes out for them", but the victims' families don't get such good lawyers due to financial constraints and that "nobody comes for us". The CM said the government has brought laws now to protect lands in certain areas and he had deputed cabinet minister Pijush Hazarika to the Dhing incident site to discuss with locals how the village, inhabited by the Scheduled Caste community, can be "protected". Sarma said, "I feel that if there is no political patronage, such incidents will decrease. But when political patronage is

there, social media posts are made in support of them, criminals get courage and such incidents increase." He said the government will take "tough decisions and measures" to curb these crimes, and sought public support in this regard. "To ensure that such crimes don't recur in the future, the society needs to be united and support the tough steps taken by the government," he added. The chief minister also urged the public not to take the law into their hands and adopt a peaceful approach. "If the Assamese society is united, there will be no problem. But if it is divided, it will be weakened. The Dhing incident is not only about rape, Assamese people are being terrorised so that they leave their land," he claimed.

## BJP-DMK enacting 'drama' of rivalry, maintaining discreet ties: AIADMK chief

PTI ■ SALEM (TAMIL NADU)

AIADMK general secretary and Tamil Nadu Leader of Opposition, Edappadi K Palaniswami on Sunday alleged the BJP and the ruling DMK in the state were "enacting a drama" vis-a-vis their rivalry, but were maintaining discreet ties. Keeping up the heat over the ruling DMK over the Karunanidhi centenary commemorative coin release event, he questioned Chief Minister M K Stalin's contention that it was a central government event and reiterated that the state government conducted the programme. "The state government emblem is there in the invitation card that I received. The State Chief Secretary has issued it. It is a state government event," he told reporters here. The programme held last week saw the participation of



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Minister L Murugan and state BJP chief K Annamalai and some other party leaders, he said without naming them. While the DMK is part of the INDIA bloc, neither Congress' Sonia Gandhi, her son Rahul Gandhi nor other party leaders were invited for the event, Palaniswami said and alleged that the DMK was trying to save its "corrupt gov-

ernment" in the state by ensuring the Centre's support. "To hide all these and to ensure Centre's support, a union minister (Rajnath) was invited and made to release the coin. If we say this, DMK gets angry, BJP leaders also get angry. The DMK is part of the INDIA bloc. Ignoring that, what is the reason to include NDA, that is what people are asking. And I only

highlighted this," the former chief minister said. To a question, he alleged that the BJP and the DMK were "enacting a drama," as if they were rivals. "Outwardly it looks like they are rivals. But the DMK and BJP have discreet ties," he said and wondered what action has been taken against the Stalin government despite "corruption list" being submitted to the Governor against the government, he said in an apparent reference to the saffron party knocking at the doors of the Raj Bhavan with such complaints. Palaniswami also launched an attack against Annamalai, especially slamming him for certain remarks made against the AIADMK founder and late chief minister M G Ramachandran, fondly addressed as MGR. On Annamalai's criticism of the previous AIADMK government, the LoP asked if things were alright when the two parties were in an

alliance. "He had criticised our rule. Didn't you realise that when you were part of the alliance and contested the assembly polls in 2021. You (Annamalai) lost in your own constituency. (BJP) wanted AIADMK for ensuring passage of various bills in the Rajya Sabha. The AIADMK was fine then and looks bad now? This is BJP's duplicity," Palaniswami charged. He said that despite a lack of revenue during the Covid-19 pandemic, the then AIADMK government implemented a lot of schemes and did not levy taxes. Further, what schemes did Annamalai bring to Tamil Nadu ever since he took over, despite promising 100 schemes in 500 days if the BJP was voted to power, he asked in an apparent reference to the BJP state chief's poll-time promise made this year as the party's Coimbatore Lok Sabha candidate.

## Yogi calls for grand Janmashtami celebrations across UP

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday directed authorities to ensure that the holy festival of Sri Krishna Janmashtami is celebrated grandly across the state, including all reserve police lines, police stations, and prisons. According to a press statement, the chief minister has emphasized the need for robust security, cleanliness, and logistical arrangements during the Krishna Leela events, tableaux, and processions. Furthermore, he has ordered the deployment of adequate police forces at crowded locations to ensure public safety. In line with these directives, DG Jail Rama Shastri of the Uttar Pradesh Prison Administration and Reform Services has issued orders to celebrate Sri Krishna



Janmashtami in all state prisons. Adityanath issued necessary guidelines to the officials regarding the festival. He pointed out that conflicts often arise over the decoration of tableaux, disagreements over procession routes, and the organization of non-traditional events. He directed the officials to prevent any such disputes during the festivities. Additionally, the use of loudspeakers during processions,

particularly when they pass near religious sites of other communities, has previously led to controversies. To avoid such situations, Adityanath instructed that all necessary arrangements be made with sensitivity, according to the press statement released. He also mandated the videography of processions for security purposes, ensuring that all CCTV cameras along the procession routes and at event venues were operational. Drone cameras should be deployed to monitor key sensitive areas, the statement read. Highlighting the large-scale programs held at Police Lines and ISKCON temples across districts, where a significant number of devotees, including women, children, and the elderly, participate, he called for effective security measures and traffic management by district officials to ensure the safe conduct of these events.

## Telangana Cyber Security Bureau arrests two persons for ₹175 crore fraud using 'mule accounts'

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Cyber Security Bureau on Sunday said it has arrested two persons here for their alleged involvement in a Rs 175 crore scam wherein transactions pertaining to cyber fraud was done through six bank accounts. Cyber Security Bureau personnel arrested the two persons on Saturday and a case was registered under relevant sections of the IT Act and BNS, a release from Telangana Police said. The Cyber Security Bureau's data analysis team detected numerous complaints reported on the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) against six bank accounts in a bank at Shamsheergunj here and upon careful verification, it was revealed that large sums of money were transacted



through these accounts within a short period of two months between March and April 2024, it said. The account holders were suspected of being involved in large-scale cyber fraud and it was found that approximately 600 complaints are linked to these accounts. The main fraudster, operating from Dubai, and his five associates were actively involved in

luring poor people into opening bank accounts and supplying them for use in cyber crimes and hawala operations on a commission basis, police said. Following the main fraudster's directions, the arrested accused and other associates convinced some poor individuals to open six current accounts in the bank's Shamsheergunj branch in February this year, luring them

with commissions. In March and April, significant transactions occurred in these six accounts, totalling approximately Rs 175 crores, police said. After opening the accounts, the signatures of the account holders were obtained on cheques, which were then kept in the custody of one of the associates, police said. Some of the money was sent to Dubai through cryptocurrency. The associates withdrew the money following the directions of the main fraudster and distributed it to various individuals through his agents, police added. Police cautioned the public not to open bank accounts for someone else or engage in suspicious transactions. "If you have already opened a mule account, report it to 1930 or cybercrime.Gov.In," the release added.

## Will crush lake encroachments with iron hand: Telangana CM

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

A day after authorities demolished a convention centre here co-owned by actor Nagarjuna, Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said his government would not spare those who encroached upon lakes and also cracked down on such activities even if they are influential in the society. Speaking at a function by the Hare Krishna Movement, Reddy said he would follow the preaching of Lord Krishna which proclaims that for the good of the people, one should follow Dharma in order to defeat Adharma through a fight. Officials of Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency (HYDRAA), GHMC, Town planning, irrigation and revenue departments on



Saturday removed encroachments in the Full Tank Level of the / Buffer zones of Tammidikunta lake and amongst the many structures removed, N-Convention co-owned by Nagarjuna was also one of the unauthorised structures. The N-Convention is built in the FTL / Buffer zone and has no building permis-

sion whatsoever, a government release said. "That is the reason despite pressures, though (some of our) friends have farmhouses, the HYDRAA was created (for protecting lakes and government properties). I want to do some good to the people as part of that. The sole objective is to liber-

ate these lakes from the encroachers. We will crush encroachments with an iron hand. Though there are pressures, we will not go back and we will remove those encroachments," the CM asserted. Lakes are part of Indian culture and people depend on them for livelihood. He also said some of the farmhouses built near lakes release sewer into drinking water bodies such as Gandipet which supply drinking water to parts of the city. He further said he will not be a true public representative if he failed to protect the lakes and interests of people. The city's chain of lakes were designed by the erstwhile Nizam administration after a great deluge in 1908 with the help of famous engineer M o k s h a g u n d a m Vishveswaraya.

## Chirag re-elected LJP (Ram Vilas) chief, pitches for caste census

PTI ■ RANCHI

Union minister Chirag Paswan was on Sunday re-elected as Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) president for five years at its national executive meeting here. The decision was taken unanimously at the meeting, Paswan said. "The national executive, in its meeting here, has re-elected me for the next five years," he said. Paswan, the Minister of Food Processing Industries, said the upcoming assembly elections in Haryana, Jammu Kashmir and Jharkhand were also discussed in the meeting. In Jharkhand, the party may contest the polls either with national alliance partner BJP or on its own, he said. "We have taken suggestions from the state units whether they want to contest the elections in alliance or alone in states where our organisation is strong... At the national level, we have an alliance with the BJP and we are a strong coalition partner of the NDA. "In the 2014 elections, we had a tie-up with the BJP for vid-



hansabha polls in Jharkhand and contested the Shikaripara seat. If there is a respectable seat-sharing, we may go with an alliance or else we can go alone in the polls," Paswan said. Assembly polls are due in Jharkhand later this year. He also pitched for a nationwide caste census, but cautioned against making the figures public as it will create

a "rift" in society. "We have always emphasised that we want the caste census to be conducted... It will ensure that the government has correct numbers. However, I do not want the figures of the census to come out in public. That may create a rift," said the minister, whose late father Ram Vilas Paswan was among the tallest Dalit leaders of the

country. He also said a special resolution was passed at the national executive meeting to extend a motion of thanks to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his welfare initiatives and work towards the SC-ST community. Commenting on the creamy layer in SC community, he said: "We have been opposed to it since they are not just

victims of social and educational backwardness, but even untouchability". Paswan said even after so many years of Independence, Dalit grooms are prevented from riding a horse during weddings, and "I even learnt about an IPS officer seeking security for his marriage". "Even today we hear that members of the Dalit community cannot enter temples... The observation of the Supreme Court did not have any mention of untouchability. The PM has also said that as per constitutional norms, the provisions for SCs would continue," he said. Earlier this month, a seven-judge bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud ruled in a 6:1 majority judgement that state governments were permitted to sub-classify communities within the SC list based on empirical data. Supreme Court judge Justice B R Gavai had said that states must evolve a policy for identifying the creamy layer even among the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Schedule Tribes (ST) and deny them the benefit of reservation.

## HP Govt announces scheme to aid vulnerable women, differently-abled in raising children

PTI ■ SHIMLA

The Himachal Pradesh government on Sunday announced the launch of 'Mukhya Mantri Sukh Shiksha Yojana', aiming to provide enhanced support to widows, destitute and divorced women, and differently-abled parents in raising and educating their children. The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, according to a statement. Under this scheme, eligible children will receive a monthly grant of Rs 1,000 for their educational, health and nutritional needs until they are aged 18, the release said. Additionally, the scheme will offer financial assistance for their higher education, covering course fees and hostel expenses for undergraduate, post-graduate, diploma, and vocational courses, it added. The timeline of the scheme's implementation is yet to be announced. The cabinet also approved a 50 percent subsidy for the purchase of e-taxis under the Rajiv

Gandhi Swarozgar Start-Up Yojana-2023, to be provided within three months after the deposit of 10 percent margin money and the disbursement of the loan installment by the bank. To implement the scheme, UCO bank has been designated as the nodal bank for sanctioning loans, whereas HP State Cooperative Bank, Jogindra Central Cooperative Bank and Kangra Central Cooperative Bank have been designated as preferred banks. The candidates will be offered loans at an interest rate of 7.9 per cent per annum. The cabinet also gave its nod to a six-month age relaxation for students already enrolled in nursery, LKG, and UKG during the 2023-24 academic year, allowing them to advance to the next higher classes up to Class I. In another decision taken at the meeting, the monthly charges for concessional travel in HRTC buses will be increased from Rs 110 to Rs 500 for police personnel up to the rank of inspector, jail officials (from jail warden to executive staff of non-gazetted rank), and security guards of the state secretariat,

the statement said. The cabinet also approved the establishment of a new sub-divisional police office at Dadasiba, a police post at Alampur, and the up-gradation of Sansarpur Terrace Police Post and Moin Police Post to police stations in Kangra district, along with the creation of the necessary office positions to make these offices operational, it added. Among other decisions taken, the cabinet gave its nod to the opening of a new Jal Shakti Vibhag Circle at Dehra in Kangra district, along with the creation and filling of the required positions. The cabinet granted approval to fill the position of one assistant professor each in the ENT and psychiatry departments at Dr Yashwant Singh Parmar Government Medical College at Nahan in Sirmour district. Additionally, the purchase of 3 TESLA MRI machines was permitted for three medical colleges and hospitals to enhance patient care. The decision also included the provision of two electric vehicles each for emergency services at AIIMS Chamiani and IGMCI, Shimla, according to the release.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Peace mission

Prime Minister Modi's Visit to Ukraine is as much about peace as it is to establish India as a neutral country

On August 20, 2024, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a historic visit to Ukraine, marking a significant moment in the diplomatic relations between the two nations. This visit came amid ongoing conflict in the region. India and Ukraine have historically maintained cordial relations, with ties largely focused on economic cooperation, technical assistance, and cultural exchange. However, the backdrop of Modi's visit is the prolonged conflict between Ukraine and Russia, which has led to a significant humanitarian and geopolitical crisis. India has traditionally adhered to a neutral stance, emphasising dialogue and diplomacy. Modi's visit underscores a nuanced shift in India's approach, highlighting a deeper engagement with Ukraine amidst the ongoing conflict. Only a month before PM Modi had visited Russia much to the chargin of Kyiv. But his Ukraine visit in a way establishes India's neutral stance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has offered to help bring peace to Ukraine in a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. He also asked the Ukrainian President to sit down and talk to end the conflict. This is first ever visit of an Indian prime minister to Ukraine after two two countries established diplomatic relations in 1992.



