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Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority

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Odisha Police tighten security for Prez visit



DGP reviews Bandabost, rail surveillance

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Director General of Police (DGP) Yogesh Bahadur Khurania on Friday chaired a high-level review meeting to assess security and safety arrangements for President Droupadi Murmu's scheduled visit to the State on August 4.

Reviewing the preparations, the DGP directed all agencies to strictly follow the security protocols laid down in the Blue Book for VVIP visits. He instructed departments to des-

ignate nodal officers to ensure seamless coordination, prompt communication and effective implementation of security arrangements.

The meeting decided that anti-sabotage checks and venue sanitisation would be carried out on priority at all venues and along the President's travel route. Access control and frisking will be strengthened, while track patrolling will be intensified. All railway level crossings on the route will remain manned throughout the visit, and railway personnel assigned to platform duties will be identified in advance and issued duty passes.

Khurania also reviewed arrangements for drone surveillance, CCTV-based monitoring and continuous vigil over the venue and travel route. He directed officers to maintain close coordination and ensure effective traffic management, crowd regulation, emergency response and contingency planning for a smooth, secure and dignified visit of the President.

The meeting was attended by Intelligence Director RP Koche, Law and Order ADGP Sanjay Kumar, SAP ADGP Rajesh Kumar, Bhubaneswar-Cuttack Commissioner of Police Dr Dev Datta Singh, East Coast Railway Principal Chief Security Commissioner Alok Bohra, Central Range IGP Dr Satyajit Naik and SCID-CB SP Vivekananda Sharma, along with senior police, railway and civil administration officials.

In city

Youth hacked to death; 3 detained

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A youth was hacked to death at Gayatri Basti near Garage Chhak under the Lingaraj police station in Bhubaneswar on Thursday night.

The victim was identified as Jitu Kand, a betel shop owner and a resident of Sishupalgarh. He was engaged in running a small betel shop.

According to reports, the victim youth had been consuming alcohol with four other persons before the incident took place. The assailants allegedly attacked him with a sharp weapon, leading to his death.

Police suspect that an altercation may have preceded the attack, though the exact sequence of events and the motive behind the alleged murder



are yet to be established.

After receiving information, the Lingaraj police rushed to the spot, recovered the body and launched an investigation. The body was sent for post-mortem examination as part of the probe.

Police have detained three persons for questioning in connection with the incident, while efforts are underway to

ascertain the circumstances that led to the suspected killing and identify those directly responsible.

It is said that the deceased, Jitu Kand, was consuming alcohol with four other people. Police have detained three individuals-Gangadhar Behera, Chagu, and Babuna Behera-for questioning. However, another accused, Gopal Das, is

currently absconding.

Sources said Jitu was allegedly involved in illegal liquor trade in Gayatri Basti. Police had previously shut down his shop, but he had recently reopened it.

Gayatri Basti president Lakshmi Priya Mishra said she came to know about the incident after receiving a phone call from the police at around

6.45 am. "When I reached the spot, I saw that Jitu was dead. He belonged to Sishupalgarh. Previously, he used to visit the house of Jayanti Reddy. I had even asked him not to come to her," Lakshmi Priya said.

"Jayanti was trading ganja in the shop, which had been raided by the local police. Later, the shop was sealed after I and some others had opposed the illegal activity," Lakshmi Priya added.

The gruesome murder has once again raised concerns over violent crimes in the capital city. Police are examining all possible angles, including personal enmity and disputes during the drinking session.

Officials said further details would emerge after the interrogation of detained individuals and the completion of a forensic investigation.

In city

AI skill drive launched for education staffs



PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

In a major step towards integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into governance and higher education, the State Higher Education Department launched a three-day "Skill Development on Artificial Intelligence (AI)" workshop at the Rama Devi Women's University here on Thursday.

The programme has brought together all officers and employees of the Higher Education Department for intensive training on AI applications, reflecting the State Government's focus on building digital capabilities within the education sector.

The inaugural session was attended by Higher Education Commissioner-cum-Secretary Aravind Agrawal, Rama Devi Women's University Vice-Chancellor Prof. Jyotsna K.B. Rout, IIT Madras educator S. Nithi, Director Kali Prasanna Mahapatra, Additional Secretary Dharanidhar Nanda, and other senior officials.

Addressing the participants, the speakers highlighted the growing significance of Artificial Intelligence

in transforming both education and public administration. They emphasized the need to promote high-quality AI research while equipping students, teachers, researchers and government officials with practical skills to ensure the technology is adopted effectively, ethically and responsibly.

The first day's sessions introduced participants to AI fundamentals, its applications in academic and administrative functions, and a range of free AI-powered mobile applications. The training also included hands-on demonstrations on the ethical and efficient use of AI tools in day-to-day work.

The workshop, which will continue till July 31, is designed to strengthen AI literacy among officials and create a future-ready workforce capable of leveraging emerging technologies to improve teaching, learning and governance. Officials said the initiative reflects the State Government's commitment to harnessing the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence to modernise higher education and enhance the efficiency of public service delivery.

Book on Emergency 'Rahasyalok' unveiled



Speaker urges recall of democratic history

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Rahasyalok, a research-based book on the Emergency (1975-77) authored by senior journalist and writer Dr. Ravi Sharma, was formally released at a function held at the Red Cross Bhawan in Bhubaneswar on Saturday.

The book was unveiled by Odisha Legislative Assembly Speaker Surama Padhy, who attended the event as the Chief Guest. Among those present were former MLA Amar Satpathy, MLA Prasanna Acharya, former MP and senior journalist Soumya Ranjan Patnaik, senior journalist Sriram Das, senior citizen Sarojini Devi, and several eminent personalities from public life.

Addressing the gathering, Speaker Surama Padhy stressed the importance of preserving historical memory. "It is important to remember history because we remember our freedom. The Emergency remains a significant chapter in India's democratic journey, and future generations must understand the value of democracy and the sacrifices made to safeguard it," she said.

MLA Prasanna Acharya

said books like Rahasyalok should be widely read and discussed, adding that a society can build a better future only when its youth understand the lessons of the past. "History is not merely a record of events but a guide for future generations," he remarked.

Recalling his own experiences during the Emergency, former MLA Amar Satpathy described the period as one of severe repression and said its lessons should never be forgotten. He emphasised that preserving the memories of that era is essential for strengthening democratic values and protecting civil liberties.

Sharing her recollections, Sarojini Devi spoke about the hardships faced by ordinary citizens during the Emergency, including food shortages and an atmosphere of fear that affected daily life.

Former MP and senior journalist Soumya Ranjan Patnaik observed that while the definition of "Emergency" may have evolved over time, the importance of dissent in a democracy remains unchanged. He underlined the need for independent journalism and the freedom to express differing opinions as essential pillars of a healthy democracy.

Speaking on the occasion, author Dr. Ravi Sharma explained the background and

objective of Rahasyalok. He said the book examines the Emergency not merely as a political event but as a period that reshaped institutions, governance, personalities and democratic processes.

Dr. Sharma also discussed the constitutional provisions relating to the Emergency, noting that while the Constitution of India provides for such a mechanism, its framework has often been linked by scholars to the experiences of Germany's Weimar Constitution. He observed that the political circumstances prevailing during the Emergency of 1975 were distinct from those of the present day and emphasised that studying history is essential for strengthening democratic institutions in the future.

Speakers at the event unanimously agreed that the Emergency remains one of the most significant chapters in India's democratic history. Through Rahasyalok, Dr. Ravi Sharma has sought to present a fresh perspective on this period and encourage younger generations to understand its historical, political and constitutional dimensions.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks to the distinguished guests, journalists, literary enthusiasts and members of the public who attended the event.

In city outskirts

STF seizes Rs 2.5 cr ganja from truck

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

In a major crackdown on interstate drug trafficking, the Special Task Force (STF) of the Odisha Police on Friday seized 497 kg of ganja worth around Rs 2.5 crore and detained a truck driver from Uttar Pradesh.

Acting on specific intelligence, an STF team intercepted a goods carrier truck (UP81ET0981) near Pitapalli under the Inovalley police station. During a search, officers recovered the commercial quantity of the contraband concealed beneath bags of rice in an apparent bid to evade detection.

The detained driver-cum-

owner of the truck was identified as Raju, son of Prem Chandra, a resident of Chaman Nagaria village in Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the contraband had been procured from Gajapati district, loaded at Brahmapur, and was being transported to New Delhi.

Besides the ganja, the STF seized the truck, mobile phones and other incriminating materials. A case has been registered under the relevant provisions of the NDPS Act.

Officials said STF teams would travel to Uttar Pradesh and New Delhi to trace the suppliers, transport facilitators,

intended recipients, financiers and other members of the interstate drug syndicate. Investigators will also examine the financial trail to establish both backward and forward linkages and dismantle the entire network. The accused will be produced before the jurisdictional court after completion of legal formalities. The STF is also likely to seek custodial interrogation to unravel the larger conspiracy behind the racket.

The seizure is one of the biggest ganja hauls in recent months and marks another significant success under the Odisha Police's "Nasha Mukh Odisha" campaign against narcotics trafficking.

In Cuttack

Mahanadi floods cut off villages

PNS ■ Cuttack

The flood situation along the Mahanadi river remained critical in parts of Cuttack district on Friday, with rising waters inundating vast stretches and cutting off several villages in Athagarh, Tigris and Banki blocks.

Floodwaters submerged roads and disrupted vehicular movement, leaving residents stranded and severely affecting access to many villages. Emergency services also faced major challenges as ambulances were unable to reach several flood-hit areas due to the loss of road connectivity.



Tigris block emerged as one of the worst-affected regions, with the Badanaupat, Sompada, Hattamal and Gadadharpur panchayats witnessing extensive inundation as the Mahanadi continued to swell.

In Banki block, nearly 15 villages under the Osiya, Subarnapur and Bandal panchayats, among others,

were also affected by the rising floodwaters, according to official sources.

The floods have dealt a severe blow to agriculture, with standing paddy crops and vegetable fields reportedly submerged and damaged across several affected pockets of the district.

Authorities are closely monitoring the situation and keeping a watch on vulnerable villages as floodwaters continue to spread in low-lying areas. Rescue and relief efforts are being coordinated in the affected regions, while officials remain on alert for any further rise in the river level.

Jajpur floods

Four missing, over 3,000 evacuated

PNS ■ Jajpur

The flood situation in Jajpur district turned grim on Thursday, with at least four people reported missing in separate incidents even as the administration shifted more than 3,000 residents to safer locations from inundated villages.

Triggered by incessant rainfall and rising river levels, the floods have affected large parts of the district, submerging villages, damaging agricultural land and disrupting road connectivity.

According to local authorities, a youth from Mugudi village was swept away by strong currents near Chiriki Padia in the Jafarpur area. In another incident, two farmers went missing while attempting to



manage the swelling waters of the Budha river.

Another person from Harijan Sahi in Similia village disappeared while crossing the breached Anura embankment near Ghosara. Rescue teams, assisted by local authorities, have launched intensive search operations to trace the missing persons.

The floods have severely impacted 84 villages spread across 28 gram panchayats.

Several roads remain submerged, cutting off transportation links and isolating many villages. Thousands of acres of agricultural land have also gone underwater, raising fears of significant crop losses.

The district administration has intensified relief and rescue operations in the affected areas. More than 3,000 people have been evacuated from vulnerable locations

and shifted to temporary relief shelters, where food, drinking water and basic medical assistance are being provided.

Officials said the situation is being monitored round the clock as water levels in nearby rivers continue to remain high. Rescue teams have been kept on high alert to respond to any emergency, while efforts are underway to restore connectivity and provide relief to stranded residents.

Rs 3,384 cr boost for Odisha broadband

BharatNet Phase-III to connect 50,000 villages

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

In a major boost to Odisha's digital infrastructure, the Centre will invest over Rs 3,384 crore to expand high-speed broadband connectivity across rural areas under the BharatNet Phase-III project. The investment follows the signing of two key Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the Odisha Government and Central agencies on Wednesday.

The primary agreement for the revised BharatNet programme was signed among Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN), the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), BSNL, and the State's Electronics and Information Technology Department.



The project aims to strengthen digital connectivity by linking block headquarters with gram panchayats through optical fibre while extending Fibre-to-the-Home (FTTH) services to villages. Data exchange centres will also be established at block and gram panchayat levels.

Under the initiative, all 6,799 gram panchayats in Odisha will be upgraded using IP-MPLS technology and a ring topology network.

Scheduled for completion within the next three years, the project is expected to provide reliable broadband connectivity to more than 50,000 villages across the state.

A second MoU was signed between the State Electronics and IT Department and the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) to collaborate on emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, research, and

digital public services.

The partnership aims to modernise governance by making public services faster, more transparent, secure and accessible through advanced digital technologies.

The twin agreements are expected to accelerate Odisha's digital transformation by improving internet access in rural areas while promoting innovation in e-governance and emerging technologies.

10 more Hirakud gates opened

As reservoir level rises due to heavy rains

PNS ■ Sambalpur

The authorities on Friday opened 10 more gates of the Hirakud Dam following a steady rise in the reservoir's water level due to persistent heavy rainfall across the State's river catchments.

Earlier, excess floodwater was being released through two gates. With the latest move, the number of operational gates has been increased to regulate the growing inflow into the reservoir.

As of 6 am, the water level in the Hirakud Reservoir stood at 623.52 feet, against its full storage capacity of 630 feet.

Officials said the reservoir is receiving an inflow of



3,69,322 cusecs of water every second, while 65,543 cusecs is being discharged downstream.

Hirakud Dam Chief Engineer Sanjay Kumar Choudhary said the gates are being operated after assessing conditions in downstream low-lying areas.

"At present, around 8 lakh

cusecs of water is passing through Mundali, and the discharge is expected to decline gradually. A flow of 10 lakh cusecs is considered a flood situation. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), there is no forecast of rainfall till August 4," he said.

Officials said a decision on

opening additional gates, if required, would be taken after 2 pm based on the prevailing inflow, reservoir level and downstream conditions.

The Water Resources Department is closely monitoring the situation and coordinating with district administrations to ensure timely response in vulnerable areas.

In Cuttack

Bhattarika Temple hit by Mahanadi floods

Deity shifted to temporary shrine

PNS ■ Cuttack

Rising floodwaters of the Mahanadi entered the revered Maa Bhattarika Temple at Badamba in Cuttack district on Wednesday, prompting temple authorities to shift the presiding deity to a temporary shrine on higher ground as a precaution.

Floodwater reached the temple's Gambhira after the Mahanadi continued to swell following heavy rainfall across the river basin. In keeping with a long-standing monsoon tradition, temple servants relocated the movable idol of Maa Bhattarika to the Sara Ghar on Ratnagiri hill, where daily rituals and wor-



ship would continue until the floodwater recedes.

Before the relocation, priests completed all prescribed religious ceremonies to ensure there was no disruption in the temple's daily niti and customary rituals.

Temple servants, along with the local administration, are closely monitoring the river level as floodwater con-

tinues to remain within the temple premises.

Necessary measures have also been taken to protect the shrine and facilitate the uninterrupted conduct of religious observances despite the flood situation.

Situated on the banks of the Mahanadi, the historic Maa Bhattarika Temple frequently faces flooding during the

monsoon season whenever the river swells. The temporary relocation of the deity is a well-established practice followed to safeguard the idol while ensuring the continuation of traditional worship.

Even as floodwaters surround parts of the temple complex, priests are continuing daily rituals from the temporary shrine on Ratnagiri hill.

In Dhenkanal

Mystery shrouds youth's death



PNS ■ Dhenkanal

A youth was found dead under mysterious circumstances at Bhagirathipur village under the Kamakshyanagar police station in Dhenkanal district on Friday morning.

The deceased was identified as Bikash Dehuri, a resident of Bhagirathipur village.

According to family members, Bikash had dinner on Thursday night and went to sleep as usual. However, when he failed to wake up on Friday morning, his family members tried to rouse him but found him unresponsive.

"When family members

tried to wake him up, he did not respond. We later found him dead," said his father, Prahalad Dehuri.

After receiving information, the Kamakshyanagar police reached the spot, seized the body and launched an investigation. The body has been sent for postmortem examination to ascertain the exact cause of death.

Police said the circumstances surrounding the youth's death remain unclear and all possible angles are being investigated. Officials added that the post-mortem report is expected to shed light on the cause of the mysterious death.

PPA holds workshop on Four Labour Codes

PNS ■ Paradip

The Paradip Port Authority (PPA) on Friday organised an awareness-cum-workshop on the Four Labour Codes to enhance understanding of labour law reforms, statutory compliance, workers' welfare and workplace safety among employers, contractors and trade unions.