The primary objectives of Modi's visit were multi-faceted. Modi aimed to bolster economic and strategic ties with Ukraine. Both countries have been exploring opportunities for collaboration in sectors such as technology, defense, and infrastructure. India has expressed support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Modi's visit included discussions on increasing humanitarian aid and rebuilding efforts in conflict-affected areas. Modi's presence in Ukraine served as a diplomatic gesture, reinforcing India's commitment to supporting peace and stability in Eastern Europe. This visit was also seen as a way to engage more actively in global diplomatic forums concerning the Ukraine crisis. During his visit, discussions focused on several key areas. Agreements were reached to enhance trade and investment, with India offering to share expertise in technology and infrastructure development. India pledged additional support for humanitarian efforts, including medical aid and assistance for displaced persons. Both nations agreed to increase strategic dialogues to address mutual concerns and foster closer cooperation in various international platforms. Modi's visit to Ukraine is a clear indicator of India's evolving foreign policy strategy. While maintaining its traditional stance of non-interference, India is positioning itself as a more proactive player in global diplomacy, particularly in regions affected by conflict. This visit also reflects India's broader ambition to balance its relations between major global powers and regional conflicts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit reflects a deeper engagement of India in global affairs, an attempt to counter China's growing influence.

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### PICTALK



Workers load heaps of straw on an autorickshaw, in Bardhaman.

# The US military inc: Profiting from war



SANTHOSH MATHEW

The American military-industrial complex, coined by President Eisenhower in 1961, has shaped US foreign policy and military strategy while perpetuating global conflicts

The American military-industrial complex, a term popularized by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his farewell address in 1961, refers to the synergistic relationship between a nation's armed forces, its defence industry, and its political establishment. This complex has played a pivotal role in shaping U.S. foreign policy and military strategy, leading to extensive global influence and numerous conflicts over the past century. While wars undoubtedly bring immense destruction and suffering, they have also generated substantial profits for certain American entities, fueling a cycle of conflict and economic gain. The roots of the American military-industrial complex can be traced back to World War II. The massive mobilization of resources for the war effort transformed the U.S. into a leading military power, with a robust defence industry emerging to meet the demands of the global conflict. Companies like Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and General Dynamics became integral to the war effort, producing aircraft, ships, and weapons on an unprecedented scale. Post-World War II, the geopolitical landscape underwent significant changes. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union necessitated a perpetual state of military readiness, leading to sustained government investment in defence. This period saw the establishment of a permanent arms industry and the proliferation of defence contractors, further entrenching the military-industrial complex in the American economy and politics.



of a pattern where military engagements, often initiated under the guise of ideological battles, served to bolster the defence industry. The Vietnam War (1955-1975) further exemplified this, as it became one of the most prolonged and controversial conflicts in American history. The war generated vast profits for defence contractors but at the cost of immense human suffering and domestic turmoil. The Cold War Era: Sustained Conflict and Profiteering. Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. participated in numerous proxy wars and military interventions, from Latin America to the Middle East. The Cuban Missile Crisis, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the support for anti-communist regimes across the globe underscored America's commitment to combating Soviet influence. Each conflict provided a pretext for increased military spending and innovation in weapons technology, ensuring continued profits for the defence industry. One of the most significant developments during this period was the arms race, characterized by the rapid development and stockpiling of nuclear weapons. The doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD) necessitated a continuous enhancement of the U.S. nuclear arsenal,



THE GULF WAR (1990-1991) SHOWCASED AMERICA'S TECHNOLOGICAL MILITARY PROWESS AND REAFFIRMED THE COUNTRY'S COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING ITS INTERESTS IN THE OIL-RICH MIDDLE EAST

benefiting companies involved in nuclear weapons production. This period also saw advancements in missile technology, stealth aircraft, and other sophisticated weaponry, all funded by the American taxpayer. The end of the Cold War did not diminish the influence of the military-industrial complex. Instead, new threats emerged, and the complex adapted accordingly. The Gulf War (1990-1991) showcased America's technological military prowess and reaffirmed the country's commitment to protecting its interests in the oil-rich Middle East. Defence contractors reaped substantial profits from the war, supplying everything from precision-guided munitions to advanced combat systems. The attacks on September 11, 2001, marked the beginning of the War on Terror, a prolonged conflict that further solidified the military-industrial complex's grip on American foreign policy. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq resulted in a dramatic surge in defence spending, with companies like Halliburton and Blackwater (now Academi) securing lucrative contracts for reconstruction and security services. In recent years, the military-industrial complex has contin-

ued to thrive, driven by ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, rising tensions with Russia and China, and the global war on terrorism. The U.S. defence budget remains the largest in the world, with substantial funds allocated to developing next-generation weapons systems and maintaining a vast network of military bases. The recent assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, former Prime Minister of Palestine and head of Hamas, by Israel in Iran, with American support, underscores the enduring influence of the military-industrial complex. This act, and the subsequent American military buildup in the region, exemplifies how geopolitical manoeuvres often serve dual purposes: advancing strategic interests and ensuring continued profits for the defence industry. As Eisenhower warned, "In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex." This cautionary message remains as relevant today as it was over six decades ago, reminding us of the intricate and often perilous relationship between war, politics, and profit. (The writer is an assistant professor at Pondicherry University; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Urban flooding must be checked



propos article, "Monsoon mayhem: Tackling urban flooding", published on August 23, this is my response. The global surge in urban flooding has brought a daunting challenge for cities worldwide, necessitating urgent attention to tackle this issue through meticulous urban planning and innovative infrastructure design. It is not only the event of flooding, but the secondary effects of exposure to infection that have a toll on human life, livelihood, and property. The impact of urban flooding is wide-

spread, including temporary relocation of people, damage to civic amenities, deterioration of water quality, and risk of epidemics. It was mostly stated that the areas lying in the flood plains are prone to floods, but urban floods have changed this notion. Urban flooding disrupts the normal working of the city by damaging water supply, sewerage, power transmission lines, communication, transportation and infrastructure. Sustainable solutions, such as green infrastructure, geospatial technology, flood governance, stormwater management, and collaboration and awareness, are needed to tackle the menace of urban flooding. A thorough knowledge and understanding of the causes and effects of flood impacts and the adoption and development of measures to mitigate these impacts must be part of a comprehensive urban development plan.

Ranganathan sivakumar | Chennai

#### DON'T MAKE PATIENTS SUFFER

Madam — I support the movement against the criminal or criminals who killed the trainee doctor at the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, but I cannot support the cease-work by the doctors. I fail to understand why innocent patients are made to suffer to the extreme. The pictures of untreated patients in pain have raised many questions. Why should they bear the burnt of the strike? What is their fault? Earlier, while passing directions to the CBI and the State of West Bengal, the Supreme Court only appealed to the striking doctors to resume work. But it cut no ice. On Thursday, the apex court again nudged the striking doctors to resume work for the sake of the patients. But the status quo is still being maintained. Are the poor patients simply pawns in the tussle? The doctors can continue their protests even after resuming work. The Supreme Court says that no coercive action shall be taken against the doctors as long as the protests are peaceful. Given the patients are made to suffer from violence within, the protests can no longer be termed as peaceful.

Sujit De | Kolkata

#### START PREPARING FOR NEXT OLYMPICS

Madam — All other nations have started preparation for the next Olympics, international sports events with renewed vigour. India is still in blame-game, scapegoat, harm, negative network, interference, discourage, devilish activities. Issuing discouraging statements in the media on how many crores spent on Paris Olympics-2024 preparation for months. Sports win depends on "luck of the day" is well known. First and foremost, India must shed its third world mind set. Replace negative devilish qualities - discouraging - harmful tendencies with encouragement, scientific happy development management and latest technology usage (for

## Uniform Civil Code: A step towards a secular legal system



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

PM Modi, reignites the debate on the Uniform Civil Code calling for a law that would apply equally to all citizens, regardless of religion

The BJP-led NDA government, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, did not implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) during its previous tenure. The UCC is a proposed law that would apply uniformly to all religious communities on personal matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption. After major ideological milestones such as the abolition of Article 370 and the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the UCC became viewed as the final step in the BJP and the Sangh's agenda leading up to the 2024 general elections. On Independence Day, from the Red Fort, PM Modi emphasized the need for a secular civil code, arguing that laws dividing the country along religious lines should be abolished. He called the current legal framework a "communal civil code" and highlighted the importance of transitioning to a more inclusive and secular version that aligns with modern societal values. Addressing the nation, he called on the citizens of India to engage in debate, insisting



that communal and discriminatory laws have no place in the country. From the outset, party and government sources have indicated that the BJP aimed to keep the UCC in public discourse. This sentiment was echoed during a Bhopal rally on June 23, 2023, where PM Modi suggested that the implementation of the UCC might be on the horizon. Top officials, however, emphasized that the law would require extensive research and consultation. The Sangh Parivar believes that states can take the initiative to implement the UCC. Several BJP-ruled states, including Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat, have begun exploring this. Assam's Chief

Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, confirmed plans to introduce laws targeting child marriage and polygamy. He added that Assam would adopt and modify the Uttarakhand model according to local needs. The political landscape surrounding the UCC has been contentious, and it has already been implemented in Uttarakhand as of March this year, likely influencing subsequent elections. Nevertheless, BJP sources acknowledge the complexities surrounding the UCC. Tribal marital practices, diverse inheritance laws, and regional variations are significant hurdles. Modi reiterated from the Red Fort that the Supreme Court has repeatedly discussed the need for a UCC, which many believe would address the communal nature of the current civil code. According to government sources, however, the UCC presents far greater challenges than issues like Article 370 or triple talaq, as it affects various social and cultural groups across India. The process of drafting the UCC would require far-reaching consultations and deep research.

One BJP functionary noted that codifying the UCC, unlike the Indian Penal Code, would be difficult due to the cultural diversity among tribal groups across regions. The UCC debate is viewed as a positive step toward creating a more uniform legal system, especially concerning women's rights. The Sangh Parivar, too, has expressed concerns, with the RSS-affiliated Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram advocating for the exclusion of tribal groups from the UCC. Meanwhile, the BJP has encouraged these communities to submit their concerns to the Law Commission, urging them not to be swayed by social media debates. The essence of the UCC, as explained by PM Modi, is to have a single law applicable to all citizens of India, regardless of religion, caste, or gender, in matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. This is outlined in Article 44 of the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution, which tasks the government with the responsibility of implementing such a code. (The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

### LIVE IN THE PRESENT MOMENT, IT MATTERS MOST

Understanding and managing stress effectively is essential for a healthier life



RADHANATH SWAMI MAHARAJ

God is often perceived as invisible, impartial & incomprehensible. Some imagine Him as a distant figure, high in the clouds, old & angry, hurling thunderbolts at us for our oversight in following His commandments. While many view God merely as a cosmic order supplier, providing for our sustenance & working out our desires behind the screens. Cultural understandings about God create a vivid but confused picture, leading many in the current generation to turn to spirituality without engaging in traditional religion.

The term "religion" itself, derived from the Latin "re-ligare," means reconnection with the Supreme Lord. However, common conceptions of God—as an empty vacuum, an outburst of floodlight, or an angry old man—do not suggest any possibility of a relationship with God.

The ancient wisdom of yoga forms the basis of spiritual science—the Bhagavad Gita as recorded 120 million years back imparted by the Supreme Lord Krsna to the sun deity—Vivasvan (BG 4.01). Therein Lord emphatically states his position ("aham sarvaysa prabhava") He is omnipresent, ("mayadhyaksena prakriti") the entire universe functions under his supervision, ("Upadrsta anumanta ca") He is manifest as the guardian spirit in everyone's heart—as the Paramatma, ("brmhano hi pratistham") He is the source of the spiritual effulgence, ("tani aham veda sarvani") He is omniscient, as he reiterates the same message to Arjuna 5000 years back, that he imparted to Vivasvan 120 million years ago. Furthermore, Krsna informs Arjuna about the secret of his appearance ("janma karma ca me divyam") from the spiritual world to reclaim



the seekers & whoever learns about it & strives to perfect their lives. Such profound wisdom makes us aware of God's greatness not merely as a concept or an infirm old man retired from the scene of creation. Rather a God who works diligently in the background & also frequently tours to his creation beaconing every individual to rekindle spiritual wisdom. To instil faith in his devotees, Lord Krishna descended on Janmashtami in the prison cell of His uncle Kamsa. Kamsa imprisoned his sister Devaki & brother-in-law Vasudeva due to an ominous mystical prediction that declared that the 8th son of Devaki would end his evil attitude. Thus fearful of his death, Kamsa instantly arrested his newlywed sister & brother-in-law. Kamsa represents the atheistic mindset that abuses power to dominate & replace Godliness in society.

One of the central purposes of Krsna's descent is to discipline such atheists who have removed God from the equation (BG 4.07). He disciplined Kamsa and subsequently helped Arjuna neutralize the egomaniac prince Duryodhan, who had usurped the kingdom from the righteous Pandavas. Lord Krishna's greatness is revealed in His purpose to bring order to society by establishing the virtues of Godliness. The ancient 'yoga of bhakti' reveals the sweetest & most refined means to connect with God i.e. through love.

Vrindavan is where He manifests His eternal pastimes—beckoning every seeker—an invitation to the spiritual world. The same Lord Krsna who revealed his Virat-rupa the gigantic universal form to Arjuna enacted as a helpless child (in Vrindavan) tearful & fearful when mother Yasoda chased & bound him by the rope due to His childhood mischief. The same Lord Krsna who lifted Govardhan hill with the tip of His finger, (in Vrindavan) failed to defeat his friends in the tug-of-war games. By Celebrating Janmashtami, devotees reaffirm their faith, deepen their spiritual connection, and draw inspiration from the life and teachings of Lord Krishna. It is a reminder of the presence of divinity in our lives and the eternal principles of dharma that guide us towards righteousness and spiritual fulfillment. Let us celebrate Janmashtami not just as a ritual, but as an opportunity to connect to the supreme Lord Krishna spiritually.

(The author is the Spiritual Guru of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness; views expressed are personal)

# Securing the women dignity on the internet



RENNIE JOYY

With threats ranging from deepfake exploitation to harassment on gaming platforms there is urgent need to safeguard women's rights online



Protecting Women's Rights in the Digital Age By - Dr Rennie Joyy, Founder of Aalekh Foundation

In the digital age, the internet has become an indispensable tool for communication, education, and empowerment. However, for many women, it has also become a dangerous space with cyber harassment and online abuse rife. In India, the proliferation of digital platforms has led to a worrying increase in gender-based violence online, with recent trends revealing more insidious forms of harassment that demand urgent attention. India's legal system has made some progress in addressing cyber harassment, but there is still a long way to go.

The Information Technology Act, of 2000, alongside the Indian Penal Code (IPC), provides the legal foundation for prosecuting cybercrimes, including harassment. However, the enforcement of these laws is often inconsistent, and the existing provisions do not fully address the nuances of newer forms of cyber harassment, such as deepfakes and abuse on gaming platforms. Moreover, the process of reporting and prosecuting these crimes remains cumbersome.

Victims often face significant hurdles, including a lack of awareness about their rights, societal stigma, and unresponsive law enforcement agencies. The borderless nature of the internet further complicates matters, as perpetrators can easily evade legal consequences by operating from different jurisdictions.

**The expanding tentacles of cyber harassment:** Cyber harassment in India has taken on new dimensions, with perpetrators using increasingly sophisticated methods to target women. Traditional forms of online abuse—such as stalking, trolling, and doxing—remain prevalent. However, the advent of new technologies has introduced more dangerous threats, including the use of deepfake technology. Deepfakes are hyper-realistic, digitally manipulated videos or images that can make it appear as though a person is saying or doing something they never did. In recent times, this technology has been weaponised against women, with perpetrators creating and sharing deepfake



THE DIGITAL AGE OFFERS IMMENSE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN, BUT IT ALSO PRESENTS SIGNIFICANT RISKS. PROTECTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS ONLINE REQUIRES A CONCERTED EFFORT FROM ALL STAKEHOLDERS

pornography without the victims' consent. This form of cyber harassment is particularly devastating, as it not only violates the victim's privacy but also damages their reputation, leading to severe emotional and psychological trauma. In 2020, India saw a surge in deepfake-related crimes, with several women finding themselves targeted by fake explicit videos circulated on social media. The difficulty in proving the falsity of these videos adds another layer of complexity, leaving victims with limited avenues for legal recourse. Although Sections 66E and 67A of the Information Technology Act, of 2000 cover the transmission of obscene material and violations of privacy, the law is still catching up with the rapid advancements in deepfake technology, and enforcement remains a significant challenge.

**Harassment on online gaming platforms:** Another concerning trend is the rise of cyber harassment on online gaming platforms. These platforms, often perceived as spaces for entertainment and community, have increasingly become hotbeds for toxic behaviour and online abuse. In many instances, female gamers are subjected to sexual harassment, including rape threats and abusive language, often from anonymous players. In India, while the gaming community is growing rapidly, there is a lack of specific laws addressing online harassment within these platforms. This gap in regulation means that many women are left vulnerable to abuse, with little recourse for protection or justice. The National Commission for Women (NCW) has acknowledged the issue, but more comprehensive policies and industry standards are needed to tackle this emerging threat. Role of tech companies and gaming platforms

companies, including social media platforms and gaming companies, bear a significant responsibility in protecting users from online abuse. While major social media platforms have implemented policies against harassment, their enforcement is often inconsistent, allowing harmful content to proliferate. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, introduced by the Indian government, aims to hold these platforms more accountable by urging them to remove unlawful content and safeguard user privacy. However, the efficacy of these guidelines is still in question, as the sheer volume of content and the evolving nature of cyber threats present significant challenges. Online gaming platforms, in particular, need to adopt stricter community guidelines and reporting mechanisms to prevent harassment and abuse. Developers and platform operators must prioritise user safety, implementing robust systems to detect and respond to incidents of online harassment effectively.

**Empowering women digitally:** Empowering women to protect themselves online is crucial in combating cyber harassment. Digital literacy programs that teach women how to safeguard their privacy, recognise and report abuse, and navigate online spaces safely are essential. **Initiatives like Cyber Saathi and She:** The People are making strides in this area, providing resources and education to women across India. Support networks and helplines also play a critical role. The National Commission for Women (NCW) has launched several initiatives, including a 24/7 helpline, to assist women facing online abuse. However, ensuring these resources are accessible to all women, including those in rural

and remote areas, remains a challenge.

**Global collaboration and community initiatives:** Addressing cyber harassment requires international collaboration, as online abuse often transcends national borders. India's participation in global dialogues on cybercrime is crucial, but more robust cooperation with other countries and international organisations is needed to effectively combat cross-border cyber harassment.

Community-based initiatives are also vital. Movements like #MeToo and #GirlsAtDhabas have demonstrated the power of collective action in raising awareness and advocating for change. Localised efforts, such as workshops, community discussions, and advocacy campaigns, can help create safer digital spaces for women.

**Looking ahead:** The digital age offers immense opportunities for women, but it also presents significant risks. Protecting women's rights online requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders—governments, tech companies, civil society, and individuals.

By addressing the evolving threats of cyber harassment, including deepfakes and online abuse on gaming platforms, we can create a safer, more inclusive digital environment that empowers women to fully participate in all aspects of society. Balancing the protection of women's rights with the preservation of free speech will be a key challenge in the years to come. However, by taking a comprehensive approach that includes legal reforms, tech accountability, education, and community support, we can make significant strides in protecting women's rights in the digital age.

(The writer is Founder Aalekh Foundation; views expressed are personal)

# Space-tech to improve logistics and supply chain management in indian scenario

As the country makes strides in space exploration, these technologies will play a critical role in economic growth writes Prof Manoj K Tiwari and Dr Rofin T M

Logistics and supply chain management are crucial foundations of the Indian economy, guaranteeing the effective movement of products, services, and individuals throughout the nation. The Indian government has effectively reduced the logistics GDP from 14% to around 7.8% to 8.9% through the implementation of programs such as Bharat Mala, Sagarmala, and PM Gati Shakti schemes. The recent triumph of Chandrayan-3 holds the potential to greatly augment the capabilities of Indian space technology. The successful mission has enhanced the existing capabilities of space technology, such as satellite navigation systems, remote

sensing, satellite communication, and web geographic information systems (GIS). The Global Positioning System (GPS) is a satellite-based radio navigation system used to communicate worldwide geographic location data. The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) has created its own regional satellite navigation system called NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation). NavIC is designed to offer accurate location data for both domestic and regional purposes. The constellation of seven satellites provides dependable positioning services not just within India but also to a substantial area spanning 1500 km outside its borders. GPS technology can be used to

trace recent wars between global countries or state boundaries that involve rivers, mountain ranges, and oceans. Surveyors employ the accuracy of absolute positions to create maps and establish property borders. It is possible to determine the optimal locations for facilities, allocate resources, establish warehouses, and identify suitable sites for multi-modal logistic parks and special economic zones. Telematics is a technology that combines GPS technology with computers and mobile communications networks to provide improved automobile navigation systems. The Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS) can be utilized to monitor the movement of ves-

sels and containers, providing information on their velocity, speed, direction, and position. This technology will significantly benefit the port and logistics industries. The subject of focus for worldwide governments in recent years is intelligent transportation systems for urban traffic management. The extensive utilization of GPS technology in automobiles presents a tremendous prospect to transform traffic management. Thousands of vehicles are sending real-time data from urban roads, including latitude, longitude, speed, and other pertinent metrics. The dynamic information can be utilized to facilitate various research and applications in Intelligent Transportation Systems, resulting in improved



traffic flow, reduced congestion, and strengthened safety procedures. Satellite-derived data can be used to exchange information between airport planners and managers and their counterparts at other agencies to expedite infrastructure development and urban planning activities in their respective regions. Remote sensing can be applied to evaluate the impact of landscape patterns, land use types, and increasing urban temper-

atures on urban thermal environments. This technology can assist army and police departments in tracking and tracing activities. Incorporate Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) into satellite systems for operations that go beyond the visual line of sight (BVLOS), such as covering terrestrial range and providing assistance in areas affected by natural disasters or prone to interruptions. Space Internet is a telecommunications service that utilizes satellites positioned in geostationary orbit, namely at a height of 35,786 kilometers above the Earth's surface. Unlike the constraints imposed by fiber-optic cables or wireless networks, these satellites in space possess the

capacity to surmount obstacles. Developed nations are utilizing space-based internet to acquire airborne laser scanning (ALS) data for the purpose of reconstructing railway overhead lines, hence providing reliable and secure transportation services. The implementation of satellite-based internet is essential for providing connectivity to remote places characterized by difficult topography, such as the Himalayas and isolated regions in the north-east. The integration of space technology into logistics and supply chain management offers India a pathway to achieving its vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat. By leveraging advancements in satellite navigation, remote sensing, satellite communica-

tion, and space internet, India can increase the efficiency, reliability, and resilience of its logistics networks. Space technology, including satellite communication, GPS and remote sensing, revolutionizes logistics by enhancing real-time tracking, optimizing routes, forecasting the weather to mitigate risks, and improving inventory management. Additionally, space tech enables global communication networks for seamless coordination and facilitates advanced geospatial analysis for supply chain management, enhancing adeptness and reducing costs across industries. (Prof Tiwari is Director, IIM Mumbai and Dr Rofin is faculty IIM Mumbai, views are personal)

# Rohingya refugees mark anniversary of their exodus, demand safe return to Myanmar

AP ■ COX'S BAZAR

Tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who live in sprawling camps in Bangladesh on Sunday marked the seventh anniversary of their mass exodus, demanding safe return to Myanmar's Rakhine state. The refugees gathered in an open field at Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar district carrying banners and festoons reading "Hope is Home" and "We Rohingya are the citizens of Myanmar," defying the rain on a day that is marked as "Rohingya Genocide Day." On August 25, 2017, hundreds of thousands of refugees started crossing the border to Bangladesh on foot and by boats amid indiscriminate killings and other violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state. Myanmar had launched a brutal crackdown following attacks

by an insurgent group on guard posts. The scale, organisation and ferocity of the operation led to accusations from the international community, including the UN, of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Then-Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ordered border guards to open the border, eventually allowing more than 700,000 refugees to take shelter in the Muslim-majority nation. The influx was in addition to the more than 300,000 refugees who had already been living in Bangladesh for decades in the wake of waves of previous violence perpetrated by Myanmar's military. Since 2017, Bangladesh has attempted at least twice to send the refugees back and has urged the international community to build pressure on Myanmar for a peaceful environment inside Myanmar that could help start

the repatriation. Hasina also sought help from China to mediate. But in the recent past, the situation in Rakhine state has become more volatile after a group called Arakan Army started fighting against Myanmar's security forces. The renewed chaos forced more refugees to flee toward Bangladesh and elsewhere in a desperate move to save their lives. Hundreds of Myanmar soldiers and border guards also took shelter inside Bangladesh to flee the violence, but Bangladesh later handed them over to Myanmar peacefully. As the protests took place in camps in Bangladesh on Sunday, the United Nations and other rights groups expressed their concern over the ongoing chaos in Myanmar. Washington-based Refugees International in a statement on Sunday described the sce-

nario. "In Rakhine state, increased fighting between Myanmar's military junta and the AA (Arakan Army) over the past year has both caught Rohingya in the middle and seen them targeted. The AA has advanced and burned homes in Buthidaung, Maungdaw, and other towns, recently using drones to bomb villages," it said. "The junta has forcibly recruited Rohingya and bombed villages in retaliation. Tens of thousands of Rohingya have been newly displaced, including several who have tried to flee into Bangladesh," it said. UNICEF said that the agency received alarming reports that civilians, particularly children and families, were being targeted or caught in the crossfire, resulting in deaths and severe injuries, making humanitarian access in Rakhine extremely challenging.

# California sees a summer of extremes, from heatwaves and wildfires to snow

AP ■ SACRAMENTO (US)

An unusually cold weather system from the Gulf of Alaska interrupted summer along the West Coast on Saturday, bringing snow to Washington state's Mount Rainier and a national park in Northern California, causing authorities to close part of a highway that runs through the park. Parts of Highway 89 through Lassen Volcanic National Park in California were closed Saturday after an estimated three inches of snow fell overnight, according to the National Weather Service. Photos posted by the National Weather Service and local authorities showed a white-covered peak from Rainier and a dusting of snow at Minaret Vista, a lookout point southeast of Yosemite National Park in California's Sierra

Nevada. Madera County Deputy Sheriff Larry Rich said it was "definitely unexpected" to see snow at Minaret Vista in August. "It's not every day you get to spend your birthday surrounded by a winter wonderland in the middle of summer," he said in a statement. "It made for a day I won't soon forget, and a unique reminder of why I love serving in this area. It's just one of those moments that makes working up here so special." In northern Nevada, rain fell Saturday in the runup to the annual Burning Man festival, prompting organizers to close the entrance gate for most of Saturday before reopening. Torrential rains upended last year's festival, turning the celebration and its temporary city into a muddy quagmire. It snowed overnight on Mammoth Mountain, a ski

destination in California, with the National Weather Service warning hikers and campers to prepare for slick roads. More light snow was possible in California on the crest of the Sierra Nevada, mostly around Tioga Pass and higher elevations of Yosemite National Park, the National Weather Service said. August snow has not occurred in those locations since 2003, forecasters said. Tioga Pass rises to more than 9,900 feet (3,017 meters) and serves as the eastern entryway to Yosemite. But it is usually closed much of each year by winter snow that can take one or two months to clear. "While this snow will not stay around very long, roads near Tioga Pass could be slick and any campers and hikers should prepare for winter conditions," the weather service wrote. While the start of ski season is

at least several months away, the hint of winter was welcomed by resorts. "It's a cool and blustery August day here at Palisades Tahoe, as a storm that could bring our first snowfall of the season moves in this afternoon!" the resort said in a social media post Friday. The "anomalous cool conditions" will spread over much of the western U.S. By Sunday morning, according to the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland. Despite the expected precipitation, forecasters also warned of fire danger because of gusty winds associated with the passage of the cold front. At the same time, a flash flood watch was issued for the burn scar of California's largest wildfire so far this year from Friday morning through Saturday morning.

# China opposes US sanctions on firms over alleged ties to Russia's war efforts

AP ■ BEIJING

China on Sunday expressed its opposition to the latest US sanctions on Chinese companies over their alleged ties to Russia's war in Ukraine, saying it will adopt necessary measures to safeguard the rights and interests of the country's businesses. The US on Friday announced sweeping sanctions on hundreds of firms in Russia and across Europe, Asia and the Middle East, accusing them of providing products and services that enable Russia's war effort and aiding its ability to evade sanctions. The US Department of State said it was concerned by "the magnitude of dual-use goods exports" from China to Russia. The Ministry of Commerce in China in its statement firmly opposed the US putting multiple Chinese companies on its export control list. The move bars such companies from trading with US firms without gaining a nearly unobtainable



special license. The ministry said the US action was "typical unilateral sanctions," saying they would disrupt global trade orders and rules, as well as affect the stability of the global industrial and supply chains. "China urges the US to immediately stop its wrong practices and will take necessary measures to resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interest of Chinese companies," it said. The US action is the latest in a series of thousands of US sanctions that have been imposed on Russian firms and their suppliers in other nations since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The effectiveness of the sanctions has been questioned, especially as Russia has continued to support its economy by selling oil and gas on international markets. According to the US State Department, some China-based companies supplied machine tools and components to Russia companies. China has tried to position itself as neutral in the Ukraine conflict, but it shares with Russia high animosity toward the West. After Western countries imposed heavy sanctions on Russian oil in response to Russia sending troops into Ukraine in February 2022, China strongly stepped up its purchase of Russian oil, increasing its influence in Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin also underlined the importance of China by meeting in Beijing with Chinese leader Xi Jinping soon after being inaugurated for a fifth term in the Kremlin.