The workshop was chaired by PL Haranadh, IRTS, Chairman, PPA. Chiranjeev Saikia, Deputy Chief Labour Commissioner (Central), Bhubaneswar, attended as the chief guest, while Jayanta Prasad Behera, Regional Labour Commissioner (Central), Bhubaneswar, was also present.

Delivering the keynote address, Haranadh said the PPA functions on the principles of trust, responsibility and teamwork, with equal emphasis on the welfare of regular and con-



tractual workers. He said the Government of India's Four Labour Codes are aimed at simplifying labour laws while strengthening social security, workplace safety and the rights of workers.

Highlighting PPA's welfare initiatives, he said the port authority has introduced enhanced benefits for contractual workers, mandatory free health check-ups every three years, multilingual safety awareness campaigns and a fully funded one-week safety

training programme for workers, including those engaged in Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects.

Chief guest Chiranjeev Saikia lauded PPA for organising the workshop, describing it as a significant initiative to strengthen labour law compliance and foster constructive engagement between employers and workers.

Technical experts conducted detailed sessions on the Four Labour Codes and demonstrated the use of the Shram

Suvidha Portal for registrations, licences and statutory returns, besides explaining the Samadhan Portal for grievance redressal, dispute resolution and claims.

The programme concluded with an interactive session, with PPA Secretary Krishna Bapi Raju G reaffirming the port authority's commitment to creating a safe, compliant and worker-friendly workplace. Representatives of trade unions and employees actively participated in the deliberations.

In Kendrapada

Snake menace deepens flood misery

35-yr-old dies of snakebite

RAJESH BEHERA ■ Kendrapada

The flood-hit Kendrapada district is now battling a new threat as venomous snakes, displaced by rising waters, have begun invading villages, triggering panic among residents.

The fear intensified after a 35-year-old man died of a snakebite while wading through floodwaters.

The deceased, Shubhprada Swain of Talagaon village under Karilopatana panchayat

in Marshaghai block, was bitten by a venomous snake on Thursday while crossing a waterlogged stretch. He was rushed to the District Headquarters Hospital but succumbed during treatment.

The incident has heightened anxiety in riverside villages, where floodwaters have forced snakes out of their burrows and into houses, courtyards and other elevated places.

The situation is particularly grim in Karandia Patana village under Mehendigar panchayat, where swelling waters of the Karandia River

have marooned residents. With roads submerged and boats becoming the only means of transport, villagers are now grappling with the dual threat of flooding and snake attacks.

"Snakes are everywhere-in kitchens, on beds and even on trees. We are afraid to sleep at night," said a resident.

Health authorities have issued an advisory urging people to wear gumboots, use torches after dark and avoid walking through stagnant floodwaters unless absolutely necessary.

The district Health Department has stocked adequate anti-venom at block hospitals and primary health centres and deployed medical teams in vulnerable areas. Awareness campaigns are also being conducted through public address systems, urging people to report snake sightings immediately and seek prompt medical treatment in case of snakebite.

With floodwaters yet to recede, the growing snake menace has emerged as another serious challenge for the flood-ravaged district.

Govt seeks flood loss reports in 3 days



PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The State Government has asked the Collectors of flood-affected districts to complete damage assessment and submit detailed reports within three days to expedite compensation for the families hit by the recent floods.

Revenue and Disaster Management Secretary Arabinda Padhee said the reports should cover crop losses, damaged houses and other destruction caused by the floods. Compensation would be released after the government verifies the assessment reports submitted by the district administrations.

"District Collectors have been directed to submit reports on crop damage, houses affected and other losses within three days. Compensation will be provided on the basis of these reports," Padhee said.

According to the latest flood status report released on Thursday, five districts, Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar have been affected by the floods.

The disaster has impacted 50 blocks, 356 gram panchayats, 1,084 villages, 11 urban local bodies (ULBs) and 169 wards, affecting 5,87,822 people. As many as 1,76,073 people have been evacuated to safer locations.

The report said 21 villages remain marooned, including

17 in Balasore and four in Keonjhar, with restoration work continuing in inaccessible areas.

Agricultural losses have been substantial, with floodwaters damaging 16,187 hectares of farmland. Jajpur reported the highest crop loss at 11,497 hectares, followed by Mayurbhanj (3,754 hectares) and Keonjhar (936 hectares).

The floods have also damaged 1,020 houses, including 654 in Balasore, 278 in Mayurbhanj and 88 in Keonjhar, according to official estimates.

To assist displaced residents, the government has opened 464 relief camps across the affected districts. These include 165 camps in Balasore, 234 in Bhadrak, 47 in Jajpur, 14 in Mayurbhanj and four in Keonjhar. Authorities have also distributed 607 polythene sheets to affected families.

Rescue and relief operations are continuing with the deployment of six National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams, 24 Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF) teams and 46 Fire Services teams across the flood-hit districts.

The government has directed all district administrations to continue rescue, relief and restoration work while ensuring that damage assessments are completed without delay so that compensation reaches eligible beneficiaries at the earliest.

Every year, as the tower of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra roll through the Bada Danda, millions of devotees witness one of India's most revered spiritual traditions.

The Rath Yatra is celebrated for its scale, devotion and timeless significance. Yet behind this magnificent spectacle stands a fraternity whose contribution often remains unseen - the Maharanasor Rath Shilpkars, who build the sacred Rath from the ground up every single year.

Months before the festival begins, the Rath Khala in Puri comes alive with the rhythmic sounds of chisels and hammers. Here, hereditary master craftsmen transform timber into the three monumental chariots, following centuries-old traditions, sacred mea-

surements and construction practices that have been carefully passed down over time. Every joint, every carving and every proportion reflects extraordinary skill, precision and discipline. For the Maharanas, however, Rath construction is not merely an act of craftsmanship but one of devotion and service, carried forward with an unwavering sense of responsibility towards a tradition that has endured for centuries.

Unlike monuments that survive through conservation, the Rathas are rebuilt from scratch every year. Their continuity depends not on preserving physical structures, but on safeguarding the knowledge, craftsmanship and values entrusted to the Maharanas. In many ways, this fraternity represents one of India's finest examples of intangible cultural heritage,

where expertise is passed from one generation to the next through years of observation, practice, discipline and devotion.

As conversations around heritage increasingly focus on safeguarding monuments and historic sites, equal attention must also be given to the people who keep these traditions alive. The Maharanas are more than master craftsmen; they are custodians of an enduring cultural legacy. Their work reminds us that some of India's greatest traditions continue to survive not through machines or manuals, but through human skill, inherited wisdom and an enduring commitment to service.

Recognising such custodians is therefore an important step towards protecting India's intangible cultural heritage. Over the past five

years, Dalmia Bharat has sought to contribute to this larger purpose through the Expert Rath Shilpkar Samman, an initiative that honours the master craftsmen behind the annual construction of the sacred Rathas.

To commemorate its fifth edition, the initiative was further strengthened with the release of a commemorative postal stamp and special postal cover in collaboration with the Department of Posts, Odisha. Together, these efforts create a lasting record of a fraternity whose contribution has largely remained behind the scenes while sustaining one of India's oldest cultural practices.

Speaking about the philosophy behind the initiative, a company spokesperson said, "At Dalmia Bharat, we believe expertise deserves recognition in every field. The Maharanas

embody generations of skill, discipline and devotion that have kept one of Bharat's most cherished traditions alive. As a company that has contributed to building modern Bharat for over eight decades, we believe preserving such craftsmanship and knowledge systems is as important as building the infrastructure that supports the nation's future."

Dalmia Bharat's commitment carries particular significance in Odisha, where the company's association spans more than seven decades. Alongside contributing to the state's industrial and infrastructure development, it has continued to support initiatives that celebrate Odisha's cultural identity and recognise the people who safeguard its rich traditions. The Expert Rath Shilpkar Samman reflects this larger commitment,

one that views progress not only through the lens of economic development, but also through nurturing the cultural legacy that shapes India's identity.

As India continues its journey towards becoming a global economic powerhouse, preserving its cultural legacy becomes an equally important responsibility. Roads, bridges and industries may build the nation's future, but traditions such as the Rath Yatra endure because of communities like the Maharanas, whose skill, devotion and quiet dedication have sustained this extraordinary legacy across centuries. Recognising these custodians of heritage is not merely about honouring the past; it is about ensuring that one of India's most treasured civilisational traditions continues to inspire generations to come.

LG leads DDA’s 1-lakh tree plantation drive in Capital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

In one of its biggest coordinated plantation initiatives, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) planted over one lakh native trees and shrubs across 77 locations in the national Capital on Friday, with Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu leading the campaign at Kamla Nehru Ridge. The Lieutenant Governor was joined by nearly 200 participants, including students from St Stephen’s College, Hindu College, Hans Raj College and Maharishi Valmiki College, students from Mamta Public School and Government Girls Senior Secondary School, morning walkers and members of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). Addressing the gathering, Sandhu said plantation drives should become a regular exercise and be repli-



cated across other ridge areas in the city. Stressing the need for youth participation, he said ecological restoration efforts must be driven by younger generations to ensure a greener Delhi for the future. The Lieutenant Governor also directed the DDA to appoint a nodal officer for every plantation site to monitor the survival and growth of saplings, making them accountable for the long-term success of the plantation programme.

The plantation at Kamla Nehru Ridge included indigenous species such as Dhok, Amaltas, Dhak and Gamhar, selected for their suitability to Delhi’s ecology and their role in strengthening biodiversity and improving wildlife habitats. Simultaneous plantation drives were held at 76 other locations, including Aravalli Biodiversity Park, Aastha Kunj Park, Sanjay Van, parks in Narela, Paschim Puri, Hauz Khas, Vasant Udyan and Dilshad Garden Deer Park.

Native species such as Peepal, Neem, Jamun, Arjun and Shisham, along with shrubs including Bougainvillea, Murraya and Hamelia, were planted based on site-specific ecological plans. Following the plantation drive, Sandhu visited the Serpentine Lake and Butterfly Conservatory to review hydrological restoration works being undertaken by the DDA for water conservation and ecological restoration in the Ridge area. According to the DDA, the initiative is part of its larger monsoon afforestation programme aimed at expanding Delhi’s green cover, restoring degraded landscapes and improving climate resilience. The plantation campaign is also linked to the Centre’s 70 Lakh Plantation Mission under the “Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam” campaign. Under the programme, the DDA has been assigned the task of planting 23 lakh indigenous saplings across Delhi.

CJP stir: Zero FIR on objectionable PM remarks moved to Delhi Police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A Zero FIR registered in Noida against a woman accused of raising objectionable slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the CJP-led protest at Jantar Mantar has been transferred to the Parliament Street police station in Delhi for further investigation. Noida Police registered the FIR on July 29 following a complaint from a Supreme Court lawyer based in Noida. The complaint alleged that the woman used abusive language against the Prime Minister during the July 23 protest at Jantar Mantar over the NEET paper leak. As the incident occurred in Delhi, the case was filed as a Zero FIR and then transferred to Delhi Police, which has jurisdiction. A senior Delhi Police officer said the force will review the contents of the transferred FIR, conduct internal consultations, and seek legal advice before



determining the next steps in the investigation. “The investigation will be conducted strictly in accordance with the law and all prescribed guidelines,” the officer said. The complaint stated that the alleged remarks lowered the dignity of the Prime Minister’s office and could create enmity in society or disturb public peace. The case has been registered under Sections 352 (intentional insult to provoke breach of peace), 353(1) (public mischief), and 356(1) (criminal defamation) of the

Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The complainant, Supreme Court lawyer Smriti Singh Chandel, said she decided to approach the police after coming across videos of the alleged slogans on social media. “I have filed a case against the girl who used abusive language against the Prime Minister and his late mother. My children are also on social media, and I don’t want them to hear or support such language,” Chandel said. She said that while disagreements and protests are part of a democracy, abusive language should not be used against anyone. “We live in India and have been brought up with certain values. We should use simple and dignified language. Such vulgar and obscene words should not be used. You cannot insult anyone like this,” she said. Police said further action will be taken after the Parliament Street Police reviews the complaint and supporting material submitted with the transferred FIR.

Delhi to roll out Aadhaar Data Vault system

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government has directed its departments to implement the Aadhaar Data Vault (ADV) system to enhance the security of personal data of various schemes’ beneficiaries. The ADV is a dedicated storage where agencies collecting Aadhaar numbers store the data in an encrypted form. The Government has also directed 100 per cent Aadhaar seeding (linking of the 12-digit number with identification documents) of beneficiaries for effective strengthening of the direct benefit transfers, they said.



Planning Department has found that the percentage of Aadhaar-seeded beneficiaries in various financial assistance schemes is below 100 per cent. Social Welfare Department has directed district social welfare officers to ensure that Aadhaar numbers of all beneficiaries are linked with their respective bank accounts so as to achieve 100 per cent Aadhaar-based payment, officials said. Aadhaar is a verifiable 12-digit exclusive identification number issued by UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India) on behalf of the Government of India to the residents of India at no cost. The number serves as proof of identity and address, anywhere in India. Information Technology Department has asked all the departments that store Aadhaar numbers of people for various purposes to implement the ADV system in compliance with UIDAI guidelines. Aadhaar has become the primary identity document used by banks, telecom service providers and government departments, among others, for delivering various services and benefits. As a result, millions of Aadhaar numbers are stored by different entities, making secure storage a key requirement.

CM distributes bicycles to class 9 girls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Launching the Vidya Vahini scheme, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Friday distributed bicycles to over 3,000 Class 9 girl students of Government schools and announced that around 1.40 lakh girl students will receive bicycles in a phased manner. The CM interacted with students and encouraged them to pursue their education with confidence, saying the bicycles would ensure safe and convenient travel to schools, improve attendance, reduce dropout chances, and ease parents’ concerns. “We are pleased to provide ‘Vidya Vahini’ bicycles to Class 9 girl students of Delhi Government schools. It will become a medium of dignity and help them safely commute to schools,” Gupta said at a function held at the East Vinod Nagar Sports Complex here. She said that a bicycle is much more than a mode of



transport; it represents freedom, self-confidence, dignity, self-reliance and opportunity. She urged the students to study with dedication and discipline, use their bicycles responsibly, follow traffic rules and always prioritise road safety. The chief minister was accompanied by Education Minister Ashish Sood, Union Minister of State and Delhi BJP president Harsh Malhotra, Patparganj MLA

Ravinder Singh Negi and senior education department officials. Addressing the event, Sood said that after reaching Class IX, many girls have traditionally faced challenges in continuing their education because of the increased distance to school and transportation difficulties. The Vidya Vahini scheme, he said, is an important step towards removing these barriers.

Dark spots on Kanwar routes cleared: Mishra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi minister Kapil Mishra on Friday said the Government has launched a drive to remove dark spots and improve lighting along the Kanwar Yatra routes, while warning commuters to expect traffic disruptions as lakhs of pilgrims pass through the national Capital during the annual pilgrimage. Mishra further said Chief Minister Rekha Gupta held several meetings to review preparations, including lighting, sanitation, toilets, traffic management and facilities at Kanwar camps. “Under the leadership of the chief minister, a special campaign is being run to eliminate dark spots. District magistrates have been instructed to ensure proper cleanliness and lighting along the Kanwar routes,” he told. He said that liquor and meat shops along Kanwar routes would remain closed during the yatra and



that the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) had issued the necessary directions. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi has directed its 12 zones to shut unauthorised meat shops and take action against licensed outlets violating permit conditions along Kanwar routes and near Kanwar camps. It has also asked officials to complete civic arrangements before the yatra, during which 308 Kanwar camps will operate across Delhi

from July 30 to August 11. Mishra mentioned that traffic diversions would be enforced wherever required in coordination with the Delhi Police, Traffic Police and Civil Defence. “Crores of Kanwar pilgrims pass through Delhi, so there will be some traffic issues. Vehicles will be diverted wherever necessary. Around the time devotees offer jal, there could be delays because of the crowd,” he said. He said that welcome gates were being erected

THE LIQUOR AND MEAT SHOPS ALONG KANWAR ROUTES WOULD REMAIN CLOSED DURING THE KANWAR YATRA

and arrangements for the stay of pilgrims had been made with the help of Kanwar Seva Samitis. Heavy police deployment and traffic restrictions marked the start of the Kanwar Yatra in Delhi on Thursday. More than 1,500 police personnel have been deployed across the city, while CCTV surveillance has been stepped up and coordination established with neighbouring states. Traffic movement is likely to be regulated on GT Road, Ring Road, Outer Ring Road, Mukarba Chowk, Azadpur, Wazirabad Road, ISBT Kashmere Gate, NH-44 and border stretches connecting Delhi with Ghaziabad and Haryana, depending on the movement of Kanwar pilgrims.