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# French authorities arrest Telegram CEO Pavel Durov

Paris (AP) — The founder and CEO of the popular encrypted messaging service Telegram was detained at a Paris airport, French media reported Sunday. Pavel Durov was detained at the Paris Le Bourget airport on Saturday evening after landing in France from Azerbaijan, according to broadcasters LCI and TFI. Investigators from the National Anti-Fraud Office, attached to the French customs department, notified Durov that he was being placed in police custody, the broadcasters said. French prosecutors declined to comment on Durov's arrest when contacted by The Associated Press on Sunday, in line with regulations during an ongoing investigation. French media reported that Durov, 39, was the subject of an arrest warrant issued by France based on allegations that his encrypted platform has been used for money laundering, drug trafficking and allowing the sharing of content linked to sexual exploitation of minors.

# 'Man surrenders in Germany knife attack that killed 3'

AP ■ SOLINGEN

A 26-year-old man has turned himself into police, saying he was responsible for the Solingen knife attack that left three dead and eight wounded at a festival marking the city's 650th anniversary, German authorities announced early Sunday. Duesseldorf police said in a joint statement with the prosecutor's office that the man "stated that he was responsible for the attack." "This person's involvement in the crime is currently being intensively investigated," the statement said. Federal prosecutors said they were investigating on suspicion of murder, attempted murder and membership in a foreign terrorist organisation. The suspect was to make a first appearance before a judge later Sunday. The suspect is a Syrian citizen who had applied for asylum in Germany, police confirmed to The Associated Press. The dpa

news agency reported, without citing a specific source, that his asylum claim had been denied and that he was to have been deported last year. On Saturday, the Islamic State militant group claimed responsibility for the attack, without providing evidence. The extremist group said on its news site that the attacker targeted Christians and that the perpetrator carried out the assaults Friday night "to avenge Muslims in Palestine and everywhere." The claim could not be independently verified. Friday's attack plunged the city of Solingen into shock and grief. A city of about 160,000 residents near the bigger cities of Cologne and Duesseldorf, Solingen was holding a "Festival of Diversity" to celebrate its anniversary. People alerted police shortly after 9:30 pm local time Friday that a man had assaulted several people with a knife on the city's central square, the Fronhof. The three people

killed were two men aged 67 and 56 and a 56-year-old woman, authorities said. Police said the attacker appeared to have deliberately aimed for his victims' throats. The festival, which was due to have run through Sunday, was cancelled as police looked for clues in the cordoned-off square. Instead, residents gathered to mourn the dead and injured, placing flowers and notes near the scene of the attack. "Warum?" asked one sign placed amid candles and teddy bears. Why? Among those asking themselves the question was 62-year-old Cord Boettner, a merchant from Solingen. "Why does something like this have to be done? It's incomprehensible and it hurts," Boettner said. Officials had earlier said a 15-year-old boy was arrested on suspicion he knew about the planned attack and failed to inform authorities, but that he was not the attacker.

# French authorities arrest Synagogue explosion suspect

Nice (AP) — French police have apprehended and detained a suspect in an arson attack on a synagogue in a southwestern Mediterranean town that injured a police officer, the country's acting interior minister said Sunday. Two cars parked at the Beth Yaacov synagogue complex in the seaside resort town of La Grande Motte, near Montpellier, were set ablaze just after 8 am Saturday. Firefighters discovered additional fires at two entrances to the synagogue. A police officer who walked up to the site was injured after a propane gas tank placed near the burning vehicles exploded. Five people, including the rabbi, who were present in the synagogue complex at the time of the attack were unharmed, it added. "The alleged perpetrator of the arson attack on the synagogue has been arrested," Gerald Darmanin, the acting interior minister, said in a post on X.

# UN: 13 die after boat carrying migrants sunk off Yemen's coast

Cairo (AP) — A boat carrying migrants sank off the coast of Yemen, leaving more than two dozen people dead or missing, the UN migration agency said Sunday, the latest in a string of shipwrecks that have left scores dead. Despite a nearly decade-long civil war, Yemen — which borders Saudi Arabia to the north and Oman to the northeast — remains a major route for migrants from East Africa trying to reach wealthy Gulf countries for work. The vessel was carrying 25 Ethiopian migrants and the boat captain and his assistant, both Yemeni, when it capsized Tuesday off the province of Taiz, the International Organisation for Migration said in a statement. The bodies of 11 men and two women were recovered along the shore of Bab el-Mandeb Strait that links the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea, while of 14 others — including the two Yemenis — remain missing. The migrants departed from Djibouti, IOM said. "This latest tragedy is a stark reminder of the perils faced by migrants on this route," said Matt Huber, IOM's acting chief in Yemen. "Every life lost in these dangerous waters is one too many, and it is imperative that we do not normalise these devastating losses." According to the agency, the number of migrants arriving in Yemen has tripled in recent years, from about 27,000 in 2021 to more than 97,200 last year, the IOM said, and about 380,000 migrants are currently in the conflict-ridden country. To reach Yemen, migrants are taken by smugglers on often dangerous, overcrowded boats across the Red Sea or Gulf of Aden. Over the past decade, at least 2,082 migrants disappeared along the route, including 693 who drowned, the IOM said. In June, at least 49 migrants were killed in a shipwreck off Yemen's southern coast that also left 140 missing, according to the IOM.

# UK PM Starmer prepares for first Downing Street keynote speech

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is preparing for his first Downing Street keynote speech since being elected last month and ahead of Parliament resuming after its summer recess. According to 'The Sunday Times', some members of the public will be invited to the Rose Garden speech on Tuesday in a signal that the Labour Party leader intends to do things differently from his Conservative Party predecessors. In keeping with a theme the government has already struck amid major announcements since the July 4 general election, Starmer will caution the public that things will get worse before they can get better due to the state of things his government has inherited after 14 years of Tory leadership. Excerpts of the speech, which is scheduled a week before the House of Commons resumes, refer to Labour inheriting "not just an

economic black hole but a societal black hole." "And that is why we have to take action and do things differently. Part of that is being honest with people - about the choices we face. And how tough this will be. Frankly, things will get worse before we get better," Starmer is expected to say. The speech will foreshadow the government's Autumn budget statement, which is widely expected to entail tough new financial announcements on October 30. The UK PM is expected to say: "When there is rot deep in the heart of a structure, you can't just cover it up. You can't tinker with it or rely on quick fixes. "You have to overhaul the entire thing. Tackle it at the root. Even if it's harder work and takes more time. Because otherwise, what happens? The rot returns. In all the same places. And it spreads." Taking aim at the Tories — now in Opposition, Starmer will reiterate his Chancellor Rachel Reeves'

previous claim that they discovered a GBP 22 billion "black hole" in the public finances within days of taking charge. "The OBR (Office for Budget Responsibility) did not know about this. They wrote a letter saying so. They didn't know — because the last government hid it," Starmer will allege. The Conservatives have hit back at the government, accusing Labour of poor financial decisions such as rolling back an allowance for senior citizens for their heating bills. "The soft-touch Labour Chancellor is squandering money whilst fabricating a financial black hole in an attempt to con the public into accepting tax rises, and literally leaving pensioners in the cold," said Conservative Party chairman Richard Fuller. "The Prime Minister really should tell his Chancellor to reverse course or step in himself to reverse her decision," he said.

# Brazil and Colombia urge Venezuela to release vote results, condemn violence

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

The leaders of Brazil and Colombia on Saturday again called on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to release voting tallies, days after the country's Supreme Court backed the government's disputed claims that it won elections in July. In a joint statement, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Colombian President Gustavo Petro said the "credibility of the electoral process can only be restored through the transparent publication of disaggregated and verifiable data." The two leaders also warned against repression as the Venezuelan government has jailed thousands and met protests with violence. The governments spoke a day after several other Latin American countries and the U.S. rejected the Venezuelan high court's certification. Many were waiting to see how the two leftist leaders would respond to the court because both are



close allies of Maduro and have been working to facilitate talks with both sides. Maduro claims that he won the presidential vote, but so far has refused to release official tally sheets, considered the one verifiable vote count in Venezuela as they are almost impossible to replicate. The main opposition coalition has accused Maduro of trying to steal the vote. Opposition volunteers managed to collect copies of voting

tallies from 80% of the 30,000 polling booths nationwide that show former opposition candidate Edmundo González won by a more than 2-to-1 margin. The Supreme Court alleged those tallies were forged. Lula and Petro said they "take note" of the court's ruling, but added they are still awaiting release of the tallies. The governments also called on actors in Venezuela to "avoid resorting to acts of violence and repression" as security forces

arrested more than 2,000 people and cracked down on demonstrations that erupted spontaneously throughout the country protesting the results. But the two leaders didn't directly accuse the Maduro government of carrying out the violence. The arrests have again spread fear in a country that has seen other government crackdowns during previous times of political turmoil. At the same time, key opposition figure Maria Corina Machado has since gone into hiding and the government said Friday it will order González to provide sworn testimony in an ongoing investigation, claiming he was part of an effort to spread panic by contesting the results of the election. Both Lula and Petro have previously been criticized for what some say have been lenient policies toward Maduro's government, but their tone has grown more stern in recent months, especially in the wake of the election fallout.

# NASA extends Astronauts' mission, scraps troubled Boeing capsule return

Cape Canaveral (AP) — NASA decided Saturday it's too risky to bring two astronauts back to Earth in Boeing's troubled new capsule, and they'll have to wait until next year for a ride home with SpaceX. What should have been a weeklong test flight for the pair will now last more than eight months. The seasoned pilots have been stuck at the International Space Station since the beginning of June. A cascade of vexing thruster failures and helium leaks in the new capsule marred their trip to the space station, and they ended up in a holding pattern as engineers conducted tests and debated what to do about the flight back. After almost three months, the decision finally came down from NASA's highest ranks on Saturday. Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams will come back in a SpaceX capsule in

February. Their empty Starliner capsule will undock in early September and attempt to return on autopilot with a touchdown in the New Mexico desert. As Starliner's test pilots, the pair should have overseen this critical last leg of the journey. "A test flight by nature is neither safe nor routine," said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson. The decision "is a result of a commitment to safety." Nelson said lessons learned from NASA's two space shuttle accidents played a role. This time, he noted, open dialogue was encouraged rather than crushed. "This has not been an easy decision, but it is absolutely the right one," added Jim Free, NASA's associate administrator. It was a blow to Boeing, adding to the safety concerns plaguing the company on its airplane side. Boeing had counted on Starliner's first crew trip to

revive the troubled spacecraft program after years of delays and ballooning costs. The company had insisted Starliner was safe based on all the recent thruster tests both in space and on the ground. Boeing did not participate in Saturday's news conference by NASA, but released a statement: "Boeing continues to focus, first and foremost, on the safety of the crew and spacecraft." The company said it is preparing the spacecraft "for a safe and successful return." Rand Corp's Jan Osburg, a senior engineer who specializes in aerospace and defense, said NASA made the right choice. "But the U.S. is still left with egg on its face due to the Starliner design issues that should have been caught earlier." Wilmore, 61, and Williams, 58, are both retired Navy captains with previous long-duration spaceflight experience. Before

their June 5 launch from Cape Canaveral, Wilmore and Williams said their families bought into the uncertainty and stress of their professional careers decades ago. During their lone orbital news conference last month, the astronauts said they had trust in the thruster testing being conducted. They had no complaints, they added, and enjoyed pitching in with space station work. Wilmore's wife, Deanna, said she and their daughters, along with family and friends, "were praying for a safe return on whatever spacecraft that may be." While they are disappointed that he will be away longer, "we know that it's the Lord's plan," she said via text. Flight operations director Norm Knight said he talked to the astronauts Saturday and they fully support the decision to postpone their return.

There were few options. The SpaceX capsule currently parked at the space station is reserved for the four residents who have been there since March. They will return in late September, their routine six-month stay extended a month by the Starliner dilemma. NASA said it would be unsafe to squeeze two more into the capsule, except in an emergency. The docked Russian Soyuz capsule is even tighter, capable of flying only three — two of them Russians wrapping up a yearlong stint. So Wilmore and Williams will wait for SpaceX's next taxi flight. It's due to launch in late September with two astronauts instead of the usual four. NASA is yanking two to make room for Wilmore and Williams on the return flight in late February. NASA said no serious consideration was given to asking SpaceX for a quick

stand-alone rescue. Last year, the Russian Space Agency had to rush up a replacement Soyuz capsule for three men whose original craft was damaged by space junk. The switch pushed their six-month mission to just over a year. Former Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield, applauded the decision via X: "Good to err on the side of caution for astronaut lives." Long missions are "what astronauts work their entire career for. I'd take it in a heartbeat!" Starliner's woes began long before its latest flight. Bad software fouled the first test flight without a crew in 2019, prompting a do-over in 2022. Then parachute and other issues cropped up, including a helium leak in the capsule's propellant system that nixed a launch attempt in May. The leak eventually was deemed to be isolated and small enough to pose no concern. But more leaks sprouted

following liftoff, and five thrusters also failed. All but one of those small thrusters restarted in flight. But engineers were perplexed by ground testing that showed a thruster seal swelling and obstructing a propellant line. They theorized the seals in orbit may have expanded and then reverted to their normal size. Officials said the results marked the turning point, as their concerns grew. With all the uncertainty about how the thrusters might perform, "There was too much risk for the crew," Steve Stich, NASA's commercial crew program manager, told reporters. These 28 thrusters are vital. Besides needed for space station rendezvous, they keep the capsule pointed in the right direction at flight's end as bigger engines steer the craft out of orbit. Coming in crooked could result in catastrophe.