CM Rekha welcomes Tahir Hussain verdict

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Friday welcomed a court’s decision sentencing former AAP councillor Tahir Hussain and five others to life imprisonment in the murder of Intelligence Bureau staffer Ankit Sharma during the 2020 Delhi riots. The Chief Minister directly questioned why AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia had stood in support of Hussain even after his arrest. In a post on X, the Chief Minister said the verdict reinforces public faith in the judicial process. “Today, justice has triumphed. This verdict further strengthens the faith of every citizen of the country in the law and the judiciary,” she said. She escalated her attack on the AAP, saying the people of Delhi now demand answers. “Tahir Hussain was arrested on charges of murder, yet even after that, Mr Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia stood in his support. They kept trying relentlessly to save him. Why? Will Mr Kejriwal tell the people of Delhi? Was it under their patronage that people like Tahir Hussain conspired to incite riots?” she said. Delhi Law Minister Kapil Mishra said the life imprisonment sentence is the beginning of justice and expressed hope that it would be upgraded. “The cruelty with which Ankit Sharma was killed, stabbed with knives even after death, the body thrown into a drain, this is certainly the rarest of rare. It is hoped that in the High Court, this life imprisonment will be converted to the death penalty,” Mishra said on X. Education Minister Ashish



Sood said the verdict vindicates the Delhi Police and the prosecution. “The court’s verdict completely vindicates the stand of the Delhi Police and the prosecution, which painstakingly uncovered the sinister blueprint of violence, hatred, and destruction orchestrated during the 2020 Delhi riots. Justice has finally been served to the family of young IB officer Ankit Sharma, who fell victim to a savage and premeditated assault,” he said. Sood described the verdict as a devastating indictment of the AAP, alleging that the party had provided political patronage and municipal power to individuals who turned official premises into launchpads for violence and mob terror. Ankit Sharma, a 26-year-old Intelligence Bureau staffer, was killed during the February 2020 Delhi riots that broke out in northeast Delhi during protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act. His body was recovered from a drain near Chand Bagh, the area in which Hussain, then a serving AAP councillor, had his residence. Sharma’s family

had alleged that Hussain’s house was used as a base by rioters and that Hussain was directly involved in the killing. Over 50 people died in the riots, which caused widespread destruction of property across northeast Delhi. A Delhi court on Friday sentenced former AAP councillor Tahir Hussain and four co-convicts to life imprisonment for the murder of Intelligence Bureau officer Ankit Sharma during the 2020 Delhi riots, saying the case did not fall within the “rarest of rare” category warranting death penalty. The prosecution had vehemently sought death penalty for all the five accused, saying they fell to the “level of being animals” while relentlessly assaulting Sharma. Hussain was sentenced to six months’ rigorous imprisonment under IPC Section 188, three years under Section 153A, two years under Section 147, three years under Section 148, seven years under Section 365 and imprisonment for life under Section 302 IPC. All the sentences will run concurrently.

Ex-cops seek balanced narrative on Parliament violence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A group of retired police officers on Friday defended the Delhi Police’s handling of the July 20 ‘Chalo Sansad’ march, arguing that public discourse surrounding the violence has focused disproportionately on allegations of police excesses while overlooking injuries sustained by security personnel. Addressing a press conference at the Press Club of India, members of the Delhi Police Retired Non-Gazetted Officers’ Association expressed solidarity with serving personnel and their families, saying the force was being unfairly portrayed despite operating under challenging law-and-order circumstances. Former Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police and Rajya Sabha MP Brij Lal said criticism of the police overshadowed the fact that 128 police personnel were injured during the clashes. “In nearly 38 years of service, I have handled numerous law-and-order situations. Everybody is questioning what the police did, but nobody is asking who assaulted the 128 police personnel. Discussions rarely mention police



training, the standard operating procedures or the sequence in which force is used,” he said. Explaining police crowd-control procedures, Lal said personnel are trained to follow a graded response while dealing with violent demonstrations. According to him, police first deploy water cannons, followed by tear gas, before resorting to a baton charge if the situation escalates. Even during a lathi charge, he said, personnel are instructed not to strike vital parts of the body, with non-lethal weapons forming part of the force’s standard operating procedures. Lal also defended the use of pellet guns, saying they had been unfairly criticised despite being introduced as a non-lethal alternative to reduce casualties. Describing a pellet gun as a 12-bore shotgun, he said it was intended to minimise the need for firearms and added that the Supreme Court had upheld the legality of such crowd-control measures. The retired officers maintained that while peaceful protests are a

the leagues beginning as early as October this year, officials said. The civic body plans to organise separate football and cricket leagues for boys and girls in the Under-9 and Under-11 categories. Each sport will feature 84 teams, with each of the MCD’s 12 zones fielding seven teams. Officials said one team in each zone will comprise students from MCD schools, while the remaining six teams will come from private schools, sports academies, institutional clubs and neighbourhood teams. An official notice inviting participation from private teams will be issued after the proposal receives formal approval. “The idea is to create a structured grassroots competition where children from municipal schools get an

opportunity to compete regularly alongside other teams from across the city,” an official said. The initiative is designed around the concept of community sports clubs and seeks to integrate more than 1,500 MCD schools into zonal sporting networks. Participation for MCD schools, teams and students will be free, with the civic body seeking to remove financial barriers that often prevent



democratic right, policing violent demonstrations presents practical challenges. They questioned how officers deployed on the ground could distinguish between genuine student protesters and “criminal elements” once violence breaks out. Retired Assistant Commissioner of Police Rajender Pathania, who spent his entire career with the Delhi Police, appealed to young people to recognise the role played by the force in maintaining public order. “Police personnel are not fragile, but they deserve greater public understanding,” he said, adding that the sacrifices made by serving officers often go unrecognised. The association also pointed out that serving police personnel are bound by service conduct rules and cannot publicly defend themselves or respond to criticism, leaving retired officers to present what they described as the force’s perspective. The press conference comes amid continuing debate over the police response to the July 20 march to Parliament, during which clashes between protesters and security personnel left several people, including police officer, injured. children from disadvantaged backgrounds from taking part in organised sport. Private schools, academies and community teams, however, will participate through a structured registration and management fee. According to officials, the revenue generated from these registrations, along with corporate social responsibility (CSR) partnerships, will be used to meet operational expenses. Any annual surplus is proposed to be invested in upgrading sports infrastructure in identified MCD schools, officials added. The leagues will follow a four-tier structure comprising Diamond, Gold, Silver and Bronze divisions, with promotion and relegation between tiers based on performance.

Cabinet extends PM-KISAN till 2030-31

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved extension of the PM-KISAN scheme for the next five years till the 2030-31 fiscal with an outlay of ₹3,15,614 crore. Under the scheme, each eligible farmer family receives annual financial assistance of ₹6,000.

This is disbursed in three equal instalments of ₹2,000 through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanism into Aadhaar-seeded bank accounts. Launched on February 24, 2019, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a centrally sponsored scheme aimed at providing assured income support to farmers nationwide.

Briefing media, Information & Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the Cabinet has extended the PM-KISAN scheme for five years till 2030-31. The total outlay stands at ₹3,15,614 crore.

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi,



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw speaks during a cabinet briefing in New Delhi on Friday PTI

approved continuation of the PM-KISAN scheme from 2026-27 to 2030-31, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters here.

A total financial outlay of ₹3,15,614 crore has been approved for the

Scheme during this period, he added.

“The approval reiterates the Government’s commitment that the prosperity of farmers forms the foundation of the nation’s prosper-

ity,” the Government said in a statement.

The extension of the scheme will enhance farmers’ capacity to invest in agriculture, improve productivity, help reduce agricultural risks and strengthen the rural economy, it added.

Through this scheme, timely and transparent income support is being provided to eligible farmer families through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system.

Talking about the successful implementation of this programme, the Government said it has so far disbursed more than ₹4.47 lakh crore directly into farmers’ bank accounts through 23 instalments under the scheme.

Under the 23rd instalment, more than 9.49 crore farmers benefited, with over ₹18,984 crore released.

“Women farmers have received more than Rs 1.06 lakh crore under PM-KISAN, and nearly one out of every four beneficiaries is a woman farmer,” the statement said.

The Government highlighted that the assistance provided under PM-KISAN has enabled farmers to make timely investments in seeds, fertilisers, irrigation, agricultural machinery and other agricultural requirements.

“This has enhanced farmers’ productive capacity, reduced their dependence on informal credit and strengthened the financial stability of rural households,” it added.

Further, the Government said that the impact of the PM-KISAN Scheme has been assessed by various independent institutions.

According to the evaluation conducted by the Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO) of NITI Aayog, more than 92 per cent of beneficiaries reported that the amount was used for agricultural activities and agricultural investment. Around 85 per cent of beneficiaries confirmed an improvement in agricultural income and a reduction in dependence on informal credit.

CBI arrests two key suspects in murder of West Bengal CM’s aide Chandranath Rath

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi/Kolkata

On Friday, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested two main suspects in the murder of Chandranath Rath, who was a close aide to West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari. Officials said these arrests may be connected to a rival political party member. The suspects, brothers Sagar Sonkar and Sahib Sonkar, had both worked with Rath in the past.

CBI officials said that while working for Rath, Sagar Sonkar often called a rival political party office using a landline. The agency is now looking into these calls as part of its wider investigation. The brothers were produced

before the designated court in Kolkata. Rath, who had served in the Indian Air Force and was a trusted aide to Adhikari, was shot and killed on May 6 near Madhyamgram in North 24 Parganas district when attackers on motorcycles stopped his car and fired at close range.

The murder took place two days after the West Bengal Assembly election results, when the BJP won by a large margin, and Adhikari became Chief Minister. The attack happened in a busy area near Kolkata airport, leading to political controversy and calls for a thorough investigation. Initially, the West Bengal Police formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) and quickly arrested suspected



contract killers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Later, the case was transferred to the CBI, which filed its own FIR and set up a special team to look into the motive, financial dealings, and who may have ordered the killing.

CBI sources said the

Sonkar brothers were familiar with Rath’s schedule because they had worked closely with him. The agency is reviewing call records, focusing on Sagar Sonkar’s landline calls to a rival party office, to see if these were part of a larger political plot.

Officials said the investigation is ongoing and more arrests could follow as they uncover the network of handlers, intermediaries, and shooters. The murder raised tensions in the state after the elections. Adhikari described the killing as a targeted assassination connected to Rath’s role in the BJP’s victory. Opposition parties condemned the violence and called for a transparent investigation.

The CBI’s recent actions are seen as progress in finding both the killers and those who may have planned the attack. Rath, who was from East Medinipur, spent almost twenty years in the Indian Air Force before joining Adhikari’s political team.

Colleagues described him as a quiet organiser who liked to work behind the scenes. His death left a gap in the Chief Minister’s inner circle and highlighted ongoing issues with political violence in West Bengal after the elections.

Investigators are reviewing new evidence alongside earlier findings about the vehicles, weapons, and scouting activities used by the attackers before May 6.

The agency says it is following every lead and aims to uncover the full conspiracy, including any possible political connections. More updates will be shared as the special court proceedings move forward, agency officials said.

IMD forecasts below-normal rainfall in August-September

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

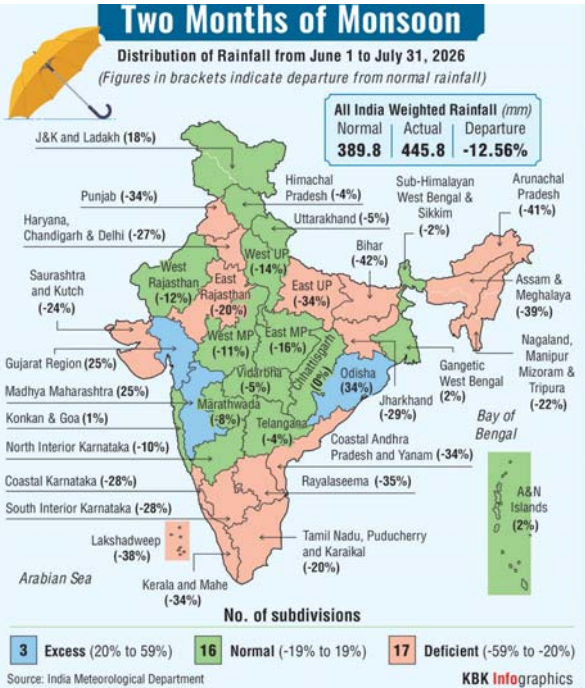
India as a whole is most likely to witness below-normal rainfall during the second half of the south-west monsoon from August to September, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its monthly forecast issued on Friday.

The rainfall is expected to be less than 94 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA), it said.

LPA refers to the rainfall recorded over a particular region in a given period, such as a month or a season, averaged over a long period, typically 30 to 50 years.

The LPA of rainfall over the country as a whole during the August to September period, based on historical data from 1971 to 2020, is 422.8 mm.

In a statement, Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director general of meteorology at the IMD, said, “During this (August-September) period, below-



below-normal, with less than 94 per cent of the LPA, the IMD said.

The LPA of rainfall over India during August, based on the 1971-2020 data, is 254.9 mm.

Currently, India is facing a rainfall deficit of 13 per cent for the period between June and July. At the end of June, this figure had stood at 35.4 per cent.

“The reduction in rainfall deficit happened due to good rainfall activity in July,” Dr Mohapatra said.

While the average rainfall in July is 280.5 mm, the country received 283.3 mm rainfall during the month this year.

There were two main reasons for this. First, four low-pressure systems (LPS) formed over the Bay of Bengal during the month, and two of them intensified into depressions.

There was also a rise in the number of LPS days. While typically July sees 13.5 LPS days, this time there were 24 LPS days.

TN CM Vijay allocates ₹340 crore to tackle water scarcity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay on Friday allocated Rs 340 crore to ensure uninterrupted drinking water supply and support essential agricultural activities across the state. The directive was issued following a comprehensive review meeting held at the Secretariat under his leadership. The meeting assessed the Southwest monsoon rainfall, drinking water distribution in districts, and the status of agricultural crop cultivation, according to an official release.

During the meeting, the chief minister extensively reviewed several key issues, including water storage levels and reserves in dams, the extent of Southwest monsoon rainfall received so far in Tamil Nadu and the ground situation in districts with deficit rainfall and drinking water distribution across urban and rural areas.

In addition, Vijay also reviewed the ongoing agricultural works, the status of Kuruvai cultivation, and the



distribution of the Kuruvai package to farmers, availability and stock of fodder for cattle and progress and implementation of drinking water supply and other essential infrastructure projects.

Data presented at the meeting revealed that the Southwest monsoon rainfall has been below normal from June to July 31, 2026.

Specifically, 20 districts, including Chennai, Cuddalore, Kallakurichi, Kanchipuram, recorded a 19 to 59 per cent rainfall deficit.

Meanwhile, Chengalpattu and Ramanathapuram districts registered a severe deficit of over 60 per cent.

Haryana CM Saini pays tribute to Shaheed Udham Singh on martyrdom day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini paid heartfelt tributes to the great freedom fighter and symbol of indomitable courage, Shaheed Udham Singh, on his martyrdom day.

Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini paid floral tributes to the portrait of Shaheed Udham Singh at Sant Kabir Kutir, his official residence here, and remembered his unparalleled sacrifice.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister said that Shaheed Udham Singh’s indomitable courage, unwavering patriotism and supreme sacrifice for the honour of the motherland constitute an immortal chapter in the golden pages of Indian history.

Paying homage to the martyr, the Chief Minister said, “The nation will always remain indebted to his bravery, dedication and supreme sacrifice. The



resolve and patience he demonstrated in securing justice for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre are unparalleled.”

He further said that the life and ideals of Shaheed Udham Singh will continue to inspire future generations to walk the path of patriotism, sacrifice and service to the nation.

The Chief Minister added that everyone should imbibe the ideals of such great revolutionaries and work towards the progress and prosperity of the nation and the State.

ITC Limited

Extract of Unaudited Standalone and Consolidated Financial Results for the Quarter ended 30th June, 2026

Sl. No.	Particulars	Standalone			Consolidated		
		3 Months ended 30.06.2026	Twelve Months ended 31.03.2026	Corresponding 3 Months ended 30.06.2025	3 Months ended 30.06.2026	Twelve Months ended 31.03.2026	Corresponding 3 Months ended 30.06.2025
1	Total Income from Operations	27588.56	84927.29	21731.84	30179.01	92339.13	23811.56
2	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before tax and Exceptional Items)	4759.41	26951.47	6543.48	5454.97	28325.09	7128.01
3	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional Items)	4759.41	26767.60	6543.48	5860.85	28033.39	7128.01
4	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional Items)	3578.82	20286.42	4910.73	4508.79	21018.15	5343.41
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	4021.93	19476.46	5099.56	4874.50	20374.86	5557.46
6	Equity Share Capital	1252.95	1252.95	1251.75	1252.95	1252.95	1251.75
7	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve)		68675.66			71254.35	
8	Earnings Per Share (of ₹ 1/- each) (not annualised):						
1.	Basic (₹):	2.86	16.20	3.93	3.51	16.52	4.19
2.	Diluted (₹):	2.86	16.19	3.92	3.51	16.51	4.18

Note:

a) The above is an extract of the detailed format of the Statements of Unaudited Standalone and Consolidated Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The unaudited Financial Results and Segment Results were reviewed by the Audit Committee, and approved by the Board of Directors of the Company at its meeting held on 31st July, 2026. The complete Statements of Unaudited Standalone and Consolidated Financial Results are available on the Company’s website at <https://itcportal.com/investors/quarterly-results.html> and on the websites of the National Stock Exchange of India Limited (www.nseindia.com) and BSE Limited (www.bseindia.com). The same can also be accessed by scanning the QR Code provided below.

b) Sproutlife Foods Private Limited (‘Sproutlife’) became a subsidiary of the Company with effect from 1st April, 2026, consequent to the Company acquiring the right to nominate majority of Directors on its Board. In accordance with Ind AS 103-Business Combinations, the Group has re-measured its existing interest in Sproutlife at fair value. The gain on remeasurement of ₹ 405.88 crores has been recognised as ‘Exceptional Items’ in the Consolidated Financial Results for the quarter ended 30th June, 2026.

c) The Limited Review for the Standalone and Consolidated Financial Results, as required under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, has been completed by the Statutory Auditors of the Company, who have issued an unmodified report on the same which has been forwarded to the Stock Exchanges.

Registered Office:

Virginia House, 37 J.L. Nehru Road, Kolkata 700 071, India
Dated: 31st July, 2026
Place: Kolkata, India

For and on behalf of the Board

Sd/-

Director & Chief Financial Officer
(DIN: 01804345)

Sd/-

Chairman & Managing Director
(DIN: 00280529)

The Financial Results along with the Limited Review Reports have been posted on the Company’s website at www.itcportal.com and can be accessed by scanning the QR Code.

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CIN: L16005WB1910PLC001985

AASHIRVAAD

Sunfeast

BINGO!

VIPPEEF

SUNRISE

Natural

ITC MASTER CHEF

Dark Fantasy

MOM’S MAGIC

Farmilite

Right Shift

Savlon

nimyle

fiama Vivel

ENJOYE

DERMAFICE

MAINGALDEEP

EDW ESSENZA

FABELE

SUNBEAN

CLASSMATE

Paperkraft

CANDYMAN

Sunfeast Fantastika!

Shower Shineer

HomeLites

FMCG | Paperboards & Packaging | Agri Business | Information Technology

Assam to seek insurance, NBFC moratorium for flood victims

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

The Assam Government on Friday decided to approach insurance companies and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) for expeditious disposal of claims and providing a moratorium to their customers from the four districts which have been badly affected by the floods this year, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Assessment of damage to houses, livestock, etc., is expected to be completed shortly, and the Government will try to ensure that funds for repair are disbursed at the earliest, he added.

The announcement came a day after the Chief Minister chaired a special meeting of the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC), in which it was decided that a six-month moratorium would

be offered to all flood-affected people in four districts for repaying loans.

At least 80 people have died and more than 2 lakh people have been affected in the deluge in the state so far. Four districts — Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat — have been impacted the most.

Addressing the media after chairing a Cabinet meeting here, Sarma said, "We discussed at length on how to provide more relief to the people at this crucial time."

He said it was decided to convene a meeting with both private and Government insurance companies on August 5 to urge them to expeditiously settle claims against insured damaged vehicles, livestock, etc.

"For the four districts of Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat, we will request them to collect the



claims themselves and settle them at the earliest," he added.

The CM further said the Government will also meet the NBFCs on August 5 with the request to grant a moratorium and such benefits to borrowers from these four

districts.

"Just as the banks have extended a six-month moratorium on loans or the term for loan repayment after our meeting with them yesterday, we will urge the NBFCs to provide similar benefits too," he said.

Sarma said assessment of damages caused to houses is being done in the worst-hit districts and is expected to be completed within a day or two, so that disbursement of ₹15,000 per family as interim relief can be done within August.

Assessment of affected students eligible for book purchase grants is also being undertaken, he added.

While distribution of free textbooks has already commenced, money from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund for the re-distribution of free school uniforms in the districts will be done on Saturday, Sarma added.

He said that the assessment of permanent damage to public infrastructure will start from August 7, and it will be carried out in a mission mode so that it is completed in 10 to 15 days, and funds for repair can be released by the

month's end.

"I will visit Sivasagar and Charaideo before the launch of the assessment," Sarma added.

He further said that the Cabinet approved Rs 2 to 3 lakh for the repair and desilting of schools in these two districts, and will ensure that classes can resume at the earliest. "From September one, damage to roads, embankments, etc. will be assessed, which will require more funds for repair," the Chief Minister added.

On reports claiming that activities in Nagaland led to the flood fury in downstream Assam districts, Sarma said, "At this stage, I cannot comment. Nagaland is also under floods, and they are also suffering. These things can be discussed when the present situation is over," he said, avoding many questions on this regard.

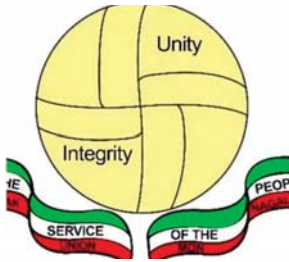
Konyak Union refutes claims linking Mon district to Assam floods

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

The Konyak Union has strongly denied allegations linking the recent floods in parts of Assam to the release of water from a purported Dikhu Hydro Electric Project in Nagaland's Mon district or to alleged illegal coal mining activities in the Naginimora area.

In a press statement, the Union clarified that no hydro-electric dam or reservoir exists in Mon district, adding that the Dikhu Hydro Electric Project remains only a proposed project and has never been constructed or commissioned. It also said there is no evidence to support claims that alleged gold mining in Naginimora contributed to the flooding.

According to the Union, the floods were triggered by



exceptionally heavy rainfall and cloudburst-like downpours on July 19 and 20, which caused landslides, flash floods and overflowing rivers across Mon district before affecting Naginimora and Tizit.

The Konyak Union urged public representatives, organisations and the media to verify facts before making statements, warning that misinformation could harm the long-standing cordial relations between the people of Nagaland and Assam.

Khandwa: 4 stranded on island rescued by SDERF

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

Four people stranded on a small island at the confluence of two rain-swollen rivers in Khandwa district were rescued safely in the early hours of Friday after an 11-hour operation carried out by the State Disaster Emergency Response Force (SDERF).

The incident occurred in the Handikundi area, around 20 kilometres from the Khandwa district headquarters, where the Sukta and Avana rivers meet. The group had gone for a picnic on Thursday when the water level rose rapidly following heavy rainfall in the region, cutting off their access to the riverbank and leaving them trapped on the island.

The stranded individuals were identified as Huzefa Hamid (40), Mayank alias Gopal (16), Ali Asgar (35), and Ayush (18). After receiving information at around 6.15



pm, police alerted the SDERF, which immediately rushed to the spot and launched a rescue operation.

Officials said the rescue team initially attempted to send a motorboat to the island using safety ropes. However, the strong current made the operation too risky, prompting

rescuers to suspend the attempt to avoid endangering both the trapped group and rescue personnel.

As the water level remained high, the SDERF adopted an alternative strategy. Using drones, rescuers delivered life jackets, food packets and drinking water to

the stranded picnickers, ensuring their safety through the night. Officials also maintained constant mobile phone contact with them to monitor their condition and reassure them as the rescue operation continued.

Once the river current weakened and the water level receded slightly, rescuers resumed the operation. A motorboat, secured with safety ropes, was successfully guided to the island, and all four people were brought back safely at around 4.45 am on Friday.

Officials said the successful rescue highlighted the importance of patience, careful planning and the use of technology during disaster response. They also urged people to avoid visiting riverbanks and low-lying areas during the monsoon, as water levels can rise suddenly due to heavy rainfall upstream, posing a serious risk to life.

Army Chief unveils Xtreme Weather Grade diesel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Army Chief General Dhiraj Seth on Friday unveiled indigenously developed Xtreme Weather Grade (XWG) diesel, which can remain effective at temperatures as low as minus 42 degrees Celsius, and described it as a "game-changing" indigenous innovation that would enhance mobility, operational readiness and mission reliability.

Compliant with BS-VI standards and IS 1460:2025 specifications, it can be used in the Indian Army's existing vehicle fleet "without any engine modification or re-homologation," the defence ministry said. Developed jointly by the Indian Army and oil marketing companies, the specialised fuel will enhance the mobility, safety and operational availability of combat and logistics vehicles in extreme climatic conditions, it said.



"The technology also has wider civilian use in high-altitude and severe winter regions and represents a significant step towards Atmanirbhar Bharat," the ministry said in a statement.

Conventional diesel can thicken and clog fuel filters at very low temperatures, affecting the operation of vehicles in high-altitude and snow-bound areas, officials said.

XWG diesel overcomes this challenge and remains effective at temperatures as low as minus 42 degrees

Celsius, the ministry said.

The Army chief, at an event held here, described XWG diesel as a "game-changing indigenous innovation" that would enhance mobility, operational readiness and mission reliability across extreme climatic conditions. He highlighted that the fuel would eliminate practices previously required to keep vehicles functional during severe winters, thereby improving the safety and morale of personnel.

General Seth commended the Indian Army team and

the oil marketing companies for developing the solution within a year and expressed confidence that the collaboration would lead to further specialised fuels for diverse operational requirements.

Beyond its military applications, the technology will also benefit civilian vehicles in high-altitude and extreme winter regions by improving the reliability and safety of vehicles and equipment operating under severe climatic conditions, it said.

10 killed as 4-storey building collapses in Bhiwandi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thane

At least 10 people were killed and three others injured after a four-storey residential building, tagged as 'dangerous' in 2020 by the local civic body and currently undergoing repairs illegally, collapsed in Bhiwandi town of Maharashtra's Thane district, officials said on Friday.

A portion of the Kohinoor Building in the Balaji Nagar area of the powerloom town, around 50km from Mumbai, came crashing down at 11.20 pm on Thursday, triggering a 19-hour-long multi-agency search and rescue operation that ended at around 7pm, they said.

Rescue workers from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Thane Disaster Response Force (TDRF), and municipal fire brigade personnel from Thane city and Bhiwandi were involved in the operation as heavy machinery and sniffer dogs were deployed to look for survivors under the debris, said the officials of the district disaster management cell.

Shrikant Pardeshi, Assistant Municipal Commissioner and PRO, Bhiwandi Nizampur City Municipal Corporation (BNCMC), told PTI that ten people lost their lives in the collapse, while three others were injured.

He said civic officials have approached the local Bhiwanda police for lodging a complaint against the contractor who carried out repairs in the building without obtaining permission from the BNCMC.

Senior Inspector Vikram Mohite of the Bhiwanda police said the process of registering a case against the contractor was underway.

The collapsed structure comprised 48 rooms, 12 on each floor. Around 9 pm on Thursday, residents heard "loud cracking sounds" emanating from the building, an official said.

Fearing the worst, locals immediately helped evacuate many families to other locations. However, while some occupants were still making their way out, the 'B' wing of



A portion of the Kohinoor Building in Balaji Nagar area of the powerloom town collapsed on late Thursday in Bhiwandi, Maharashtra on Friday. PTI

the building caved in, he said.

The officials said five of the deceased were identified as Shamim Shaikh (32), Ranjeet Singh (45), Miraj Rasul Shaikh (34), Santosh Kumar Pandey (42) and Shamim Ansari (30).

The BNCMC said it identified the building as "dangerous" in September 2020, and issued eviction notices on June 5 this year, subsequently disconnecting electricity and water supply. But despite that, the property owners

initiated structural repair works without obtaining any permission from the civic body.

Hours before the crash, on July 30, 2026, a civic team led by an Assistant Municipal Commissioner visited the site and noticed structural instability. The team immediately evacuated around 40 residents and labourers working there, said the civic body.

The contractor and workers were asked to stop the repair work, but they

refused to listen, it said, adding a few residents also refused to step out.

The civic commissioner ordered a strict punitive action and criminal proceedings against the contractor involved in the "illegal" repair works.

Maharashtra Water Resources and Disaster Management Minister Girish Mahajan visited the disaster site to inspect the ongoing relief operation and announced a financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh each to the families of the deceased.

Talking to reporters, he said, "I have briefed Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis about the situation. Following directions from the CM, we are announcing a compensation of Rs 5 lakh each to the families of those who lost their lives in this tragic incident."

The minister added instructions have been issued to hospital authorities to provide the best possible medical treatment to the injured persons at Government expense.

Non-local labourer killed in a terrorist attack in Kulgam

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

A non-local labourer, hailing from Chhattisgarh, was killed while another sustained injuries after terrorists opened fire on them in the Kelam area of Kulgam district late Friday evening.

This is the second incident of targeted killing in a span of 10 days. On July 22, a Jammu and Kashmir policeman, deployed on Amamath yatra duty, was killed in a surprise terrorist attack at Lal Chowk in Anantnag district.

A senior J&K police officer said terrorists fired upon two non-local labourers, working in a local brick kiln at Kelam, leaving both critically injured.

Bleeding profusely, the injured labourers were immediately shifted to a nearby hospital, where one of them succumbed to his injuries, while the other was undergoing treatment at the time of filing the report. Lieutenant Governor



Manoj Sinha strongly condemned the terrorist attack in Kulgam that claimed the life of a labourer from Chhattisgarh and directed security forces to intensify anti-terror operations to eliminate those responsible.

Soon after the attack, security forces rushed to the area, cordoned off the locality and launched a search operation to trace the attackers. LG Sinha in a post on X wrote, "I spoke with Director General of Police

Nalin Prabhat and other top security officials following the attack.

"I strongly condemn this cowardly terrorist act. I have directed our security forces to step up their operations and eliminate the terrorists," the Lieutenant Governor said. He said that J&K Police and security forces have cordoned off the area and launched an operation to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The Lieutenant Governor also stated that another injured labourer from Chhattisgarh had been shifted to hospital for urgent medical treatment.

Expressing condolences, Sinha conveyed his deepest sympathies to the bereaved family and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured labourer. "The J&K Administration and the entire nation stand firmly with the affected families during this difficult time", he said.

West Bengal STF arrests JeM operative for tracking Adhikari

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Special Task Force of Bengal Police has arrested Hamim Mondal, an operative of Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-e-Muhammad. Digital devices recovered from him indicated his surveillance activities on several political functionaries, including travel movements of State Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari, officials said, adding he was picked up from the Renaissance township of Burdwan, a city 110 km north of Kolkata.

Mondal was picked up in a dramatic operation in the small hours of Friday, sources said.

He had recently shifted to his rented apartment at Burdwan after the State Government conducted an eviction drive in the Pil Khana area of Howrah where he originally lived, police said, adding he was a close confidant of Sajjad



Butt, one of the alleged persons involved in the 2019 Pulwama attack when a Jaish suicide bomber rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into a CRPF convoy in Kashmir, killing 40 personnel.

Sajjad and Mondal might have come into contact via social media a few years ago, officials suspected, adding he was also in touch with Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence.

Referring to the arrest, the Chief Minister said: "It is an extremely sensitive issue... it is not for me to comment on the issue as it involves a

larger national and even international angle... the STF will give a briefing later on... I can only say that some political persons, including Umesh Rai (a Bengal minister) and me."

Mondal, who was living with his parents and sisters at Burdwan, was on Friday remanded to 14 days' police custody by the designated judge, police said, adding they were analysing the various other data that had been recovered from him.

The police sources said electronic devices, including a mobile phone seized

from Mondal, were being examined to trace his communications, movements and alleged plans. "The police have to find out whether he was a recruiter and if so how many persons had he recruited and whether they have set up bases in the State or other places of the country... the full extent of his network has to be found out," a senior official said.

Incidentally, parts of Burdwan East had figured earlier on account of terror activities when in 2014 an accidental blast inside a house at Khagragarh exposed the presence of banned Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) operatives in the area.

In fact, the Union Home Minister had conducted a high-level meeting with four Chief Ministers of eastern India in Kolkata in 2022 to discuss the issue of rising terror threats.

CBI conducts searches in ₹105.44 crore PNB fraud case involving NCS Sugars Ltd

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

On Friday, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) searched 10 locations in Hyderabad, Vizianagaram, and Kakinada as part of a major bank fraud case involving NCS Sugars Ltd. The case, handled by the CBI's Bank Securities and Fraud Branch in Bengaluru, involves an alleged loss of ₹105.44 crore to Punjab National Bank in Chennai.

According to the CBI spokesperson, the agency registered the case against the company, its directors, and some unknown public servants after a complaint from PNB. The bank accused them of criminal conspiracy, cheating, breach of trust, misappropriation, and forgery.