# Dhaka limps back to normal amid echoes of protests

PTI ■ DHAKA

With the metro resuming services, buses and taxis plying regularly and university students enjoying carefree evening strolls in the gardens of the historic Curzon Hall - life seems to be returning to normal in Dhaka. Businesses have resumed but it's not business as usual in the capital city of Bangladesh. Till three weeks ago, the streets of the capital were flooded with anti-government protesters, many public squares choked by the agitating masses reaching a dramatic climax on August 5 — the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government and her fleeing to India. The wave of the resistance has subsided and an interim government has been in place since August 8, but the streaks of rebellion remain in many streets of Dhaka. In the past few days, several government employees have

held protests in groups at the government secretariat while some demonstrators have marched in streets near the famous Ahsan Manzil and other areas to put forth their demands. Many Dhaka University students are raising their voices regularly at the Raju Memorial Site opposite the Teacher Student Centre (TSC) for holding students' union elections at the varsity and demanding "no political interference" on the campus. The anti-government protests have initiated a churn in Bangladesh and while education goes on, so do protests to achieve a more equitable society "free of discrimination and corruption". Ibrahim Mahmud, a student of public administration who took part in a varsity protest earlier this week, alleged that members of Chhatra League, the student wing of the ousted Awami League, used to

"harass" several fellow students in the campus. "We have achieved our 'second independence', this time from the high-handedness of the Awami League and its bad influence," he told PTI on the sidelines of the protest held at the Raju Memorial site opposite TSC. The Dhaka Metro line near the university—a major lifeline for students and a means to beat city traffic—was shut for over a month. While the passenger services resumed on Sunday morning, two of its stations Mirpur-10 and Kazipara will remain shut. These two stations were vandalised during the anti-government protests. Students of Dhaka University and other institutions heaved a sigh of relief as the metro services resumed after a gap of over 35 days. Abdur Rahman, a first-year undergraduate student in the English Department



A man gestures as he rides a rickshaw going past Raju Memorial opposite the Teacher Student Centre (TSC) of the Dhaka University

of the 103-year-old Dhaka University, said the last time he had used the city metro was about 40-50 days ago. "Life is slowly getting back on track," he said. Near to the Dhaka Metro station is the historic Curzon Hall housing the science faculty of the university. Students and general visitors go there every evening for strolls while others take selfies or make reels for social media platforms. Walls of its main lobby still carry the slogans "No quota" and "Only Merit" spray-painted during the agitation. However, not everything has returned to normal in this historic city of Dhaka—both the political and financial capital of Bangladesh. On Friday, a holiday in Bangladesh, visitors from Dhaka and other districts of Bangladesh who had come to see the iconic Ahsan Manzil and its museum in Old Dhaka,

were "turned away" from the main gate, with security staff telling them it had been "closed indefinitely". No official reason was cited, though it is learnt that it is a "contingency measure". The recent protests that rocked Bangladesh for over a month have hit the hospitality sector hard in Dhaka with the majority of rooms at several luxury and economy hotels here going empty in the aftermath of the unrest. A front office staff at a luxury hotel, running here since 2007 and operated by an international hotel chain, told PTI: "The situation in the hospitality sector is not good due to the impact of the unrest the country has seen recently" and "heavy financial losses have been incurred". Abdul Moyeen Khan, a top BNP leader and a former Cabinet minister of Bangladesh, who lives in the plush Gulshan area, however, feels the city "largely went

back to routine life" soon after August 5. "The current situation is quite clear. It is amazing how the country is settling back after such a big upheaval. People are trying to get back to their normal day-to-day life, the (interim) government is trying to normalise everything, and they are up to their main mandate which is the transition from autocracy to democracy," Khan told PTI on Thursday. Ask any autorickshaw driver or a rickshaw-puller on the streets of Dhaka, and they respond mutely. "Even we don't know what lies ahead. We just need to go through the struggle of our daily lives," said Mohd Alam, a rickshaw puller. The rickshaws of Dhaka are one of the defining images of the city. Keychains, fridge magnets and other merchandise at tourism department stores at the Dhaka airport celebrate this ubiquitous three-wheeler.

## 'Imran Khan's trial in military court over May 9 violence possible'

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's trial in cases concerning the violence on May 9 last year might go to the military courts, a government spokesperson has said. The events and vandalism on May 9 last year invited the application of the Army Act since military installations were attacked and damaged. Government spokesperson for legal affairs Barrister Aqeel Malik was quoted as saying by Dawn newspaper. On May 9 last year, violent protests erupted after the arrest of 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party founder Khan by paramilitary Rangers from the premises of the Islamabad High Court in connection with an alleged corruption case. His party workers allegedly vandalised a dozen military installations, including the Jinnah House (Lahore Corps Commander House), the Mianwali airbase and the ISI building in Faisalabad. A mob also attacked the Army headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi. Speaking at an interview on a private news channel on Friday, Malik said, "It is entirely possible that Imran Khan's trial would be held in a military court, and the reason for that is because the Army Act will be applicable." Alleging that the attack was "premeditated" and "pre-planned", Malik said the PTI founder orchestrated and "properly operated" the riots, according to the paper. When asked whether Khan's trial could be possible in a military court following the arrest of former intelligence chief Lt-Gen (retired) Faiz Hameed, he said, "Yes". Hameed, who served as director general of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) from 2019 to 2021, was arrested following action in the complaint of a private property developer over alleged misuse of official authority. He was arrested on August 12 in the Top City Case. Malik said that once the options of appeals were exhausted, then only the mercy appeal could be submitted to the army chief or the president as a last resort.

## 4 more murder cases filed against Hasina, her aides

PTI ■ DHAKA

At least four more murder cases have been filed against Bangladesh's deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, her former cabinet ministers and aides, media reports said on Sunday. A murder case was filed on Sunday against 76-year-old Hasina, former director general of Border Guard of Bangladesh Gen Aziz Ahmed and 11 others over the death of Abdur Rahim, an official of the then Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in 2010, state-run BSS news agency reported. Rahim, then deputy assistant director (DAD) of former BDR, was an accused in the case lodged over the carnage that took place in Pikhana in 2010. He died in jail custody on July 29 of the same year. Rahim's son Advocate Abdul Aziz filed the case with the court of the Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Akteruzzaman.

Another murder case was filed on Sunday against Hasina and 48 others for killing a student of the Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST) during the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement on July 18, the agency said. Victim Shaikh Ashabul Yeamin's uncle Abdullah-Al Kabir filed a plea to Dhaka Senior Judicial Magistrate Md Saiful Islam's court Sunday, appealing to lodge a murder case against the 49 accused, it added. Accepting the petition, the court ordered police to record the statement of the plaintiff and register the complaint as a first information report (FIR). Awami League general secretary and former road transport and bridges minister Obaidul Quader and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan, among others, have been made accused in the case. A separate case was filed against Hasina and 27 others over the killing of a seller of Trading

Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) products in the capital during the recent protests. Mamunur Rashid, the brother-in-law of victim Md Eusuf Sanowar, filed the complaint with Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Saddam Hossain. The court asked the officer in charge of Jatrabari Police Station to accept the matter as a first information report (FIR). The other prominent accused in the case are - Awami League general secretary Obaidul Quader and former ministers Anisul Huq and Tajul Islam. Another case was filed against 25 people, including Hasina, over the killing of an auto-rickshaw driver in the capital during the recent protests. Hasina, the Awami League chairperson, now faces at least 53 cases, including 44 for murders, seven for crimes against humanity and genocide, one for abduction and one for an attack on a Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) procession.

## Dhaka Metro resumes service after more than 30 days

PTI ■ DHAKA

The Dhaka Metro resumed services on Sunday over a month after it was shut for passengers during the unprecedented anti-government protests in Bangladesh with two of its stations bearing the brunt of vandalism. These two stations—Mirpur-10 and Kazipara—will however remain closed, according to an official notification. Commuters, especially students and office-goers, heaved a sigh of relief as they had to travel through Dhaka's notorious traffic congestions daily to reach their destinations. According to the official notification, the services resumed in the morning around 7 am. Mirpur-10 and Kazipara stations were vandalised in July during the anti-government protests. The Dhaka Metro services were shut for passengers in the third week of July and coupled with choc-a-bloc streets due to

protests had nearly paralysed the public transportation system in the capital. Many commuters who otherwise were using cab services or autorickshaws for travelling to university and other areas on Sunday used the metro after a gap of over five weeks. Dhaka Metro, whose current network spans from Uttara North to Motijheel, is operated by the Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited (DMTCL). "We are planning to make the metro rail infrastructure a key point installation with enhanced security for its protection from any kind of vandalism," Road Transport and Communication Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan said. Khan said the interim government also plans to declare metro rail operations as an essential service to prevent any disruption in the service. He travelled between Agargon station and Bangladesh Secretariat station in the metro. A Dhaka High Court official told PTI that he used the

metro on Sunday to travel to his office, and the resumption of services has come as a big relief for daily commuters like him. On December 28, 2022, Bangladesh launched its first metro rail service with Japanese assistance to ease commuting in the capital Dhaka, one of the most congested cities in the world. Called Dhaka MRT Line 6, it initially operated on an 11.73-km section from Uttara North to Agargaon, consisting of nine stations. The then prime minister Sheikh Hasina had inaugurated the project. In November 2023, the section from Agargaon to Motijheel having eight stations and spanning 9.53 km, was inaugurated by Hasina. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) is working on the Dhaka Metro project (three lines) as a consultant, with varying degrees of involvement, a senior official of the DMRC had earlier said. Besides the presently operational Line 6,

DMRC is involved as a consultant for Line 5 North and Line 1 in the Dhaka Metro project. "About 10 DMRC employees were posted in Dhaka as part of the metro project there. They have all returned safely to India," a senior official of the DMRC said in response to a PTI query. A large number of Indian nationals have returned to India from Bangladesh since the protests began on July 1. The unprecedented anti-government protests reached a crescendo on August 5. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to India on that day, even as protesters had termed the fall of the government and her departure a "day of victory". Asked if the DMTCL has approached the DMRC to send consultants for the ongoing or planned construction works, the senior official said the DMRC officials are "extending the necessary cooperation as per the terms and conditions of our engagement".

## 40 dead in 2 bus accidents in Pak

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/KARACHI

At least 40 people, including 11 Shia Muslim pilgrims, were killed and several others injured in two separate bus accidents in Pakistan on Sunday, officials said. The first accident occurred when a bus carrying around 70 pilgrims returning from Iraq through Iran overturned on the Makran coastal highway and fell into a ditch, police said. At least 11 people were killed and 35 others injured in the accident in Balochistan province, over 100 km from Karachi. The Makran Coastal Highway is a 653-km national highway that extends along Pakistan's Arabian Sea coast from Karachi in Sindh province to Gwadar in Balochistan province. Most of the passengers were from Lahore or Gujranwala, according to police sources. The driver apparently lost control of the bus, which first overturned and then fell into

the ravine, police said. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Lasbela Capt. Naveed Alam said the bus was carrying pilgrims from Iran to Punjab when it overturned near Buzzi Top on the coastal highway as the driver lost control of the vehicle due to overspeeding. He said 11 bodies were taken out from the ravine while 35 passengers who were injured were moved to hospitals. "Four passengers are still trapped inside the remains of the bus and they are being rescued," he said. Hours later, 29 people were killed and three others injured when a coaster bus carrying 30 people fell into a ditch in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, said Qamar Nadeem of Edhi Foundation, which runs the largest private ambulance service. The accident took place on the Girari Bridge, Kahuta, some 400 km from Lahore, when the driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle due to the failure of brakes. According to Rescue 1122, the

dead include 23 men, five women and one child. The bodies of some dead were taken out after cutting the bus body. Deputy Commissioner Sadhanoti Umar Farooq said the victims were from the Sadhanoti district. The police, administration and rescue teams were present at the site of the incident. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari expressed sorrow over the loss of lives in the accident, offering their condolences to the families of the deceased. "In this hour of sorrow, my sympathies are with the families of the deceased," Zardari said, stressing the need to speed up the relief activities. Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz offered her condolences and expressed regret over the loss of lives. The accidents come just days after a bus carrying Pakistani Shia pilgrims met with an accident in Iran, leaving 35 dead and 15 injured.

Flash flood sweeps away buildings; 13 people dead

AP ■ TERNATE ISLAND

Torrential rains caused a flash flood on Indonesia's eastern Ternate Island, sweeping away residential areas and leaving 13 people dead on Sunday, officials said. The deluges cut off the main road and access to the village of Rua in North Maluku province, the most hard-hit area, and buried dozens of houses and buildings under the mud. Search and rescue teams worked with locals to recover the bodies and look for those still missing. The Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency says high-intensity rain is still possible in the Ternate City area and its surroundings in the coming days. Local authorities advised residents to remain vigilant and heed instructions in case of further flooding. Heavy rains cause frequent landslides and flash floods in Indonesia where millions live in mountainous areas and near floodplains.



Shiite pilgrims mark Arb'een on Saturday in Karbala, Iraq. The event marks the end of the forty-day mourning period after the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, in the 7th century

## Five people die in shelling of Russian border region

AP ■ KYIV

Five people died in Ukrainian shelling in Russia's border region of Belgorod, officials said Sunday, while Russian forces struck a hotel in eastern Ukraine, leaving one journalist missing and two others injured. Twelve other people were wounded in the Russian village of Rakitone, 38 kilometres from the Ukrainian border, including a 16-year-old girl reported to be in critical condition, said regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov. Russian forces struck a hotel overnight in the city of Kramatorsk in the eastern Donetsk region, injuring two people and leaving one trapped under the rubble, regional Gov. Vadym Filashkin said. All three were reported to be journalists from Ukraine, the US, and the UK. Reuters news agency said



Ukrainian soldiers of 3rd assault brigade fly by an FPV suicide drone over Russian positions in Kharkiv region, Ukraine, on Sunday

Sunday that their journalist covering the war in Ukraine was missing and two other team members were hospitalised after Hotel Sapphire, where a six-person crew was staying, was hit "by an apparent missile strike" on Saturday. "One of our colleagues is unaccounted for, while another two

have been taken to hospital for treatment," the agency said. The rest of the team has been accounted for, said the news agency. In addition to the hotel, a nearby multistory building was also destroyed, Filashkin said, and rescuers were busy clearing the debris at the site.