The accused used forged documents to get credit, then diverted and misused the

loans instead of using them for business. The accounts became irregular and eventually defaulted, leading to major losses for the public sector bank.

The searches took place at the company's factory, its registered office, and the directors' homes. CBI teams collected documents and digital evidence for their investigation. Officials said they are now reviewing the materials to determine how far the alleged conspiracy extends, trace the money, and identify everyone involved, including any public servants. NCS Sugars Ltd, which makes sugar in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, has faced financial problems in recent years and has been going through insolvency proceedings since 2022.

The CBI is now investigating PNB credit facilities and



claims that forged documents were used to obtain and move funds.

Bank fraud like this is still a problem for India's public sector banks. Agencies like the CBI often look into cases where borrowers get loans by giving false information, inflating assets, or moving money to related companies. In this case, the complaint mentioned forged docu-

uments and the failure to use the funds for proper business purposes.

CBI officials said the investigation is still in its early stages. They expect the digital evidence to help trace transactions and find any transfers meant to hide how borrowed funds were used. Reviewing the seized records will show if the alleged forgery and fund diversion happened once or are part of a bigger pattern involving more people.

The agency said more action could follow after it finishes analysing the material. No arrests have been made so far. The agency has economic offence cases and says protecting public funds is a top priority. As they continue reviewing documents and digital devices, more information about the alleged conspiracy and the amount of diverted funds should emerge.

■ States Focus ■



FORMER ARMY CHIEF GENERAL VISHWA NATH SHARMA DIES AT 96

Former Army chief General Vishwa Nath Sharma (ret'd) died on Friday at the age of 96, the Indian Army said. General Sharma was the Chief of the Army Staff from June 30, 1988 to June 30, 1990, and saw action as a Major during the 1965 Indo-Pak War in the Lahore Sector. He commanded the Armoured Regiment and held important staff and instructional appointments. Post 1965 war, he was promoted to the rank of Bbrigadier. He commanded a Mountain Brigade in an insurgency-affected area and was awarded the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM) in 1977 for distinguished service, according to his profile on the Army's website. Later, he commanded an Armoured Brigade in the Rajasthan desert. In 1980, he was elevated to the rank of Major General and commanded a Mountain Division in the Western Sector. (PTI)



GUJARAT ON RED ALERT AS HEAVY RAINS INUNDATE STATE

Gujarat remained in the grip of an intense monsoon spell on Friday as widespread heavy to extremely heavy rainfall triggered red alerts across several districts, inundated cities and towns, disrupted transport and forced authorities to step up emergency measures. The India Meteorological Department (IMD), in its latest nowcast, warned of intense rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms, lightning and strong winds over large parts of south, central and north Gujarat. Red alerts were issued for several districts, while orange and yellow alerts remained in force across other parts of the state, indicating the likelihood of continued adverse weather over the next few hours. (PNS)

Modi, UK's Burnham pledge to take ties to new heights

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his British counterpart Andy Burnham on Friday vowed to take the India-UK comprehensive strategic partnership to "new heights" and fully harness the trade and investment opportunities presented by the recently operationalised bilateral trade deal. Modi and Burnham discussed key aspects of the two-way ties during a phone conversation. In a social media post, Modi said he congratulated Burnham on assuming the charge of the top office and conveyed his best wishes for a successful tenure. "We agreed to work together across sectors such as technology, innovation, defence, security, clean energy, education and people-to-people ties and take the India-UK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership to new heights," he said. "We will also collaborate closely to fully harness the



trade and investment opportunities presented by the recently operationalized India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, for the shared prosperity and well-being of both our people," Modi said. A British readout said Burnham began the conversation by reflecting on the strength of the UK-India partnership and the significant impact it has had on local communities across the UK. "The prime minister set out his ambitions to further enhance the UK-India relationship, including through the UK-India Vision 2035 framework and strong people-to-people links," it said. Burnham praised the contribution Indian communities in the UK make to the fabric of UK society, with Modi noting the links between the two leaders' own home cities of Manchester and Ahmedabad, in Gujarat, which he called the "Manchester of India", it said. Turning to trade, Modi underlined the value of the recently introduced free trade agreement which will create opportunities for people across both countries, it added.

BJP MPs protest in Parliament, demand CBI probe into alleged JPSC paper leak

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

BJP MPs from Jharkhand on Friday staged a protest in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue at Parliament premises demanding a CBI investigation into the alleged Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) paper leak. The protesting MPs claimed alleged irregularities in recruitment examinations in Jharkhand, accusing the JMM-led Government of jeopardising the future of students, and targeted the Congress for what they termed "double standards" over examination-related issues. Women and Child Development Minister Annpurna Devi alleged that students in Jharkhand have been protesting for the past five days over alleged irregularities in the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) examination and reports of paper leak. "The state Government has entrusted the conduct of these examinations to companies that have been black-listed. Such companies are playing with the future of our youth," she said. Claiming the Congress and their INDIA bloc allies speak selectively on examination-related issues, Devi said,



"They speak about the concerns of students in Delhi, but is Jharkhand not a part of the country? They do not speak about the youth of Jharkhand or their future because their Government is in power there." "Today, all of us MPs who

Anurag Thakur accuses Rahul, Priyanka of fabricated allegations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

BJP MP Anurag Thakur on Friday accused Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra of making "fabricated" allegations in the Lok Sabha in violation of the House rules. He said he has submitted a notice to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla seeking action against Gandhi. The former Union minister also accused the opposition parties of insulting the armed forces and the police, alleging that their leaders question military operations, level false allegations against Union Home Minister Amit Shah and use objectionable language in Parliament. Thakur on Thursday submitted a notice of breach of privilege and contempt of the House against Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi for "use of unparliamentary and derogatory language and levelling grave and unsubstantiated allegations" against Home Minister Amit Shah.



Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, BJP MP Anurag Thakur and others during the ongoing Monsoon session of Parliament in New Delhi on Friday (PTI)

In the three-page notice, Thakur requested Birla to refer the matter to the Privilege Committee for a detailed enquiry and appropriate action, including a direction to Gandhi to tender an unconditional apology to the House as well as to Shah. "We have repeatedly seen that the Congress and some opposition parties never

miss an opportunity to insult the Indian Army and the police. They questioned the airstrikes, surgical strikes and Operation Sindoor, and echoed the language of India's enemies," Thakur told reporters in the Parliament House complex. "It is unfortunate that the Congress leaders use objectionable language inside the House and level fabricated allegations in violation of the rules. I have submitted a notice under the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha and urged the Speaker to take action," he said. Thakur said Gandhi made false allegations against the Union Home Ministry, and his party targeted the media and the police. "Rahul Gandhi levels false allegations against the Union Home Ministry. Priyanka Gandhi calls the media 'pet' in the House, while Rahul Gandhi comes outside and says that the media is aligned with the BJP. They also question the country's police," he said.

PM to visit Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, to inaugurate ₹17,900 crore projects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka on Saturday, during which he will open a newly constructed international airport and lay the foundation and inaugurate multiple development projects worth more than ₹17,900 crore. Modi will lay the foundation stone for the ASIP semiconductor project at Visakhapatnam, being developed with an investment of more than ₹460 crore. During the day-long trip, the prime minister will first undertake a walk-through of the passenger terminal building of the Alluri Sitarama Raju International Airport at Bhogapuram in Andhra Pradesh's Vizianagaram district, an official statement said. He will then inaugurate



the airport and lay the foundation, inaugurate and dedicate to the nation multiple development projects worth over ₹17,900 crore in Bhogapuram, an official statement said. Modi will also address the gathering on the occasion. In the afternoon, Modi will inaugurate the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Youth Centre — Viveka Smaraka at the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Mysuru, Karnataka, and also address the gathering.

Developed under the public-private partnership (PPP) mode at a cost of more than ₹5,640 crore, the greenfield Alluri Sitarama Raju International Airport has been designed to handle six million passengers annually, the statement said. The passenger terminal building has been designed to provide a modern, seamless and efficient travel experience, it said. The airport incorporates advanced infrastructure, cutting-edge tech-

nologies and sustainable features to enhance operational efficiency and meet future aviation requirements. The airport has been equipped with advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), building information modelling (BIM), Airside 4.0 technologies, airport predictive operations centre (APOC), biometric passenger processing, automated baggage handling and operational monitoring solutions, which are expected to enhance operational efficiency, improve passenger convenience and safety, and optimise resource utilisation, the statement said. The terminal has been designed in accordance with the green building standards and is registered with the US Green Building Council (USGBC). The airport's architectural design draws inspiration from the cultural heritage

of Andhra Pradesh, it said. The ASIP semiconductor project at Visakhapatnam is being developed by ASIP Technologies Pvt Ltd in partnership with APACT, Republic of Korea. It is Andhra Pradesh's first semiconductor manufacturing facility approved under the India Semiconductor Mission. The facility will manufacture around 96 million semiconductor chips annually and create high-skilled employment opportunities, while also fostering a robust ancillary ecosystem to support semiconductor manufacturing, the statement said. In Karnataka, the prime minister will inaugurate the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Youth Centre — Viveka Smaraka in Mysuru, which commemorates Vivekananda's historic visit to the city in November 1892 during his journey across India.

India can become global powerhouse in grassroots innovation: President

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday said that India has the potential to become a global powerhouse in grassroots innovation by leveraging its vast scale and spirit of innovation. Meeting a group of grassroots innovators of Atal Innovations Mission, who had called on the President at the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre here, she said that societal changes do not come about through ideas alone and advancing these ideas requires an environment that guides talent and provides appropriate platforms and resources. Murmu emphasised that grassroots innovations are well-suited to society's needs,



as they combine local experience, scientific thinking, and individual creativity with a sense of social responsibility. The President said that India has the potential to become a global powerhouse in grassroots innovation by leveraging its vast scale and spirit of innovation. She said that the dream of Viksit Bharat will be realised when every citizen works with an innovation mindset to find solutions to problems.

Murmu was happy to note that various institutions and citizens are working together with a shared objective, and a culture of innovation is gaining strength. She expressed confidence that the benefits of such efforts will reach a wide cross-section of society. The President said that many innovators persisted in their efforts despite limited resources, uncertainties, and recurring challenges.

21st century will need youth who integrate knowledge across multiple fields: J&K LG

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said on Friday that the 21st century would belong to young people who can integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines and discover innovative solutions to complex challenges. He made these remarks while inaugurating a series of new academic programmes at Cluster University Jammu. Sinha said the world today demands multidisciplinary thinkers rather than specialists confined to a single subject. "I believe that the 21st century will welcome those young people who are not specialists in just one subject but can integrate knowledge from multiple fields and discover new solutions," he said while addressing a gathering after launching the university's "design your degree" programme and other academic initiatives at Lok Bhawan here. "The future belongs to those who recognise possi-



Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha addresses the inauguration of academic and institutional initiatives of Cluster University of Jammu at Lok Bhavan in Jammu on Friday (PTI)

bilities, not boundaries. This initiative empowers students to shape their own academic journeys, combining subjects according to their interests, talents and aspirations," the Lieutenant Governor said. He said the frontiers of knowledge are expanding and the problems facing society are multidimensional, requiring multidisciplinary approaches for meaningful solutions. Sinha inau-

gurated integrated programmes in physics, chemistry, botany, zoology, mathematics and geography, saying such courses would help develop holistic researchers capable of addressing complex issues. Referring to climate change, he said understanding the issue requires contributions from several disciplines, including chemistry, physics, mathematics and geography.

Housing Ministry asks RERAs to give 4-month extension to projects hit by West Asia conflict

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry on Friday issued an advisory asking all state Real Estate Regulatory Authorities (RERAs) to grant a four-month extension in the registration and completion timelines of eligible real estate projects affected by disruptions arising from the ongoing conflict in West Asia. The ministry, in an advisory issued to all regulatory authorities, said the prevailing situation in West Asia has adversely affected global supply chains, resulting in a shortage of construction materials, thereby impacting the timely construction of the real estate projects. It said the ministry had received several representations from stakeholders in the real estate sector seeking relief in view of the disruptions affecting timely completion of projects. Referring to an Office Memorandum issued by the Department of Expenditure under the Ministry of Finance



on April 29, the advisory noted that the ongoing West Asia situation has been treated as "war" for invocation of the Force Majeure clause. Section 6 of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 provides for extension of registration of a real estate project on account of Force Majeure, which, inter alia, includes "war" affecting the regular development of a real estate project. Further, under Section 7(3) of RERA, the Authority may, instead of revoking the registration, permit it to remain in force subject to such terms and conditions as it considers appropriate in the interest of the allottees, it said.

In view of the Force Majeure conditions arising from the conflict, the ministry has advised regulatory authorities to issue suitable orders extending the registration and corresponding completion timelines of registered real estate projects by four months. The relief would apply to projects whose original, revised or already extended completion date falls on or after February 28, 2026. In order to avoid the need for submission of separate applications for extension of registration of individual real estate projects and issuance of separate orders thereon, state RERAs may issue a common order or direction in this regard.

Punjab Govt committed to freedom fighters' dreams: CM Mann

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Sunam

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday said the AAP Government is firmly committed to fulfilling the dreams of the freedom fighters who made supreme sacrifices for the nation. During a state-level function here to commemorate the 87th martyrdom day of Shaheed Udham Singh, Mann said the legendary revolutionary's unparalleled patriotism and supreme sacrifice would continue to inspire generations to serve the nation selflessly and the nation would forever remain indebted to the iconic martyr. Earlier, the chief minister paid floral tributes and laid a wreath at the memorial in honour of Shaheed Udham Singh. Mann also posted on X to pay tribute to Shaheed Udham Singh. "On the martyrdom day of the great revolutionary Shaheed Udham Singh Ji, who avenged the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, I pay my humble tributes to him. His unparalleled



Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann pays tributes to freedom fighter Shaheed Udham Singh on his 87th Martyrdom Day at his memorial in Sunam, Sangrur district, Punjab on Friday (PTI)

sacrifice for the honour and dignity of the nation will forever remain a great source of inspiration for all of us." Addressing the gathering here, Mann said Shaheed Udham Singh made the supreme sacrifice for the freedom of our country. It was a matter of immense pride and satisfaction for him to be part of the solemn occasion to pay tribute to the iconic martyr, he added.

Editor's
TAKE

Communal violence clouds
Balén Shah's 100-day tenure

Nepal's communal violence tests whether Balén Shah
can fulfil his promise of an efficient government
capable of restoring order in the Himalayan kingdom

Prime Minister Balén Shah, the rapper-turned- politician recently completed 100-days in office. However, what should have been a cause of celebration was drowned in the noise of communal violence. What began in Kaptanganj in Sunsari, in Nepal on July 26 over religious flags and loud music during separate Hindu and Muslim programmes quickly turned violent. Police firing killed at least one person and the unrest spread into parts of Madhesh Province. By July 30, the death toll had risen to three, with curfews imposed in several districts and the Army deployed to restore order.

Nepal's Terai is a densely interconnected social space where religious, ethnic, caste and political identities overlap. A quarrel over a flag or loudspeaker can become combustible when mistrust is already high. Provocative social-media content, identity-based mobilisation and the perception that the state is slow or partisan can turn a small dispute into a communal confrontation. That is where the 100-day record of Shah's government becomes relevant.

Shah came to power on an anti-establishment mandate, promising clean government, efficiency and rapid reform. His administration has begun anti-corruption investigations, administrative changes and digital-governance initiatives. Yet only about one-third of the government's 100-point agenda had been delivered by the 100-day mark. The violence raises a larger question: can a government promising to reform the state also make the state visibly fair, fast and effective at the grassroots?

The handling of Sunsari will matter beyond restoring order. The Balén Shah government must ensure an impartial investigation, prosecute instigators irrespective of community, scrutinise the use of lethal force and compensate victims. The National Human Rights Commission has already called for an impartial probe and accountability. Appeals for brotherhood will not be enough; equal justice is the only credible antidote to communal fear.

For India, this is not a distant crisis. Sunsari and the wider Madhesh belt lie close to the open India-Nepal frontier, where families, traders and tourists daily cross the border. Instability in Nepal's southern plains can have consequences for border security, trafficking, misinformation and local tensions in adjoining Indian areas. I

New Delhi's response should therefore be firm but restrained: reinforce border vigilance and information-sharing, remain in close contact with Kathmandu, and avoid any perception of interference in Nepal's internal affairs. India has a direct interest in a stable, democratic and inclusive Nepal, but stability cannot be built by taking sides in Nepal's communal politics.

The direction of Nepal now depends on whether this episode becomes a contained warning or the beginning of a pattern. Shah won power as the face of political renewal. His real test is whether that renewal can protect Nepal's tradition of coexistence.

Compensation cannot mend the loss

The NEET protests may have ended but can the death of a young student, driven to suicide by an examination system already tainted by leaks and repeated uncertainty, really be reduced to compensation? The government may call it relief; for grieving families, it risks becoming an unkindest cut—placing a price on lives that should never have been lost

AMITABH SRIVASTAVA

The just ended protests by students at Jantar Mantar ended with a sort of symbolic victory both for students and Government as the Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan was forced to resign and an agreement was signed between the Government and the striking students.

Sonam Wangchuk the unlikely hero who jumped in the protest launched by the Cockroach Janta Party to take out the sting from the protest was turned into Aana Hazare two days before the pact was signed between students and Government.

Among other things, the joint press conference televised by two Ministers of BJP and two leaders of CJP agreed to adequately compensate for the loss of lives due to the NEET paper leakages and reexamination between 2024/2026.

This is the unkindest cut of all to my mind. All of us should be thankful to the Social Media, for a change this time, for showing live coverage of how the Delhi Police pounced on young unarmed girls with their batons giving them electric shocks here, there everywhere.

If this protest has been indeed an eye-opener, it's not for BJP or CJP but for these gutsy girls brought up on the slogan 'Beti Padhao' 'Beti Bachao' for the last 13 years.

Do they still have that option?

Those of us who have been writing on the education scenario for the last several years have watched with growing distress how young boys and girls, primarily from middle class families in India, have been ending their lives because they could not live up to the expectations of their 'greedy' parents.

Kota with its coaching mafias in Rajasthan takes the lead in catering to this greed (they term it 'dreams' to lure parents). And Bollywood has only glamorised this scenario by making several films on it.

But the compensation promised by the Government on July 25 is only for students who committed suicide in the last two years due to leaks in the NEET examination.

Only!

A little research shows that among the 12 students who committed suicide due to NEET leak in 2024 and re-exam in 2026 around half were girls.

Among those documented from various sources are Akanksha Chaturvedi, (Nagpur), Riya Kumari (23) Dehradun, Sheikh Sana (19), Hyderabad), Anika Pande (17) Delhi, Ruchi

ONCE THE GIRL CHILD IS BORN THE FIRST PRIORITY OF THE PARENTS WHETHER RICH OR POOR IS ARRANGING FOR THEIR DOWRY NOT EDUCATION, BECAUSE EVEN IN THE YEAR 2026 IT'S THE ARRANGED MARRIAGE THAT GETS SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE EVEN IF IT ENDS WITH DOWRY KILLINGS SHOWED AS SUICIDES

The writer is a political and social activist

Kumari ((Jharkhand) Bhagyashree (Karnataka) one each from Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

Does this government understand what compensation for suicides of young girls means in India where girls continue to be unwelcome even before they are born.

Not for nothing has the Government banned ultrasound tests for pregnancy to check female foeticide, though some clinics continue to perform these tests because even if arrested they have earned enough to last two generations.

Once the girl child is born the first priority of the parents whether rich or poor is arranging for their dowry not education, because even in the year 2026 it's the arranged marriage that gets social acceptance even if it ends with dowry killings showed as suicides.

By the way, the West terms arranged marriages as 'human trafficking' because they cannot understand how two total strangers can decide to spend their entire lives together without dating or knowing each other.

For a girl child in India and more so in 'Bharat' it's always a fight for survival for a girl. If she does not do well in studies (which means she must take up science and beat the much pampered boys) she should be married off.

But girls have been doing well in sciences for some time.

The percentage of girls joining the Police and IAS may be dismal (less than 13 per cent as mentioned in these columns earlier) but they are competing with boys as far as admissions to engineering courses is concerned (20 per cent). Similarly they have also started excelling in management courses as the results of entrance to IITs and IIMs shows(30/40%).

For medical education for which NEET is held the percentage of girls is as high as 57 per cent.

For the remaining girls who take up Arts or Humanities it's a double whammy. They are looked down upon by their peers and are put up in the marriage market because they are not good enough to become an engineer or a doctor.

Under these circumstances imagine the shock of the grieving parents who had pinned all their hopes and dreams on their daughters because they themselves were either too lazy or incompetent to compete themselves.

When this government talks of compensating for the deaths of these girls it's a huge insult to these parents and the departed souls.

Let's stop this talk before the bargaining begins!

PIC TALK

Painted storks seen inside an enclosure at Alipore Zoological Garden, in Kolkata. PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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INDIA MUST PREPARE FOR
TARIFF HEADWINDS

Reports of a proposed 500 per cent tariff bill in the United States have understandably caused anxiety among Indian exporters and policy observers. If such a measure receives bipartisan backing in the US Congress, its implications could be far more serious than earlier tariff actions imposed through presidential executive authority, which had faced legal challenges.

A congressional statute would enjoy stronger legal standing and would be considerably harder to overturn through judicial review. For India, the concern is not merely the headline tariff rate but the uncertainty it could create for trade, investment and supply-chain planning. Sectors ranging from pharmaceuticals and engineering goods to textiles

and IT-linked services could feel indirect pressure if bilateral economic relations deteriorate.

The possibility of securing relief through a comprehensive India-US free trade agreement or a country-specific waiver appears uncertain in the current political climate.

Given that the present US administration has several years remaining in office, New Delhi must prepare for a prolonged period of strategic economic negotiation. Diversifying export markets, strengthening domestic manufacturing competitiveness and maintaining steady diplomatic engagement with Washington will be essential to navigating this difficult phase. India has the mettle to take on these tariffs, what is required is right policy and execution.

YASHASWI BAIRAGI | UJJAIN

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

Rage bait: When anger becomes the product

SAKSHI SETHI

2ND OPINION

Some social media posts are designed neither to inform, entertain nor inspire, but simply to provoke anger.

They are easy to recognise: the sudden surge of indignation, the tightening of the jaw, the thumb already hovering over the reply button.

What often escapes notice in that moment is that the outrage was never accidental. It was the intended outcome, carefully engineered and delivered. The individual's anger was the product.

Rage baiting, the deliberate fabrication of provocative, false or upsetting content to elicit outrage has become one of the internet's quietest yet most potent motors.

The creator may not even believe what has been

posted. What matters is not the belief behind the content, but the reaction it produces: comments, reposts, quote-shares and ultimately, the algorithmic reward that follows.

Young people are especially vulnerable to this economy of outrage. As an educator, I often see students arrive at school already disturbed by something they encountered while scrolling through their phones. They carry a borrowed anger that they cannot fully explain, directed at people or issues they barely understand.

Their vision of the world is increasingly moulded not by what is real, but by what is incendiary. When fury is rewarded online, discipline begins to appear weak and brutality starts disguising as heroism. That is a dangerous curriculum for any child.

The consequences are not merely personal. A society trained to react rather than reflect becomes easier to manipulate and harder to govern.

Rage bait reduces complex questions involving education, faith, gender and public policy to shouting matches in which the loudest voice appears to win. Genuine disagreement is essential to democracy, but meaningful debate is increasingly drowned out by conflict designed merely to attract attention.

We begin to mistake digital noise for national conversation.

What makes rage baiting especially insidious is that

it hides behind our virtues. The instinct to challenge falsehood, defend the vulnerable and speak against injustice is precisely what the rage baiter exploits.

The angrier and more righteous we feel, the more useful we become to someone quietly monetising our attention. The defence is not indifference, but discernment. Before sharing or replying, one should ask: who benefits if I amplify this?

Often, the answer is not the cause we imagine we are supporting, but the person who provoked us.

This is a sort of digital literacy that must be taught purposefully, both in classrooms and at kitchen tables. Children should learn to evaluate the emotional architecture of a post as thoroughly as they examine its words. They must be taught to understand when content is aiming to control their feelings rather than educate their judgment.

We already teach children not to trust a stranger who tries to frighten them on the street. We must now teach them to recognise the stranger who tries to terrify them through a screen.

Anger can drive good social change, but anger that is fake, sold for money and controlled by computers is not true belief. It is a trap used to control us and the first step to freedom is seeing it.

The writer is an educator and councillor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Parliament debates must not be frivolous

Political debate in a democracy is expected to be sharp, even sarcastic, but it should not descend into needless personal ridicule. Citizens are increasingly disillusioned when parliamentary time is consumed by comments aimed at individuals rather than by serious discussion of unemployment, education, healthcare, economic growth and other pressing national concerns. The recent exchange involving remarks about IT Madras Director V Kamakoti illustrates how quickly public discourse can be reduced to mockery instead of substantive engagement.

Kamakoti is not merely a public personality who made a controversial statement; he is also a distinguished computer scientist who has spent decades working on computer architecture, cybersecurity and indigenous processor design. Disagreeing with any of his views is entirely legitimate, but dismissing his academic and professional contributions through laughter or caricature does little to elevate the quality of debate.

Whether criticism is directed at a former prime minister, an opposition leader or a technocrat, arguments should be grounded in facts and reasoned analysis rather than in personal insinuation.

CK SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

Urgent need to preserve indigenous languages

English, Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, Spanish, French and Arabic are the common globally spoken languages. It is estimated that there are about 7500 such languages.

These include both the mother tongue and the second language. While Mandarin Chinese has a large number of native speakers, speaking English is a global imperative.

However, the general consensus, stemmed by researches and studies, is that 90 percent of more than 7000 languages will become extinct by 2050. Globalisation, urbanisation and history have pushed plenty of mother tongues to the wall. When parents tend to shift their focus on dominant or non-native languages, native languages tend to suffer.

Compulsion to speak in a particular language at workplace and migration, of course, are huge factors that determine the longevity of a language: native or non-native. When all this happens, the culture and knowledge deeply embedded in these rare languages take a massive hit.

Governments of the day have the onerous task of buffering and developing an indigenous language without disrespecting the second language.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Ajinkya Rahane leaves a lasting legacy

The retirement of Ajinkya Rahane marks the close of a remarkable chapter in Indian cricket. In an era often dominated by flamboyant personalities and relentless self-promotion, Rahane stood out for his quiet determination, humility and unwavering commitment to the team. Across 85 Tests, 90 One-Day Internationals and 20 T20 Internationals, he scored more than 8,000 international runs and established himself as one of India's most dependable performers in challenging overseas conditions. His 5,077 Test runs and 12 centuries reflect technical excellence, but statistics alone cannot capture his true impact. Rahane's defining moment came during the 2020-21 Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia. Taking over the captaincy under difficult circumstances after India's Adelaide collapse, he led an injury-ravaged side with exceptional composure.

His superb century in Melbourne and his calm, understated leadership were central to India's historic 2-1 series triumph, widely regarded as one of the country's greatest Test achievements abroad. Although his international career concluded in 2023, Rahane's influence will endure. His flawless slip catching, dignified conduct on and off the field, and reassuring presence in the dressing room offered a model of professionalism for younger cricketers.

M PRADYU | KANNUR

From Khadi to fast fashion: The changing face of Indian textiles

As synthetic fibres, chemical pollution and textile waste threaten sustainability, India now faces a crucial choice: preserve its rich textile traditions while embracing innovation, or allow the pursuit of cheap, fast fashion to undermine the ecosystems and livelihoods that have sustained its textile heritage for centuries



BKP SINHA | ARVIND KUMAR JHA

The evolution of Indian textiles, from ancient civilisation to modern times, mirrors the profound political, economic and social transformations that India has undergone—from colonialism and nationalism to industrialisation, economic liberalisation, globalisation and consumerism. Each of these periods has influenced the way textiles are produced, garments are designed and clothing is consumed.

The textile industry has been one of the oldest pillars of India's economy and an enduring symbol of its rich cultural heritage, regional diversity and artisanal craftsmanship. Its origins date back to the Indus Valley Civilisation.

During the Mauryan period, textile production expanded considerably under a more organised administrative system. Cotton remained the dominant raw material for textile production, while linen, silk and woollen fabrics were also produced in different regions of the empire. These textiles were traded extensively within the Indian subcontinent and exported through well-established overland and maritime trade routes to Central Asia, Persia, Egypt and the Mediterranean.

The Gupta Empire further strengthened textile production through improvements in weaving, embroidery, dyeing and decorative techniques. Textile centres in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Kashmir developed distinctive weaving, dyeing, embroidery and printing techniques. Block printing, resist dyeing, ikat, brocade, bandhani and fine silk weaving flourished under royal patronage, and these textiles were exported to Southeast Asia, the Middle East, East Africa and China through maritime trade.

The Mughal Empire marked the golden age of Indian textiles. Royal patronage encouraged the production of luxurious muslin, jamdani, brocade, velvet, silk, pashmina, chintz and richly embroidered fabrics. Textile centres such as Dhaka, Banaras, Ahmedabad, Surat and Kashmir earned global recognition for their textile craftsmanship. Techniques including zari embroidery, gold and silver thread work, block printing, floral motifs and intricate weaving reached exceptional levels of refinement.

The arrival of European trading companies, particularly the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British, further expanded international demand for Indian textiles. By the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Indian cotton, silk fabrics, calicoes, muslins and printed chintz had become some of the most sought-after commodities in global trade. However, the fortunes of India's textile industry changed significantly under British colonial rule. India was gradually reduced from being a leading exporter of finished textiles to a supplier of raw cotton for British industries.

During India's struggle for independence, textiles became powerful symbols of nationalism and self-reliance. The Swadeshi Movement encouraged the use of indigenous products while boycotting imported British textiles. Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on the spinning wheel (charkha) sought not only to revive rural employment but also to challenge Britain's economic dominance over India's textile trade. Following independence, the Government of India formulated successive Five-Year Plans to promote the expansion and modernisation of textile mills and introduced a range of policies, institutions and development programmes to support and protect the handloom and handicraft sectors.

The opening of the economy in 1991 brought greater exposure to international fashion through global media, organised retail and multinational brands, leading to significant changes in consumer preferences. In the following years, the growth of e-commerce further expanded access to fashionable clothing across different income groups and geographical regions.

As competition intensified, both international and domestic fashion brands adopted shorter production cycles, giving rise to the fast fashion business model. This model significantly increased clothing production and consumption, resulting in greater textile waste and a higher demand for raw materials, water and energy. Today, synthetic fibres such as polyester, nylon and acrylic dominate the fashion industry because they are inexpensive,



A SHIFT TOWARDS RESOURCE-EFFICIENT PRODUCTION, CLEANER TECHNOLOGIES AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRINCIPLES IS ESSENTIAL TO REDUCING THE INDUSTRY'S ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT. EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS ENCOURAGING CONSUMERS TO MAKE MORE INFORMED AND RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING CHOICES

BKP Sinha & Arvind Kumar Jha are Former PCCFs, UP and Maharashtra

durable, wrinkle-resistant and well suited to mass production. However, most synthetic fibres are derived from petroleum, making them dependent on fossil fuels and energy-intensive manufacturing processes that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Unlike natural fibres, they are non-biodegradable and can persist in landfills and the environment for hundreds of years.

In addition, the washing of synthetic garments releases microscopic plastic fibres into rivers, lakes and oceans, where they accumulate in aquatic ecosystems, harm marine life and eventually enter the human food chain.

The textile industry contributes about one-fifth of global water pollution and around one-tenth of global greenhouse gas emissions. If current trends continue, these emissions are expected to rise by more than 50 per cent by 2030. The sector also generates approximately 7,793 kilotonnes of waste annually, of which 3,944 kilotonnes consist of post-consumer textile waste. Although a significant proportion is recovered through reuse and recycling, nearly 34 per cent is still disposed of in landfills.

Several chemicals used in textile dyeing, printing, bleaching, finishing and fabric treatment have been identified as carcinogenic. Prolonged occupational exposure to these hazardous substances through inhalation of chemical vapours and aerosols, or direct skin contact during handling and processing, increases the risk of certain cancers, respiratory diseases, skin disorders and allergic dermatitis, particularly in workplaces where occupational safety measures are inadequate. In several textile-producing regions of India, inadequate treatment or improper disposal of textile effluents has contaminated water, soil and, in some cases, the surrounding air, posing risks to ecosystems and nearby communities.

The industry's water footprint is equally alarming. Producing a single cotton T-shirt requires approximately 2,700 litres of water, while a pair of cotton jeans requires about 9,000-10,000 litres. Cotton cultivation consumes nearly 25,000 litres of water per kilogram of fibre, and textile dyeing and finishing require an additional 125-150 litres per kilogram of fabric.

Today, nearly 95 per cent of cotton cultivated in India is genetically modified Bt cotton. However, its widespread cultivation has raised concerns about pest resistance, rising input costs, increased reliance on chemical inputs to manage secondary pests, biodiversity loss and the growing economic vulnerability of smallholder farmers, particularly in rain-fed regions.

Addressing these challenges requires rethinking the way textiles are produced, consumed and discarded. A shift towards resource-efficient production, cleaner technologies and circular economy principles is essential to reducing the industry's environmental footprint. Equally important is encouraging consumers to make more informed and responsible purchasing choices. Extending the lifespan of garments through repair, reuse and recycling can further minimise waste and conserve natural resources.