## Taliban vice and virtue laws provide 'distressing vision' for Afghanistan, warns UN envoy

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

The Taliban's new vice and virtue laws that include a ban on women's voices and bare faces in public provide a "distressing vision" for Afghanistan's future, a top UN official warned on Sunday. Roza Otunbayeva, who heads the UN mission in the country, said the laws extend the "already intolerable restrictions" on the rights of women and girls, with "even the sound of a female voice" outside the home apparently deemed a moral violation. Afghanistan's Taliban rulers last Wednesday issued the country's first set of laws to prevent vice and promote virtue. They include a requirement for a woman to conceal her face, body and voice outside the home. The laws empower the Vice and Virtue Ministry to be at the front line of regulating personal conduct and administering punishments like warnings or

arrest if its enforcers allege that Afghans have broken the laws. "After decades of war and in the midst of a terrible humanitarian crisis, the Afghan people deserve much better than being threatened or jailed if they happen to be late for prayers, glance at a member of the opposite sex who is not a family member, or possess a photo of a loved one," Otunbayeva said. The mission said it was studying the newly ratified law and its implications for Afghans, as well as its potential impact on the UN and other humanitarian assistance. Taliban officials were not immediately available for comment. In remarks broadcast Sunday by state-controlled broadcaster RTA, Vice and Virtue Minister Mohammad Khaled Hanafi said nobody had the right to violate women's rights based on inappropriate customs.

## Philippine vessel brushes against Chinese ship in disputed waters

AP ■ BEIJING

China's coast guard said Sunday it took action against a Philippine vessel that ignored warnings and caused a light collision with its vessel in the disputed South China Sea, where confrontations between the two sides have increased. Gan Yu, the coast guard spokesperson, said in a statement that the Philippine vessel entered the waters around Sabina Shoal in the Spratly Islands, known in Chinese as Xianbin Reef in the Nansha Islands. Gan said the Philippine ship ignored the Chinese warning and sailed toward the coast guard ship "unprofessionally" and "dangerously," causing the two vessels to brush against each other. He said the Philippine vessel also had journalists on board to take pictures to "distort facts." "The responsibility is totally on

the Philippines' side. We sternly warn that the Philippine side must immediately stop the infringement and provocation, otherwise it must bear all consequences," he said. Gan did not elaborate on what control measures the Chinese coast guard took. The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources in the Philippines said its vessel encountered aggressive and dangerous maneuvers from eight Chinese maritime vessels. It said the actions from the Chinese side were aimed at obstructing its vessel's humanitarian mission to resupply Filipino fishermen with diesel, food and medical supplies. China is rapidly expanding its military and has become increasingly assertive in pursuing its territorial claims in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety. The tensions have led to more frequent confrontations, primarily with the Philippines, though the long-time territorial disputes also involve other claimants including Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei. The latest incident came days after Chinese and Philippine coast guard ships collided near Sabina Shoal, a disputed atoll. At least two vessels were reported to be damaged but there were no reports of injuries. Sabina Shoal lies about 140 kilometres west of the Philippine province of Palawan, in the internationally recognised exclusive economic zone of the Philippines. The atoll is near Second Thomas Shoal, another flash-point where China has hampered the resupply of Philippine forces. China and the Philippines reached an agreement last month to prevent further confrontations at Second Thomas Shoal.

# Macro data, F&O expiry, global cues to chart market direction this week: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Release of key macroeconomic numbers, monthly derivatives expiry, and global cues are likely to drive stock market movement this week, according to analysts. Markets will also be reacting to remarks made by the US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, they said. "This week, we expect the market to witness a gradual up-move with stock-specific action. The focus will shift to monthly F&O expiry as well as global cues. Markets on Monday would react to commentaries of the US Fed Chair at the Jackson Hole Symposium," Siddhartha Khemka, Head of Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. US Fed Chair Jerome Powell on Friday signalled that the central bank would cut its interest rate in the September meeting. Powell made a crucial speech that laid the groundwork for future interest rate



reductions. Powell said, "The time has come for policy to adjust." "The market has been expecting an interest rate cut during the next Federal Reserve meeting in September. There are indications that the rate cuts could happen at a faster pace, especially with the weakening of jobs data. "However, Powell believes that the chances of the US economy entering a recession in the near term are very low. This implies that rate cuts would likely align with

consensus expectations, and the possibility of higher rate cuts may be lower," Chief Investment Officer at Axis Securities PMS Naveen Kulkarni said. After the Fed Chief's speech, US markets started their upward movement and closed higher on Friday. Traders are anticipating some volatility in the subsequent sessions due to the monthly F&O expiry scheduled this week, experts said. Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 649.37 points or 0.80 per cent. The

NSE Nifty too closed with gains of 282 points or 1.1 per cent. "The Indian market continued its recovery rally this week, buoyed by positive US economic data, which diminished the likelihood of a US recession. Moreover, positive global sentiment from ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas, along with a decline in crude prices, contributed to the rally," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said. In institutional activity, foreign institutional investors (FIIs) pulled out Rs 1,608.89 crore from equities, however, domestic institutional investors kept their buying streak, purchasing Rs 13,020.29 crore worth of stocks during the previous week. According to Religare Broking's Senior Vice-President of Research, Ajit Mishra, domestically, investors will keep an eye on economic data releases, including GDP figures and infrastructure output.

# Anil Ambani reviewing Sebi order, to take appropriate steps: Statement

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Businessman Anil Ambani is reviewing a Sebi order imposing a fine and banning him from capital markets for five years in an alleged fund diversion case and will take appropriate next steps as legally advised, his spokesperson said in a statement on Sunday. Ambani, the spokesperson in a statement said, had resigned from the board of Reliance Infrastructure Ltd and Reliance Power Ltd, pursuant to Sebi's interim order dated February 11, 2022 in the matter pertaining to Reliance Home Finance Ltd. He "is in compliance with the said interim order (of February 11, 2022) for the last two and half years," the statement said. On the August 22 order that banned him and 24 others from the securities market for five years on charges of diversion of funds, the spokesperson said, "Mr Ambani is reviewing the final order dated August 22, 2024 passed by Sebi in the said matter, and will take appropriate next steps as legally advised." The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) had also imposed a fine of Rs 25 crore on Ambani, saying he orchestrated a scheme to "siphon off" funds from Reliance Home Finance, a listed subsidiary of conglomerate Reliance Group of which he is chairman.



The ban means that he and the other 24 will not be able to access the securities market and are prohibited from buying, selling or otherwise dealing in securities, directly or indirectly. In a separate statement, Mumbai-listed Reliance Infrastructure Ltd said it "was not a noticee or party to the proceedings before Sebi in which the order is passed. No directions are given in the order against Reliance Infrastructure Ltd." "Mr Ambani had resigned from the board of directors of Reliance Infrastructure Ltd pursuant to the interim order dated February 11, 2022 passed by Sebi in the same proceedings. Therefore, the order dated August 22, 2024 passed by Sebi has no bearing whatsoever on the business and affairs of Reliance Infrastructure Ltd," it said. Reliance Power, the other listed company of Anil Ambani's group, also issued a

similar statement saying Ambani had resigned in 2022 and that the latest Sebi order has no bearing on it. Sebi in the August 22 order had stated that a "fraudulent" scheme "siphoned off" funds from Reliance Home Finance, which provides loans for housing and construction, by structuring them as loans to credit-unworthy borrowers. Most of these borrowers were linked to "promoters", the regulator had said. Anil Ambani and his elder brother Mukesh had in July 2006 split their father Dhirubhai Ambani-created Reliance Industries Ltd. Anil Ambani's Reliance Group spanned financial services, infrastructure and telecommunications while the elder brother got the traditional oil refining and petrochemicals business. Over the last few years, Anil Ambani has seen three of the largest firms within the group, including Reliance Communications, Reliance Capital, and Reliance Infrastructure, undergoing bankruptcy over unpaid debt. Sebi has charged that more than Rs 9,000 crore worth of loans from Reliance Home Finance were made to "nondescript borrowers who had no demonstrable financial ability to repay any of it". The other 24 banned include executives of Anil Ambani's Reliance Group and other unlisted companies connected to him.

# Nine of top 10 valued firms add ₹95,522 cr to market valuation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of nine of the top 10 most valued firms jumped by Rs 95,522.81 crore last week, with Reliance Industries, TCS and HUL emerging as the biggest gainers. Rising for the fourth straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 33.02 points or 0.04 per cent higher at 81,086.21 on Friday. Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 649.37 points or 0.80 per cent. The market capitalisation (Mcap) of Reliance Industries surged by Rs 29,634.27 crore to Rs 20,29,710.68 crore. The valuation of TCS jumped Rs 17,167.83 crore to Rs 16,15,114.27 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever by Rs 15,225.36 crore to Rs 6,61,151.49 crore. The Mcap of Bharti Airtel rallied by Rs 12,268.39 crore to Rs 8,57,392.26 crore and that of ICICI Bank by Rs 11,524.92 crore to Rs 8,47,640.11 crore.



ITC soared Rs 3,965.14 crore to Rs 6,32,364.24 crore, while State Bank of India added Rs 2,498.89 crore to Rs 7,27,578.99 crore. In addition, the valuation of Life Insurance Corporation of India jumped by Rs 1,992.37 crore to Rs 6,71,050.63 crore and that of Infosys by Rs 1,245.64 crore to Rs 7,73,269.13 crore. However, the mcap of HDFC Bank plunged by Rs 4,835.34 crore to Rs 12,38,606.19 crore. Reliance Industries retained the title of the most valued firm, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, LIC, Hindustan Unilever and ITC.

# FPIs inject ₹11,366 cr in debt market in August; inflow tally crosses ₹1 lakh cr for 2024

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors infused Rs 11,366 crore in the Indian debt market so far this month, pushing the net inflow tally in the debt segment to over the Rs 1-lakh-crore mark. Foreign investors' strong buying interest in the Indian debt market can be attributed to India's inclusion in JP Morgan's Emerging Market government bond indices in June this year. According to data with the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) injected Rs 11,366 crore in the debt market this month (till August 24). This inflow came following a net investment of Rs 22,363 crore into the Indian debt market in July, Rs 14,955 crore in June and Rs 8,760 crore in May. Before that, they pulled out Rs 10,949 crore in April. With the latest flow, FPIs net investment in debt has reached Rs 1.02 lakh crore in



2024 so far. Market analysts said that ever since the announcement of India's inclusion came in October 2023 year, FPIs have been front-loading their investments in Indian debt markets in anticipation of the inclusion in global bond indices. Even after the inclusion, their inflows have continued to remain robust. On the other hand, FPIs pulled out over Rs 16,305 crore from equities so far this month, due to unwinding of the yen carry trade, recession fears in the US and ongoing geopolitical conflicts. Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager

Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said the post-budget announcement of an increase in capital gains tax on equity investments has largely fueled this selling spree. In addition, FPIs have been cautious due to the high valuations of Indian stocks, coupled with global economic concerns such as rising recession fears in the US amid weak jobs data, uncertainty over the timing of interest rate cuts, and the unwinding of yen carry trade, he added. Overall, India remains in a favourable position, attracting long-term investments from FPIs. "Amidst a global slowdown, geo-political crisis in the middle east and neighbouring countries, India still stands at a sweet spot compelling the foreign fraternity to take a bet for a long term investment horizon," Manoj Purohit, Partner & Leader, Financial Services Tax, Tax & Regulatory Services, BDO

India, said. In terms of sectors, FPIs were big sellers in financials in India in the first fortnight of August. Vipul Bhowar, Director Listed Investments, Waterfield Advisors, said that FPIs are selling banking shares due to concerns over slow deposit growth. "There are also challenges in Q1FY25 for banks with shrinking margins, deteriorating asset quality, and rising provisions, especially in credit cards, personal loans, and agriculture portfolios," he said. Besides, selling was witnessed in many other sectors including metals on fears that economic slowdown in US and China will keep metal prices soft, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. Conversely, foreign investors were buyers in telecom and health care where the growth and earnings prospects are safe and bright, he added.

# Next round of India-Australia comprehensive trade pact talks in November



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior officials of India and Australia are expected to hold their next round of talks for a comprehensive free trade agreement in November here, the commerce ministry said on Sunday. The two countries implemented an interim trade agreement in December 2022 and are now under negotiations to expand its scope. It said that the tenth round of India-Australia CECA (comprehensive economic cooperation agreement) negotiations was held from 19-22 August in Sydney in the areas of goods, services, digital trade, government procurement, rules of origin and agri-tech. Intense discussions were held on each of these tracks bringing in clarity and understanding for convergence in the remaining provisions, it added. "The next round of CECA negotiations is likely to be held in November," it said in a statement. The Indian delegation was led by Rajesh Agrawal, the Chief Negotiator and Additional Secretary, Department of Commerce and the Australian delegation was led by Ravi Kewalram, the Chief Negotiator and First Assistant Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

"The meeting saw intensive discussions and negotiations to narrow down the differences through better understanding of each other's proposals and the way to bring in convergence. Efforts were made by both the sides keeping in mind the domestic sensitivities for reaching a balanced outcome," the ministry said. Further the ministry said that the Australian side proposed to hold the first meeting of the India-Australia Agri Tech Forum (IAATF), a newly constituted forum by Australia, in New Delhi on September 23, with the Indian agricultural stakeholders including industry, research institutions and government. The objective of the meet is to build on mutually beneficial relationships by exploring opportunities for focused activity around technology transfer and knowledge sharing in agriculture and horticulture sectors. Australia is an important trading partner of India in the Oceania region, with merchandise trade between India and Australia reaching around USD 24 billion in 2023-24. India's exports to Australia last fiscal stood at USD 7.94 billion, while imports were USD 16.15 billion. The trade between the two countries has been hovering at around USD 25 billion mark since 2021-22.

# IOC, BPCL, GAIL fined for 5th straight quarter for not meeting listing norm

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's biggest oil firms including Indian Oil, BPCL and gas utility GAIL have been slapped with fines for a record fifth straight quarter for failing to meet listing norms of having the requisite number of independent and women directors on their board. Stock exchanges BSE and NSE have slapped fines on oil refining and fuel marketing giants Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), explorer Oil India Ltd (OIL), gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd, and refiner Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) for not meeting the listing requirement in the April-June quarter.

In separate stock exchange filings, the companies detailed the fines imposed by the BSE and NSE for either not having the requisite number of independent directors or the mandated women directors in the quarter ended June 30, 2024 (first quarter of current 2024-25 fiscal year), but were quick to point out that appointment of directors was done by the government and they had no role in it. The companies had faced fines for the same reason the previous four quarters as well. Listing norms require companies to have independent directors in the same proportion as executive or functional directors. They are also required to have at least one woman director on the board. IOC said, BSE and the



National Stock Exchange of India Ltd (NSE) imposed a fine of Rs 5,36,900 each on the company for non-compliance of Regulation 17(1) of the SEBI (LODR) relating to composition of the Board of Directors during the quarter ended June 30, 2024.