Innovation in sustainable materials, cleaner production technologies and effective waste management will also play a vital role in reducing the industry's environmental footprint. Stronger environmental regulations and their effective enforcement are equally essential to ensure compliance with sustainable production practices. Alongside these environmental measures, preserving traditional textile crafts and supporting artisans is important for safeguarding India's cultural heritage and sustaining rural livelihoods. Ultimately, achieving a more sustainable and equitable future depends on the collective commitment of all stakeholders. The question is not whether fashion will continue to evolve, but whether that evolution will be guided by sustainability or driven by folly.

Animal cruelty: Who deserves mercy, and who doesn't?



ACHARYA PRASHANT

Where does the violence actually lie? This summer in London, I discussed the genesis of violence with Professor Jonathan Birch at the London School of Economics, with Mimi Bekhechi and Poorva Joshipura of PETA, and with Psychologist Melanie Joy.

On the twenty-sixth of June, I spoke at the London School of Economics, in conversation with Professor Jonathan Birch, as part of London Climate Action Week. Professor Birch directs the Jeremy Collier Centre for Animal Sentience there. In 2021 he led the review of the evidence for sentience in invertebrates that shaped the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act, and octopuses, squid, cuttlefish, crabs, lobsters and shrimps are recognised in British law today because of his work. I congratulated him on his work, and I meant it. Then I asked him about the 'dividing line'.

I meant that a line that is drawn to include is, at the same instant and with exactly the same precision, a line that excludes. Once it has been established with academic confidence and legislative authority which beings are sentient, it has been established with equal confidence which beings are not. Those on the far side are no longer merely neglected. They have been formally released for use, and the release carries a scientific signature.

Jeremy Bentham asked the question that has organised this entire field: not whether they can reason or talk, but whether they can suffer. Why is the ego so interested in whether they suffer? By ego I do not mean pride or arrogance. I mean the continuous feeling of I-am-ness, the one who says 'I'. The default position is denial of sentience, and proof is demanded before the default will change, because denial is profitable. Yet no owner of a dog asks for evidence that the animal on the sofa has an inner life. So it is not proof that sets the boundary. Intent sets the boundary, and proof is fetched afterwards to hold it in place.

Protection is currently extended based on kinship: find in that creature a self resembling the self inside you, and consideration follows. But the ego in here, the one performing all this measurement, has never been put to the test. If that self should turn out to be a claim rather than a fact, the entire basis of protection collapses, because the reason for kindness was resemblance to something that was never there.

Bull-baiting and bear-baiting were made illegal in Britain by the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1835. Suppression had first been put to the Commons in 1802 and lost by thirteen votes. The bulls and bears of England died for another thirty-three years while the question sat in Parliament. The objectors did not argue that baiting was painless.

They conceded the cruelty and refused the bill anyway, on the ground that baiting was the entertainment of labourers and factory hands, while fox hunting was the entertainment of gentlemen and was not being touched. So for three decades the bulls were held in the ring by a quarrel between men about which men could keep their pleasures. The animal was never what the quarrel was about.

Nothing in the two centuries since suggests the pattern has broken. Animal welfare legislation has multiplied across the world, and across the same period the rate at which species go extinct has risen to something like a hundred times the natural rate, while meat consumed per person stands many times higher than it did before any of these laws existed. A law is drafted where love has already failed. And the ego that raises a regulatory wall in the morning knows better than anyone where that wall can be climbed at night, having built it.

At the PETA offices, a woman asked how to reconcile the kindness of her friends and family with the fact that they eat animals. Do not grant them the kindness. To say that a person is good in nine areas of life and unfortunate in the tenth is to hand him a score he will happily accept and never revisit. He will keep the goat as his one permitted exception and consider the account settled. What has actually been practised, at the table, three times a day for a lifetime, is not cruelty; it is inattention. And inattention is never object-specific. Whoever does not see what is on his plate does not see what is in the rest of his life either.

Speaking with Melanie Joy, I put it as a matter of geometry. Compassion is generally imagined as a circle to be widened. The radius grows. The centre never moves. The circle is not there to include; the one sitting at its centre is the violent one, and the circle exists to defend him. To care for everybody, you must be nobody. And the ego has no intention of being nobody.

I do not talk about being kind to animals. I talk about where violence actually lies. It is not in the knife, nor in the slaughterhouse, nor on the plate. Those are the last stages of something that began much earlier, somewhere quieter, in a person who had already stopped looking at himself and found that the practice served him. Around 2012, I was keeping a rabbit in my study. She had come from a rescue with insufficient fur on her hind legs, so the skin would open and bleed if she tried to play with the others. She stayed with me. When the doctors advised euthanasia, I declined. She lived some years more and died in my arms. If a relationship of mine ever required me to give that rabbit up, I would give up the relationship. A relationship that could ask that of me was never worth what I had taken it for, and the rabbit is simply what made the fact visible.

The food plate is available three times a day, every day, which makes it the most frequent examination a human being is ever offered, and the one most reliably declined. When the one at the table sees where the violence actually lies, the plate cleans itself. He does not have to repair the world; he has only to stop being the one who breaks it.



Acharya Prashant is a philosopher and author whose work centres on self-inquiry and its application to contemporary life

A political assault on faith



ASHISH KUMAR PATHAK

On 31 July 2026, the scene that unfolded in the Parliament complex involving Independent MP Pappu Yadav, Rahul Gandhi, and other opposition leaders marked a low point in political discourse. Dressed in saffron robes as a sadhu-priest and seated with a donation box, Pappu Yadav enacted a theatrical skit in which Rahul Gandhi and others symbolically offered donations while he pocketed the money and pretended to flee. Slogans such as "Chadhawa Chor, Gaddi Chhod" were raised. What was presented as a protest crossed into a deliberate attempt to target the priest, the saffron symbol, and the Ram Mandir itself. This was not a mere political protest—it was a calculated political gimmick that amounted to a direct assault on Sanatan Dharma.

The Ram Mandir donation theft is a serious matter. A few lower-level employees allegedly engaged in embezzlement during the counting process. The SIT investigation was initiated on the complaint of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust itself. Eight people have been arrested, around ₹80 lakh has been recovered, and the probe continues. The guilty must

face the full force of the law—there can be no disagreement on this. Yet Pappu Yadav, Rahul Gandhi, and SP leaders converted the incident into an opportunity to attack the temple, its priests, and the larger Sanatan tradition. Staging a street-theatre-style skit inside the Parliament complex by dressing as a priest and enacting a theft represented the height of political vulgarity and cheap theatrics.

Faith, saffron and the dignity of the temple

In the Sanatan tradition, sadhus and priests are regarded as representatives of the divine. The saffron colour stands for renunciation, austerity, and spiritual purity. The Ram Mandir itself is the culmination of five centuries of struggle and sacrifice. Crores of devotees have offered their savings as chadhawa with deep devotion. When Pappu Yadav enacted a thieving priest and Rahul Gandhi joined the skit, they insulted the sentiments of millions of Ram Bhakts. By dressing as a priest and enacting theft, the leaders crossed the Lakshman Rekha of political propriety.

This episode reveals a deeper mindset. Sections of the opposition have never fully reconciled themselves to the construction of the Ram Mandir. Using the theft case as a pretext, they appear determined to cast aspersions on the temple, the Trust, and the saffron symbol. The viral visual of Rahul Gandhi offering a donation and Pappu Yadav pocketing it has caused widespread hurt. Was it necessary to mock faith in



the name of accountability? Was dressing as a saffron-clad priest the only way to demand answers on the alleged embezzlement? The real target, it is increasingly clear, was never the individual wrongdoers but the institution of the Ram Mandir and the faith it represents. Using a genuine case of embezzlement to target the Ram Mandir and saffron amounts to hitting below the belt.

As actor Anupam Kher rightly observed, thieves exist everywhere, yet that does not diminish the dignity of a temple. One punishes the culprit; one does not indict the faith. The opposition, however, has chosen the opposite path—

projecting the crime of a few staff members onto the priestly class and the saffron flag itself. In doing so, it has insulted the core values of service, devotion, and sacrifice that Sanatan Dharma upholds.

Parliament as a stage for cheap theatrics

The July 31 episode also raises serious questions about the dignity of Parliament. Turning the complex into a circus for political point-scoring diminishes the dignity of the institution. A serious discussion inside the House, a demand for the SIT report, and insistence on accountability

ity would have been the appropriate course. Instead, the preference for gimmicks suggests that the objective was less about justice and more about targeting the Ram Mandir. The viral visual of the skit may ultimately prove to be a political self-goal.

The larger message for the opposition

Sanatan faith does not get shaken by such insults. The Ram Mandir remains a powerful cultural and spiritual identity of India. When political leaders choose to mock symbols of faith, they are playing with fire. Faith cannot be reduced to a political football for short-term gains. The 31 July drama by Pappu Yadav, Rahul Gandhi, and the Samajwadi Party has exposed the true colours of a section of the opposition on matters of faith.

The time has come for the opposition to recognise its limits. Respect for faith and the separation of politics from sacred symbols are essential. Those who target the Ram Mandir risk pushing themselves to the margins of public sentiment. Sanatan is eternal; those who repeatedly insult it will eventually have to answer to the people.

The issue was theft. The response, however, turned into an assault on the priest, saffron, and the faith itself. That is the real takeaway from the events of July 31.

The writer is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Banaras Hindu University and writes on current affairs and social issues



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Order Order

**Govt rejects legal changes for
CAG recommendations**



The Government on Friday told the Lok Sabha that there is no proposal to amend the law to effectively implement recommendations of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) across ministries and States.

In a written reply, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal also said measures have been taken to improve legal compliance and accountability regarding the audit findings of the principal auditor.

He said in the last five years, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has registered one case on the basis of CAG Report No 7 of 2012-2013 regarding performance audit of allocation of coal blocks and augmentation of coal production. "Upon completion of investigation, a closure report was filed on March 31, 2025, in the competent court," he noted. (PTI)

**Supreme Court stays CIC
order on NSEI RTI status**



The Supreme Court on Friday stayed an order of the Central Information Commission which held that the National Stock Exchange of India (NSEI) is a 'public authority' under the Right to Information Act.

A bench of justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta agreed to hear a petition filed by the NSEI and sought responses from the Central Information Commission and others within four weeks.

The NSEI challenged the July 1 verdict of a division bench of the Delhi High Court.

The high court's division bench had dismissed the NSEI's appeal against its single judge's April 2010 decision which ruled that NSEI qualified as a 'public authority' under section 2(h) of the RTI Act.

The stock exchange had challenged the June 2007 CIC order before the single judge and asserted that it was not a 'public authority' under the RTI Act.

Citizens can enforce their right to ask for information only from a 'public authority' under the RTI Act.

The high court's division bench had observed that if the body is owned, controlled or substantially financed by the appropriate Government, it would qualify as a 'public authority'.

"The single judge holds, in the impugned judgment, that the NSEI is controlled by the appropriate Government, and we agree," the division bench had said. (PTI)

Muslims offer *namaz* at site near Bhojshala complex

A day after the Supreme Court granted permission, Muslims offered prayers on Friday at a site near the Bhojshala-Kamal Maulla complex in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh amid heavy deployment of police personnel.

The arrangements for the *namaz* at the site, survey number 612, near Bhojshala was selected by the Muslim community leaders during a meeting with the district administration.

A good number of devotees turned up for the Friday *namaz* for the first time after the Madhya Pradesh High Court ruled in May that the Bhojshala-Kamal Maulla Mosque complex was a temple dedicated to Goddess Saraswati. The Supreme Court on Thursday permitted Muslims to offer Friday prayers at the premises of a *dargah* adjacent to the disput-

SC stays arrest of DMK leader Senthil Balaji

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

In a major relief to DMK leader and former minister V Senthil Balaji, the Supreme Court on Friday granted him anticipatory bail till further orders in a fresh corruption case lodged against him by the Tamil Nadu Government.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi stayed his arrest with certain conditions — that he will cooperate with the investigation, deposit his passport and not influence any witnesses and tamper with evidence.

"You immediately come to us even if there is slightest breach in bail conditions. We will modify or cancel our orders," Justice Bagchi told senior advocate Guru Krishnakumar, appearing for the Tamil Nadu Government.

The case, pertaining to alleged irregularities in the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) saw fast paced twist and turns in last couple of days.

On Thursday, the Madras High Court dismissed his pre-arrest bail plea saying his custodial interrogation was needed. Within a couple of hours, a battery of senior lawyers led by Kapil Sibal mentioned the appeal against the denial of bail before the apex court for urgent hearing.

The top court took the plea and listed it for hearing on Friday, when Justice Mohana recused herself from hearing. The petition was taken up for hearing during the day by a bench headed by CJI owing to the urgency. During the hearing, the Chief Justice asked Krishnkumar, why Balaji's custodial interrogation was needed as the case was largely based on documentary evidence.

The senior counsel replied that the allegations pertain to the incident of 2021-25 and Balaji prevented the registration of the FIR as he was then a minister and therefore he cannot get a blanket protection from the court.

Sibal along with senior



counsels Mukul Rohatgi and Amit Anand Tiwari, appearing for Balaji submitted that it was a "strange case" as the FIR was filed on July 28 after the new TVK Government led by Chief Minister Joseph Vijay came to power, based on an affidavit filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in another case.

"The events they say are of 2021-25. There's an affidavit filed by ED in 2025 in this court. The person who filed the affidavit has now turned as the Government has come into existence. FIR filed on July 28 relying on that affidavit," he submitted.

Justice Bagchi then pointed out that he was no longer a minister and the state Government was not under his influence and the court will ensure that he does not run away from the investigation and influence the witnesses.

Krishnakumar further submitted that it was a case of grave corruption and anticipatory bail was not warranted.

He pointed out Balaji's antecedents, saying that the top court has also earlier adversely commented on his conduct in the case.

The top court issued notice

to Tamil Nadu Government on the plea and said the Government can approach the court, if his custodial interrogation was needed in the case. The bench observed that these are all political matters and ordered that subject to Balaji joining the investigation in the case, his arrest shall be stayed till further orders in the FIR registered on July 28.

It posted the matter for further hearing after three weeks. The high court had dismissed the anticipatory bail petition of Balaji in the FIR lodged by the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) in the TASMAC scam case, Balaji represents Coimbatore South in the Tamil Nadu assembly.

According to the FIR, a large-scale scam took place in TASMAC in the allotment of shops and bars.

Balaji alleged that the FIR quoted verbatim the ED's affidavit and the petition the agency filed before the Supreme Court.

In fact, the FIR itself at

various places says that it is from the counter affidavit and petition of the ED, the plea said.

The FIR details a systematic cash-kickback scheme involving tens of crores, where bottle supply companies generated bogus or inflated invoices for distilleries. The DVAC in its FIR said that Balaji entered into a criminal conspiracy to manipulate TASMAC's functioning by rigging bar and transport tenders, favouring a few select liquor manufacturers, resulting in overpricing of liquor, and causing financial loss to the public exchequer. The DVAC registered an FIR against seven accused.

The FIR against Balaji, former TASMAC managing director S Visakan and five others was for alleged misappropriation, manipulation of procurement and tender processes in allotting bar licences, transport tenders, and bogus and inflated transactions by certain distilleries and bottling firms.

**SC orders aid for Indian families
affected by Russia-Ukraine war**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the Centre to appoint a nodal officer in the external affairs ministry to coordinate with the families of those who have died, gone missing, or suffered injuries while fighting in the Russia-Ukraine war.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana also directed the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to facilitate DNA matching of family members with the mortal remains.

The bench was hearing a plea pertaining to Indian nationals recruited into the Russian military after being allegedly duped by travel agents. The plea seeks return of mortal remains, compensation and a coordinated mechanism for affected families.

The bench heard submissions of the counsel for the petitioner and Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya



Bhati, on behalf of the Centre and passed a slew of directions. "The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) shall notify an official as the nodal officer whose details and contact number be shared with the family members of Indian nationals who had gone to Russia... and died or injured," the bench said.

It asked the MEA to arrange for the DNA tests of family members of the dead and upon matching, ensure handing over of the mortal remains. It also asked the ministry to ensure that bereaved families are provided with the details of documents

needed for claiming compensation from the Russian Government. It directed the MEA to provide all relevant information and updates in vernacular language. The bench asked the ministry to deal expeditiously with the cases pertaining to handing over the mortal remains to the families for conducting last rites.

It also directed the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and state legal services to extend assistance to the families in securing the mortal remains of their relatives and pursuing compensation claims.