"In response to the notices, IndianOil vide letter dated August 22, 2024 has represented to the BSE and NSE that being a government company, the power to appoint directors (including independent directors) vests with the Ministry of

Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India and hence the shortfall in independent directors including non-appointment of women independent director on the board of the company during the quarter ended June 30, 2024 was not due to any negligence / default by the company," IOC said. Stating that IOC should not be held liable to pay the fines and the same should be waived-off, the firm said it regularly takes up with the ministry for appointment of requisite number of directors to ensure compliance with corporate governance norms. "We would also like to inform that the company had received similar notices from the BSE and NSE in the past imposing fines and waiver requests from the company

was considered favorably by the exchanges," it added. BPCL said it has been imposed with a fine of Rs 2,41,900 each by BSE and NSE for having one independent director short. Stating that it has no control over the appointment of directors, the firm said it will be approaching BSE Ltd and NSE for waiver of the fines. HPCL said it has been fined Rs 5,36,900 each by BSE and NSE. GAIL too faced similar fines. "This is to submit that the non-compliance with regard to the composition of the board was neither due to any negligence/default by the company nor within the control of GAIL's management and continuous efforts were also made to meet the compliance requirements," it added.

# Major Indian pharma firms to showcase products at exhibition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Minister of State, Ministry of Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada will inaugurate the three days international exhibition for pharma and healthcare exhibition (IPHEX 2024) which will begin from August 28 at India Expo Mart in Greater Noida. More than 400 major Indian pharma companies are expected to showcase their pharmaceutical products and Technologies at the expo. India exported pharma products worth USD 27.84 billion during the fiscal 2023-24. During FY24 pharma exports are set to

touch USD 31 billion a jump of 11% led by key markets US and UK. "The three day pharma expo will offer the domestic industry majors from India and all across the world a great platform to connect and do business. It will provide you with an opportunity to meet new and existing customers actively looking for new suppliers, or looking to assess the current progress of existing projects," said SV Veeramani, Chairman, PHARMEXCIL. About 70 per cent of World Health Organisation's (WHO) vaccines under essential immunization schemes served from India" he said.

# ONGC opens well in KG field to raise oil production

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on Sunday said it has opened another well on its flagship deep-sea project in Krishna Godavari basin in Bay of Bengal, which will help augment production of crude oil and natural gas. In January this year, ONGC had started producing oil, which is converted into fuels like petrol and diesel in refineries, from the KG-DWN-98/2 or KG-D5 block. "On August 24, 2024, ONGC marked a significant milestone by starting production from its fifth oil well in the Block KG-DWN-98/2 Cluster-2 asset," the firm said in a stock exchange filing on Sunday.

"Leveraging the floating production, storage, and offloading (FPSO) vessel, ONGC has begun transporting and sale of associated gas, all the while underscoring its commitment to achieving zero gas flaring." It, however, did not state how much the new well was producing. With this, ONGC also successfully commissioned its gas export line from the offshore-to-onshore terminal. "Earlier in January, oil production commenced from the same asset, with 4 of 13 wells already flowing. Gas production is also advancing, with 3 of 7 wells online," it added. The block, which sits next to Reliance Industries' KG-D6 block in the KG basin, has a



number of discoveries that have been clubbed into clusters. Located 35 kilometres off the coast of Andhra Pradesh in water depths ranging from 300-3,200 metres, the

discoveries in the block are divided into Cluster-1, 2 and 3. Cluster 2 is being put to production first. As per original plans, oil production from Cluster-2 should have begun by

November 2021, but was delayed because of the Covid pandemic. Thereafter, ONGC set May 2023 as the first Cluster-2 oil production deadline but then extended it to August 2023 and thereafter extended the flow of first oil every month, with the last deadline announced being December 2023. Oil started flowing from January 7, 2024. At the time of start of production in January, ONGC had stated that peak or maximum production from the field is expected to be 45,000 barrels of oil per day (bopd) and over 10 million standard cubic meters per day (mmscd) of gas which is used to make fertilisers, generate electricity, turned into CNG for use as fuel in

automobiles and piped to household kitchens for cooking. In an investor call on August 6, ONGC Director (Finance) Vivek Tongaonkar had stated that the firm was producing 12,000 bopd and 0.4 mmscd of gas from the eastern offshore block. This production was from four wells and one more well was planned to be opened in August, he had said. This well would not just raise the oil production but also help increase the amount of natural gas which flows out with oil, to 1.5 mmscd. "And subsequently, from the third quarter (October-December 2024), we expect to open further wells, which would add to our oil production as much.

# CELEBRATING JANMASHTAMI

## THE DANCE AND DRAMA DEPICTION OF LORD KRISHNA'S JOURNEY

Experience the divine journey of Lord Krishna with Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra's **KRISHNA**. Directed by Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh, this captivating production combines mesmerising dance with stunning visuals, vividly portraying Krishna's playful childhood and profound wisdom, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



Photos: Pankaj Kumar/Pioneer

**At its core, 'KRISHNA' was more than just a retelling of an ancient story. It was a message of hope and peace, echoing the enduring spirit of Krishna. In a world that often seemed overwhelmed by conflict and confusion, Krishna's teachings offered a hope of light.**

Janmashtami also known as Krishna Janmashtami or Gokulashtami is a festival filled with joy and devotion that celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna. This beloved figure in Hinduism is honoured on the eighth day of the dark fortnight in Bhadrapada (August-September), marking his birth in Mathura to Devaki and Vasudeva. The festival brings people together, uniting them in vibrant celebrations and shared experiences of devotion. Lord Krishna's life, known for its compassion, love and playful spirit, has a profound impact on Hindu culture and philosophy. Janmashtami is not just a religious occasion, it's a time when communities come together to celebrate his teachings and spirit creating a joyful and unifying experience for all involved.

### A MESMERISING FUSION OF DANCE AND DRAMA: A VISUAL SPECTACLE

One of the most captivating expressions of Janmashtami celebrations was through dance dramas that depicted the life and teachings of Lord Krishna. Among these performances, Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra's annual dance drama "KRISHNA," under the esteemed guidance of Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh (Vice Chairperson, Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra), stood out as a unique blend of art, culture and spirituality. This year, the world geared up to honour Lord Krishna, the Kendra presented the latest edition of this mesmerising dance drama at the Kamani Auditorium in New Delhi.

The production was more than just a performance, it was a journey through the life of Lord Krishna, capturing the essence of his divine playfulness, wisdom and eternal teachings. The stage was transformed into the vibrant world of Vrindavan, where young Krishna's charm and mischief took centre stage. The use of traditional costumes, combined with the captivating storytelling, ensured the audience remained engaged throughout. The seamless transitions and attention-grabbing scenes created an immersive experience, drawing viewers into a realm where Krishna's divine playfulness unfolded with every moment. The choreography executed with exceptional attention to detail, vividly brought Krishna's legendary stories to life. From his playful interactions with friends to his cheeky escapades with the butter pot (matka) and his enchanting dances with the gopis, each scene was a visual delight that resonated on a deeper spiritual level. These moments beautifully captured Krishna's joy, mischief and the simple yet profound essence of his childhood.



### THE DIVINE CONNECTION: KRISHNA AND RADHA

Every retelling of Krishna's story beautifully unfolded his profound relationship with Radha. Krishna's life was incomplete without depicting his profound connection with Radha, his eternal consort. In this production, their connection wasn't just depicted as a love story, it was portrayed as a deeply spiritual journey. The dance sequences, set to soulful music, depicted the deep bond between Krishna and Radha, with Krishna endearing Radha with his divine presence. The choreography captured the delicate balance between earthly affection and spiritual connection, leaving the audience mesmerised. The dance drama took a mystical turn as Krishna, in his divine form, multiplied himself so that every gopi felt she was dancing with him. This scene, set on a full moon night, was a visual treat with the stage bathed in soft, ethereal light. The dancers, clad in flowing white costumes, moved in perfect harmony, creating an illusion of multiple Krishnas dancing with the gopis.

### THE LEGEND OF GOVARDHAN: A TALE OF FAITH AND DEVOTION

One of the most iconic episodes from Krishna's life was his lifting of Mount Govardhan to protect the people of Vrindavan from the wrath of Indra, the god of rain. This tale of faith and devotion was brought to life in the dance drama with powerful choreography and cutting-edge technology. The use of sound to mimic the torrential rain, combined with the visual effects of Krishna lifting the mountain, created a dramatic and immersive experience. This scene was a reminder of Krishna's role as a protector and guide, offering shelter to those who sought refuge in him. The production also delved into Krishna's teachings, particularly his discourse in the Bhagavad Gita, where he imparted profound wisdom to Arjuna on the battlefield of

Kurukshetra. These moments were portrayed with a deep sense of reverence, with the actors embodying the solemnity and gravitas of the occasion.

### THE BOND OF FRIENDSHIP: KRISHNA AND SUDAMA

Another beautifully portrayed scene in this production was the touching story of Krishna and his childhood friend Sudama. The drama captured the essence of their humble friendship, where Sudama, a poor Brahmin, visited Krishna with a small offering of beaten rice. Despite his wealth and status, Krishna welcomed Sudama with open arms, treating him with the utmost love and respect. This scene was a poignant reminder of the value of true friendship and the humility that Krishna embodied. The emotions conveyed in this part of the drama were both heartwarming and inspiring, showcasing the depth of Krishna's compassion and kindness.

### A MODERN TAKE ON A TIMELESS NARRATIVE

What set this production apart was its seamless blend of tradition and innovation. The use of a state-of-the-art LED wall enhanced the storytelling, providing a dynamic backdrop that shifted with the mood and tone of the scenes. Whether depicting the serene beauty of Vrindavan, the dramatic battlefield of Kurukshetra, or the divine dance of the gopis, the LED wall brought each scene to life with stunning visuals. The choreography itself was a fusion of traditional Indian dance forms like Kathak, Mayurbhanj Chhau and Kalaripayattu. Kalaripayattu, a martial arts form, was used to depict Krishna's role as a warrior, while the graceful movements of Kathak highlighted the romantic and spiritual elements of his story. This combination of dance forms not only added variety to the performance

but also showcased the versatility and depth of Indian classical dance.

### A MESSAGE OF HOPE AND PEACE

At its core, "KRISHNA" was more than just a retelling of an ancient story. It was a message of hope and peace, echoing the enduring spirit of Krishna. In a world that often seemed overwhelmed by conflict and confusion, Krishna's teachings offered a hope of light. His life, as portrayed in this dance drama, was a reminder of the importance of love, compassion and understanding. Whether it was his playful interactions with the people of Vrindavan or his profound discourse in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna's message was timeless, resonating with audiences across generations.

Under the esteemed guidance of Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh, the production had been carefully crafted to bring out the essence of Krishna's teachings. She shared her vision, stating, "KRISHNA is a living embodiment of Lord Krishna's timeless wisdom. Through captivating storytelling and artistic brilliance, we bring his life's journey to the stage. Each performance is a symphony of dance, music and visuals, creating a world where divine and human intertwine."

### THE ENDURING LEGACY OF 'KRISHNA'

As the final scene unfolded with Krishna delivering his message, the audience was deeply impressed by the scale and beauty of the performance. The combination of traditional dance, modern technology and powerful storytelling created an experience that was both entertaining and thought-provoking. It was a production that stayed with everyone long after the final bow, leaving them with a renewed sense of faith and a deeper understanding of Krishna's teachings.

In its 48th edition, "KRISHNA" continued to captivate audiences, offering a fresh perspective on the story. It served as a reminder that Krishna's story was not just

a part of India's cultural heritage but a universal message of love, wisdom and divine grace. As the lights dimmed and the audience stood to applaud, it was clear that the legacy of Krishna, as brought to life by Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, was as enduring as ever.

This Janmashtami, as you celebrate the birth of Lord Krishna, take a moment to reflect on his life and teachings. Whether through the lens of this mesmerising dance drama or in the quiet moments of prayer, let the spirit of Krishna guide you towards a path of love, compassion and peace. After all, as Lord Krishna himself said, "Whenever there is a decline in righteousness and an increase in unrighteousness, O Arjuna, at that time I manifest myself on earth." Let his words inspire you to be the change you wish to see in the world.

### AN EXPERIENCE BEYOND WORDS

The dance drama was a breathtaking spectacle that left a lasting impression on everyone fortunate enough to witness it. The seamless fusion of traditional dance forms, vivid costumes and intricate choreography captivated audiences across all ages. Children gazed in wonder at the playful and mischievous Little Krishna while older viewers were drawn into the deeper layers of his life story, each moment beautifully portrayed with an authenticity that touched the soul. The meticulous attention to detail in every aspect of the production was evident. The vibrant costumes, reflecting the rich culture of India, were perfectly complemented by the dancer's expressive movements. The makeup artistry brought out the divine essence of Krishna, making him not just a character on stage but a living, breathing deity with whom the audience felt a personal connection.

Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra's "KRISHNA" was not just a performance; it was an experience. It was an annual tradition that rekindled our faith in the enduring legacy of Lord Krishna and his teachings.

As we celebrate Janmashtami, we carry forward the lessons from this dance drama into our own lives, striving for a world where love, compassion and righteousness prevail. The life of Krishna, as depicted in this magical performance, reminds us that divinity resides not in the heavens alone but within each one of us, in the love and kindness we show to others. As we enjoy the festivities, let's carry forward the lessons of love, compassion and wisdom that Krishna embodies, allowing them to guide us in our everyday lives.



# Paralympic social media accounts front traditional media with edgy take

**AP ■ PARIS**  
The message is clear: Paralympians are not participating. They are competing. A number of athletes preparing for the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games have proclaimed that on their social feeds over the past few days, reminding the world that Olympians are not the only athletes coming to Paris looking for gold. The games will be underway next week with the opening ceremony on Wednesday. Athletes and the games' own social and creative teams have been taking a more aggressive approach to their messaging, leaning into disabilities and being willing to risk discomfiting their audience to introduce athletes and their personalities, not just their



disabilities. The International Paralympic Committee has released several YouTube videos to show the edgier side of its competitors, including: "Paris 2024: What Really Matters" and "Paris 2024: 100 Days to Go - Welcome to the Paralympics." The tagline for both: "This is the Paralympics... they're not playing games." A Guy With No Arms If you didn't know the characters, the "What Really Matters" series opens on a jarring note. A genial 5-foot-6-inch man grasps a car's steering wheel

with his feet. He leans over to his passenger and says with a sideways smile, "Is this your first time riding in a car with a guy without arms?" The guy with no arms is Paralympic silver medalist Matt Stutzman, who has built up a brand as the "Armless Archer." He maneuvers the car with his feet: left foot on the pedals, right foot on the steering wheel. Stutzman's passenger is Chuck Aoki, a wheelchair rugby player joining Stutzman on Team USA. In the YouTube series, Stutzman hosts Aoki and para track and field athlete Scout Bassett telling their stories from a different point of view with humor thrown in. "There's that connection; it's like an unspoken bond," said Stutzman, who earned a silver medal in the men's individual compound open at the London games in 2012. "I might not know who Bassett is, but we both know that we both had to go through something specific to even get to the level where we're at in sport." Edgy takes The IPC has received criticism for leaning into the disabilities of their athletes, but spokesman Craig Spence said the irreverent approach was necessary. "If you speak to Paralympians, they've got a great sense of humor. They're not wrapped up in cotton wool and protected from society," Spence said in an interview earlier this year. "They like to laugh about themselves," he said. "Like we all do, and that's why we've tried to be really edgy on the Paralympic TikTok account." Spence said the criticism the IPC had received came mostly from people outside the community of people with disabilities, and the comments often ask who the admin is on the account - implying it's someone making fun of disabilities. But according to Spence, the "admin" is 2008 Paralympian Richard Fox from Britain.



## Nacer, voice of Olympic boxing, now targets Paralympic glory as judoka

**AP ■ PARIS**  
Nacer Zorgani has had a busy summer. In July at the Paris Games, his captivating baritone voice gained him fans as the announcer at the Olympic boxing. Now, the 38-year-old is preparing to make his mark as a fiercely dedicated Parajudo competitor, training tirelessly for the Paralympic Games that start Wednesday. Zorgani will compete on Sept. 7 in the men's 90-kilogram, J2 classification for visually impaired athletes. For him, the sport is far more than just a competition; it is the embodiment of his lifelong commitment to the "way of the bushi," with the traditional Japanese martial art philosophy of bushido shaping his journey. Before finding his calling in judo, Zorgani dabbled in various sports, including boxing and Brazilian jiu-jitsu. "It's all one thing for me," he said. "I follow the way of the bushi... Resilience, discipline, and an unwavering focus. Whether it's in the ring, on the mat, or in life, the principles are the same." His transition to judo was a natural progression. The sport's emphasis on balance, technique, and mental strength resonated with Zorgani, who found in judo not just a way to compete but a path to mastering his own limitations. Zorgani was declared legally blind at 17 after a doctor diagnosed progressive deterioration of both retinas. By 20, he had lost most of his vision and could only see blurry shapes in very bright environments. This did not deter him; instead, it fueled his determination to excel. "I've lived through very dark moments, when I felt beat down by my disability," Zorgani said. "But combat sports really, really helped me." In judo, the tactile nature of the sport can be useful for athletes like Zorgani. From the moment he comes to grips with his opponent, he uses touch to sense their movements, balance, and intentions. The lack of sight can sharpen his other senses, allowing him to anticipate and react with split-second precision. "Judo is about feeling your opponent's energy, their center of gravity, and their intentions," he said. "In that sense, my visual impairment has taught me to trust my instincts and my training even more."

## Lakshya heads to Austria for physical assessment

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Aiming to be in the best shape for the upcoming tournaments in the BWF circuit, India's Lakshya Sen on Sunday left for Austria for a detailed evaluation of his body. The 22-year-old from Almora, who had come close to winning an Olympic medal in Paris before finishing fourth, will undergo a series of tests at the Red Bull Athlete Performance Centre in Salzburg to get a detailed evaluation to rev up his fitness and game. "Lakshya is going to Austria to do some physical assessment. There is a good sports institute there, where he wants to do some physical exercise. He left today and will be back after a week," Vimal told PTI. Lakshya is accompanied by his trainer, Gaurav and a 15-year-old junior shuttler Nishchal Chand from Uttarakhand to help him keep abreast with the game during the week. "The tests will focus basically on specific strength aspects. Many of the elite athletes go and get themselves tested there. We had consulted Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala for all his niggles and injuries. "Right now, he is fine but before he really starts going full-fledged, it is important for him to get the right physical training, and unless the strength and conditioning program is really spot on, he can get injuries. So we have to find the right things to do." Lakshya is likely to play the Hong Kong Super 500 and China Open Super 1000 next in late September this year. Badminton is a physically demanding game and Vimal feels Lakshya has to keep working on his overall fitness, especially considering the kind of game that he possesses. "He needs to definitely get better on fitness aspects, especially the speed, endurance and other things he needs to work on."

## Bangladesh registers historic 10-wicket win after Pakistan collapse to 146 all out in 1st test

**AP ■ RAWALPINDI (PAKISTAN)**  
Bangladesh shrugged off political unrest back home to notch a historic 10-wicket win after Pakistan collapsed to 146 all out on a dramatic final day of the first test on Sunday. Off-spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz and left-arm spinner Shakib Al Hasan, who was a lawmaker in the government of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, shared seven wickets after the pace bowlers mopped up the top order to give Bangladesh its maiden win in 14 test matches against Pakistan. Openers Zakir Hasan and Shadman Islam were unbeaten



Mehidy picked up 4-21 and Shakib 3-44 while the three fast bowlers Shorif Islam, Hasan Mahmud and Nahid Rana snared one wicket each.

on 15 and 9, respectively, as Bangladesh reached 30-0 at the stroke of the tea interval for only its seventh away test win and the first since beating New Zealand at Mount Maunganui in January 2022. Pakistan, which conceded a 117-run first innings lead despite declaring at 448-6, was bowled out by a disciplined pace and spin attack after it resumed on 23-1 and still 94 runs behind. Mohammad Rizwan followed his career-best unbeaten 171 to top-score with 51 but most of his teammates were guilty of falling to rash shots coupled with some aggressive field placings by Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto. Earlier, in a dramatic first session Bangladesh set up its victory as Pakistan limped to 108-6 and lost five wickets. Captain Shan Masood (14) was dismissed in the second over of the day when Hasan found a faint edge and had the Pakistan skipper caught behind. Masood argued with onfield umpire Richard Kettleborough for the second time in the test match after he was also caught behind in a controversial manner in the first innings, but the television replays clearly suggested the left-hander had a tickle on the ball after Bangladesh went for a successful television referral. Hasan should have had Babar Azam out for a pair of ducks in the game, but wicketkeeper Litton Das spilled a simple catch off the first ball Babar faced. Babar tried to break the shackles and hit three boundaries before he was out to fast bowler Rana (1-30) when on 22. Pakistan's middle-order batters were guilty of throwing away their wickets against the two spinners, Shakib and Mehidy. First innings century-maker Saud Shakeel needlessly tried to play an extravagant shot against Shakib and got stumped for zero for the first time in his short test career.

## Meet 13-year-old badminton prodigy Tanvi

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Thirteen-year-old Tanvi Patri from Odisha has cemented her status as one of India's most promising badminton prodigies by clinching the girls' singles title at the U-15 Badminton Asia U-17 & U-15 Junior Championships in Chengdu, China, the country where she first honed her skills in the sport. Patri capped off a phenomenal week with a superlative performance, defeating Vietnam's second seed Thi Thu Huyen Nguyen 22-20, 21-11 in a 34-minute final, offering a glimmer of hope after Indian badminton's recent struggles at the Paris Olympics. "I'm feeling good after winning the title," Patri told PTI from Chengdu. "I had expected to win, and I'm happy I could do that. I've been training at the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy (PPBA) in Bangalore for the last two years." Patri displayed remarkable resilience, fighting back from 11-17 down in the opening game to win the title without dropping a game throughout the tournament.



Her parents, Rabinarayan Patri and Sailabala Panda, are software professionals who previously worked in China, where she first took up badminton. The family returned to India in 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic. Vimal Kumar, Director of PPBA, sees great promise in Tanvi, even drawing comparisons to the early days of P V Sindhu, one of India's most celebrated badminton players. "She was about eight or nine when she moved to India and joined the academy in 2022," said Vimal. "She reminds me of Sindhu when she was young. The ability to win matches at a young age is a good sign. She has a long way to go, and with her temperament, she has great potential." Rabinarayan, a software engineer who works from home, accompanies Patri to the academy. In November 2022, he drove 1,400 km from Bengaluru to Balangir for Patri's participation in the state sub-junior badminton tournament. "She is ahead of her age group," Vimal noted. "In the last six months, she has won U-17 tournaments and defeated several senior players, including the

current national championship finalist, Tanvi Sharma. "If she improves her strength and continues to develop, she could be a strong contender for the 2028 or 2032 Olympics." Patri, who also enjoys skating, began her badminton training under Chinese coach Jiang Yong Yi and won nine titles in China between 2017 and 2020. After returning to India, she was spotted by PPBA during a camp and joined the academy in March 2022. She went on to claim both the U-15 and U-17 girls' singles titles in the All India sub-junior ranking tournaments in Hyderabad in June and Mapusa, Goa, in May this year. Tanvi also won the gold medal in the 35th Sub-Junior National Championships in Balangir, Odisha, last November and became the first shuttler from Odisha to win the girls' singles title in the 34th Sub-Junior (U-13) National Championships in Lucknow in 2022. A class eight student, Patri had reached the quarterfinals at the German Junior International in Berlin in March.

## Shubhankar Sharma tied 11th in Dutch Golf

**PTI ■ AARHUS (DENMARK)**  
Shubhankar Sharma landed two eagles in his third round but also gave away a double bogey as he closed the day at 2-under 69 to be tied-11th at the Danish Golf Championship. Sharma, who had also shot 69s in his first two rounds, is currently 6-under and six strokes behind leader Lucas Bjerregaard, who after a slow start, shot 5-under 66 that had four birdies between the 10th and the 14th. The Indian star, who had won the second of his two DP World Tour titles in 2018, opened with an eagle and followed it up with a birdie. Pars followed and, on the back nine, he had another eagle on the 10th at which point he was 5-under. He even held a share of the lead briefly. Sharma then gave away too many shots, including a double and two bogeys against just one more birdie on the 17th. It was the third straight round in which he had a double bogey. Bjerregaard will go in search of his first DP World Tour title



## Mayweather goes distance against John in Mexico City

**AP ■ MEXICO CITY**  
Former world champion Floyd Mayweather went the distance against John Gotti III in an exhibition fight on Saturday night in Mexico City. The 47-year-old Mayweather fought Gotti in an eight-round fight with no judges in Arena Ciudad de Mexico. It was a rematch of a fight that ended in a massive brawl in Florida last June. Mayweather, who retired from boxing in 2017 with an unbeaten record in 50 bouts, dominated the fight from the second round, when the fighter nicknamed "Money" asked for a change of referee. At the end of the fight, Mayweather and Gotti III embraced in the ring as Mexicans fans loudly booed. Mayweather is considered one of the greatest boxers in history. During a career that spanned 21 years, he won world titles in five different divisions and beat rivals including Manny Pacquiao, Oscar De La Hoya, Shane Mosley and Saul "Canelo" Alvarez.

## Bowlers, Dhruv-Lakshay power Central Delhi Kings to 10-wicket win over West Delhi Lions

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Dhruv Kaushik scored an unbeaten half century after bowlers produced a disciplined effort to help Central Delhi Kings inflict a 10-wicket defeat on West Delhi Lions in the Delhi Premier League here. Chasing a modest target of 124, Central Delhi Kings openers Dhruv (68 off 52 balls) and Lakshay Thareja (46 off 37 balls) came out all guns blazing on Saturday. Right from the start, both openers were aggressive in their approach and found the boundaries comfortably as they chased down the target in 14.5 overs. Dhruv's unbeaten innings included six boundaries and two sixes, while Lakshay smashed three fours and a six. Earlier, West Delhi Lions didn't get the start they

would have wished for after they were sent in to bat. Central Delhi Kings' Sumit Kumar dismissed both their openers cheaply. With the openers back in the pavilion, the responsibility came on Yugal Saini and Krish Yadav. With Central Delhi Kings bowlers sticking to their line and length, West Delhi Lions struggled to keep the scoreboard ticking. Yugal was then dismissed by Yogesh Sharma for 7 runs. At the end of the powerplay, West Delhi Lions were struggling at 33/3. Krish Yadav along with Ayush Doseja then slowly started rotating the strike and kept the score ticking. At the halfway stage of their innings, West Delhi Lions were 53/3. However, the 38-run partnership from 43 balls

## Keegan takes 1-shot lead over Adam Scott at BMW Championship

**AP ■ CASTLE ROCK (COLORADO)**  
Keegan Bradley is still getting used to his new title as U.S. Ryder Cup captain. He still feels like a player who should be competing to win and thinking about playing in the matches. He certainly looked the part Saturday in the BMW Championship, all while hearing the occasional "U-S-A! U-S-A!" cheer as he made his way across windswept Castle Pines for a wild round of 2-under 70 that gave him a one-shot lead over Adam Scott. "To be named Ryder Cup captain and still be a full-time player is strange, said Bradley, at 38 the youngest U.S. Captain since Arnold Palmer in 1963. "I don't know anyone who knows how to handle this situation, so I'm doing the best I can. The only thing I can keep doing is playing my best golf and maybe play my way



on to some of these teams." A victory would make him the first captain to win on the PGA Tour since Davis Love III was 51 when he won the 2015 Wyndham Championship. It also would move Bradley to No. 11 in the world ranking. One round, but that can feel like a long way off considering the developments Saturday. Bradley had eight birdies and still only shot 70, a round that featured three straight birdies on the front, three straight bogeys on the back and four birdies over his last five holes (the exception was a bogey on the par-3 16th). He was at 12-

under 204. It was like that for just about everybody. Adam Scott hit one tee shot out-of-bounds and another in the water after just three holes and had to rally at the end to limit the damage to a 74, leaving him only one shot behind. "I kind of felt like I made a meal of that, and I didn't feel like I did that much wrong - a couple of drives were just not quite right, and a three-putt, and all of a sudden I'm kind of chasing," Scott said. "I'm in a good spot in the end of it to be one back." Ludvig Aberg began his day

**INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI) FOR ENGAGEMENT OF ATTENDANTS**  
Expression of Interest for Engagement of Attendants through contractual manpower outsourcing agencies to provide Attendants throughout the geographical jurisdiction of Kathihar Division. The detailed EOI document indicating the scope of work, qualifying requirements, forms and procedure for submission of proposal for EOI are available and can be downloaded from website of NFR at <http://nfr.indianrailways.gov.in>. Bidding offer can be submitted in sealed cover addressed to Office of Divisional Material Manager/Kathihar, DRM Building, North East Frontier Railway, Kathihar, Bihar-854105 on or before 15.00 hrs. of 09-09-2024 and will be opened on 09-09-2024 at 16.30 hrs.  
Divisional Material Manager, Kathihar  
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