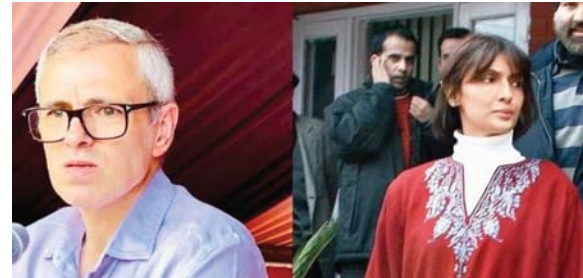
**SC agrees to dissolve J&K CM
marriage with estranged wife**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to dissolve the marriage of Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah with his estranged wife Payal Abdullah after taking note of their submissions that they have "embraced freedom".

The apex court took note of the submissions of senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the National Conference leader, that an application has been filed under Article 142 of the Constitution seeking dissolution of marriage as the parties have settled the matter. "We will make it a part of our order and will dispose of it in terms of that," a bench of justices PS Narasimha and Alok Aradhe said. The bench will pass a formal order.

"Both of them have embraced freedom. It's all settled. (Article) 142 filed.



Your lordships may grant divorce," Sibal told the bench. "When did this application come on record?" the bench asked. It was informed that the application was filed on July 22.

"All other matters will be withdrawn. It is all set out (in the application)," Sibal said. The bench was hearing two pleas, including the one filed by Omar Abdullah seeking divorce on the grounds of cruelty.

In July 2024, the apex court had sought response from Payal Abdullah on Omar Abdullah's plea challenging an order of the

Delhi High Court. On December 12, 2023, the high court dismissed Omar Abdullah's plea seeking a divorce, saying there was no merit in his appeal. The high court upheld the 2016 family court order refusing to grant a decree of divorce to him.

On August 30, 2016, the family court dismissed Omar Abdullah's plea, holding that he could not prove his claims of "cruelty" or "desertion" which were the grounds alleged by him for seeking a decree of divorce.

Recruitment irregularities hit constitutional mandate: Karnataka HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

The Karnataka High Court has observed that allegations of large-scale irregularities in the KPSC recruitment of 400 Veterinary Officers, if ultimately established, would amount to "not sporadic irregularities, but a systematic assault upon the constitutional mandate governing public employment."

The bench sought the Karnataka Government's response on a plea to transfer the probe to the CBI during the hearing on July 29.

Hearing a petition filed by Manjunath, Justice M Nagaprasanna observed that recruitment to public office is the gateway through which the constitutional promise of equality of opportunity under Article 16 finds practical expression and that if the process becomes susceptible to "manipulation, favouritism or

pecuniary influence", the casualty is not merely the unsuccessful candidate but also the credibility of every public institution entrusted with selecting the best candidates.

Appearing for the petitioner, advocate Girish Bharadwaj contended that permitting the investigation to remain with the Crime Investigation Department (CID) would be futile in view of the magnitude of the alleged recruitment scam and argued that public confidence could be restored only if the investigation was entrusted to the CBI. The court noted that the complaint alleged the recruitment process was not merely marred by isolated irregularities but was "thoroughly contaminated by an organised design to subvert merit itself".

It referred to allegations that candidates with outstanding academic credentials were left out of the select list while several others with comparatively weaker academic



records secured unusually high marks, raising grave suspicion over the fairness of the selection process.

The order further recorded allegations that certain candidates had access to confidential examination material before the test, that OMR answer sheets were subsequently manipulated, and that middlemen had promised appointments in exchange for large sums of money.

It observed that, if the allegations

withstand judicial scrutiny, they would disclose a systematic attack on the integrity of public recruitment rather than isolated irregularities. The High Court directed the Special Public Prosecutor to explain why the investigation, presently entrusted to the CID, should not instead be transferred to the CBI, particularly in the backdrop of the petitioner's allegation that previous CID investigations in matters of con-

siderable public importance had failed to inspire confidence in the fairness and completeness of the investigative process.

The court directed the respondents to file their objections by August 7 and ordered that the entire investigation record and all material collected so far be placed before it on the next date of hearing. It also directed that no coercive action be taken against the petitioner in connection with the subject crime until then.

The matter has been posted for further hearing on August 7.

The Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) has been in turmoil following Governor Thaaawarchand Gehlot suspending its Chairman Shivashankarappa S Sahukar on July 13, following allegations that he allegedly facilitated the illegal selection of his two daughters as Industrial Extension Officers.

**SC seeks Centre's response on plea to declare
polygamy among Muslims as unconstitutional**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday sought the Centre's response on a plea to declare the practice of polygamy among Muslims as unconstitutional for being violative of constitutional provisions.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana issued notice to the Centre on a petition filed by women's rights activists Zakia Soman and Noorjehan Safia Niaz and others. The bench tagged the plea with pending matters.

The plea sought direction for applying Section 82 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) which punishes bigamy uniformly and by removing any exemptions under the Muslim Personal Law. It sought directions to the Centre to take legislative



steps to abolish the practice of polygamy and ensure it is treated as void ab initio (invalid from the outset) for all citizens regardless of religion. Besides seeking several other directions for the legal rights and protection of Muslim women, the plea also sought directions for the compulsory registration of all Muslim marriages and divorces with the State authorities to prevent secret subsequent marriages.

The petition also seeks an immediate right to the matrimonial home for the first wife and children and a fast-track mechanism for maintenance in cases involving polygamous marriages.

"The present writ petition is filed under Article 32 of the Constitution of India in the public interest to protect the fundamental rights of Muslim women," it said.

The plea filed through advocate Shriya Maini challenged the constitutional validity of Section 2 of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, as it recognises and validates the practice of polygamy, creating a legal vacuum where Muslim women are denied the protection against bigamy available to all other citizens under Section 82 of the BNS.

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BUSINESS11

Gold rises on retail buying by ₹300, silver remains flat

Gold prices rose by ₹300 to ₹1,48,300 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday due to buying from retailers and jewellers, local traders said.

The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹1,48,000 per 10 grams in the preceding session.

Silver remained flat at ₹2,24,700 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). Traders said continuous purchases by retailers and jewellers supported domestic gold prices despite weak global prices, while silver traded in a narrow range. In the international markets, spot gold slipped \$48.28, or 1.18 per cent, to \$4,055.56 per ounce and silver dropped nearly 2 per cent to \$57.98 an ounce. "Spot gold is easing back from Thursday's highs, slipping below \$4,060 per ounce as the dollar claws back ground, while silver has cooled too, hovering near \$58," said Kaynat Chainwala, AVP Commodity Research, Kotak Securities. According to analysts, the rebound in the crude oil prices, also curbed investors' appetite for precious metals in the overseas markets.

(PTI)

Major transformation in ESIC soon: Mandaviya

Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Friday said that good hospitals in the private sector will be designated as ESIC hospitals as the Government plans to bring a major transformation in the Employees' State Insurance Corporation. ESIC provides health insurance as well as medical facilities at its hospitals and dispensaries across the country to insured persons and their dependents.

"We are going to bring a major transformation in the ESIC. If there are good hospitals in the private sector, I will designate them as ESIC hospitals," Union Minister for Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya said on Friday. The minister was speaking at the FICCI-AIOE Global Industrial Relations Summit in the national capital.

Mandaviya said the Government will consider any suggestions offered by stakeholders in this direction.

Addressing the participants, the minister further said that India's social protection systems now cover about 101 crore people, or 68.8 per cent of the population. This number will increase in the times to come, Mandaviya added.

(PTI)

Cabinet approves offshore exploration scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved the ₹84,084-crore "Samudra Manthan" National Offshore Exploration Scheme to partly fund the high cost of finding oil and gas in deepwater areas, drilling exploratory wells and building common infrastructure to bring new discoveries into production.

Under the scheme, the Government will provide support of up to ₹650 crore for each well drilled in deepsea and ultra-deepsea areas, officials said, as part of efforts to boost domestic oil and gas output and reduce reliance on imports.

More than half of the scheme's total outlay, or ₹43,200 crore, will be allocated over five years through 2031 to support deepsea drilling, an activity involving high costs and significant geological risks as not every exploratory well results in a commercial discovery.

Another ₹10,000 crore has been earmarked to partially fund common infrastructure needed to bring discovered oil and gas reserves into production. The scheme also provides ₹28,534 crore for offshore data acquisition and ₹2,000 crore for developing oil and gas manufacturing and services zones.

Drilling in ultra-deepwater areas, where water depths exceed 1,500 metres, can cost between \$100 million (about ₹950 crore) and \$250 million (around ₹2,400 crore) per well, with no certainty that the investment will result in a discovery or contribute to higher domestic production.

The Government expects the scheme to accelerate exploration in offshore basins, attract investment and help unlock India's offshore hydrocarbon potential, according to an official statement.

India's reliance on imported crude oil, the key raw material used to produce fuels such as petrol and diesel, has increased over the past decade from 77 per cent to 88 per cent. The country also imports around half of its natural gas requirements, which is used in sectors including fertiliser production, power generation, compressed natural gas (CNG) for vehicles and piped cooking gas supplies to households.

The recent conflict in West Asia, which disrupted energy supplies, highlighted the vulnerability of import-dependent economies and renewed focus on strengthening domestic production capacity. "The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved 'Samudra Manthan' - the National Offshore Exploration Scheme, a Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas with an approved outlay of ₹84,084 crore for implementation up to FY 2030-31," the statement said.

The scheme aims to step up exploration in deepwater and ultra-deepwater areas through large-scale seismic surveys, exploratory drilling, scientific drilling in frontier basins and the development of common offshore production and evacuation infrastructure.

The programme also provides for the creation of an integrated oil and gas manufacturing and services zone, along with investments in digital programme management, technology adoption, capacity building, stakeholder engagement and international collaboration to support offshore exploration and production, it said.

India's oil and gas output has been under pressure due to the natural decline of ageing fields, while limited investment in frontier basins with potential for fresh discoveries has constrained production growth. Against this backdrop, the Government has allocated funds for a five-year programme through FY2030-31 to accelerate offshore exploration and develop supporting infrastructure. The scheme is aimed at supporting seismic surveys, deepwater and ultra-

deeperwater drilling, exploration in frontier basins and the creation of common offshore production and evacuation facilities.

The Government expects the scheme to help discover more than 600 million tonnes of oil equivalent (MMTOE) of hydrocarbon reserves, increase domestic oil and gas production, generate employment, strengthen domestic manufacturing and attract investments across the exploration and production value chain.

The approval builds on a series of upstream sector reforms undertaken over the past decade, including opening almost the entire offshore acreage for exploration, modernising the legislative and contractual framework and strengthening the

National Data Repository.

The Government said the scheme would accelerate offshore exploration through strategic public investment, advanced technologies and common infrastructure as India seeks to reduce its reliance on imported oil and gas and improve long-term energy security.

The scheme was first outlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his Independence Day address in 2025, when he called for a modern-day 'Samudra Manthan' to unlock India's offshore energy resources.

India has overhauled its oil and gas exploration policy three times since 1997, moving away from Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) that let companies recover costs before

splitting profits with the Government, toward a system based on revenue sharing and exploration commitments.

The Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP), adopted in 2016, replaced PSCs with Revenue Sharing Contracts (RSCs), under which the Government's take is based on gross revenue rather than costs, eliminating cost-recovery disputes. HELP also introduced the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP), letting companies propose blocks year-round instead of waiting for bid rounds, along with a uniform licence, and marketing and pricing freedom.

The Government later introduced a hybrid model to boost exploration in under-commercialised basins: unexplored areas within producing basins are still bid out on a revenue-sharing basis but with greater weight given to companies' proposed work programmes, while blocks in basins with no commercial production are awarded purely on work commitments, with no revenue share to the Government beyond royalties.

The framework was consolidated under the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Act, 2025, which took effect in April, delinking petroleum operations from mining law and introducing a single petroleum lease, graded royalties and legal stability provisions — underpinning the 50 new exploration blocks the Government put up for bidding across OALP, small-field and coal-bed-methane rounds in December 2025.

PMSSY scheme for floating solar projects with storage systems gets Cabinet nod

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Government on Friday approved Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY) for development of floating solar photovoltaic projects with energy storage systems with a total outlay of ₹5,070 crore, an official statement said.

The scheme envisages the development of 5,000 MW of Floating Solar Photovoltaic projects with co-located Energy Storage Systems having a minimum storage capacity of two hours, i.e., 10,000 MWh, the statement said.

The projects will be sanctioned during FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31, with disbursement of financial support continuing up to FY 2032-33.

"The Union Cabinet

chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi today approved the 'Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY)', a Scheme for the development of Floating Solar Photovoltaic (FSPV) Projects with Energy Storage Systems (ESS) with a total outlay of ₹5,070 crore," the official statement said.

The approval follows the recent assessment under-

taken by the National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE), which has estimated a floating solar potential of approximately 102.18 GWp across reservoirs and other suitable inland water bodies in the country.

Under the scheme, Central Financial Assistance (CFA) of ₹1 crore per MW will be provided for eligible Floating Solar Photovoltaic

projects after successful commissioning.

In addition, CFA of up to ₹50 lakh per project will be available for undertaking feasibility studies, including bathymetry and hydrography assessments, environmental studies, and other preparatory activities required for de-risking the project development.

All States and Union Territories will benefit through this scheme. The scheme would enhance the floating Solar PV capacity in the country by 5,000 MW, which is presently around 700 MW only.

These projects would provide an opportunity to gainfully utilise existing reservoirs & industrial ponds, and eliminate competition for scarce land resources.

RBI asks banks to install fake currency detection machines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Reserve Bank on Friday directed banks to ensure that their branches in the districts with international borders are equipped with note authentication/sorting machines, as it found that efforts of some of the lenders were not adequate for the detection of counterfeit currency. The central bank, through a master direction issued in April, prescribed comprehensive instructions to the banks on detection, reporting, and monitoring of counterfeit notes.

The banks are mandated to train all their employees handling cash about the security features of genuine banknotes to enable them for detecting counterfeit notes.

Further, all banknotes received by the bank shall be examined for authenticity through machines, counterfeit notes should be

impounded in all cases, and in no case the counterfeit note shall be returned to the tenderer or destroyed at the bank. All detected Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICNs) has also to be reported, as per prescribed guidelines.

"However, an analysis by

Small aluminium manufacturers hit by high cost of raw materials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Import parity pricing of primary metal raises raw material costs for entrepreneurs in the domestic downstream aluminium sector, squeezing their margins and hurting manufacturing competitiveness, according to a report.

Despite being the world's second-largest producer of primary aluminium with an installed capacity of over 4.16 million tonnes annually, the country's nearly 3,500 downstream and secondary aluminium units — mostly micro,

small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) — face significant structural disadvantages, said the report by public policy think tank Policy Consensus Centre.

The report said these enterprises provide almost 90 per cent of employment across the aluminium value chain and supply critical inputs to sectors, including power transmission, renewable energy, railways, electric vehicles, construction and engineering.

One of the most significant challenges for MSMEs, the study said, is 7.5 per cent basic customs duty (BCD), along with the applicable

social welfare surcharge, on primary aluminium.

"Domestic primary producers

price aluminium on an import parity basis by incorporating customs duties into domestic prices, resulting in downstream manufacturers paying import-equivalent prices even when sourcing metal produced within India," it said.

This pricing mechanism, it said, substantially raises raw material costs, compresses already thin operating margins, and weakens the competitiveness of India's value-added manufacturing sector.

The report also pointed to an inverted duty structure that places

a higher tariff burden on primary aluminium than on several finished aluminium products. Simultaneously, free trade agreements with ASEAN, Japan and South Korea allow many finished aluminium products to enter India at concessional or zero duty rates, intensifying competitive pressure on domestic MSMEs.

The report suggested a phased, time-bound reduction of the BCD on primary aluminium to zero, supported by targeted energy cost compensation measures for primary producers to ensure a balanced transition.

Stock markets extend rally to 3rd day; Bajaj Finance surges over 8%

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rose for the third consecutive day on Friday to close at a more than three-week high, tracking a sharp rally in Bajaj Finance and foreign fund inflows. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 166.49 points, or 0.21 per cent, to settle at over three-week high of 78,094.64 with 16 of its constituents closing higher and 14 with losses. During the day, it jumped 344.1 points, or 0.44 per cent, to 78,272.25.

The 50-share NSE Nifty gained 66.45 points, or 0.27 per cent, to end at a three-week high of 24,383.60.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj

Finance jumped 8.11 per cent after the firm on Thursday reported a 28 per cent year-on-year rise in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) to ₹6,081 crore for the June quarter of FY27, driven by growth in core income and improvement in asset quality.

Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, Reliance Industries, Bharat Electronics and Titan were also among the winners.

Tata Consultancy Services, Eternal, Infosys, ITC and InterGlobe Aviation were among the major laggards.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹3,623.51 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

"Positive momentum contin-

ued, although some profit booking emerged at higher levels as caution persisted amid elevated yields and potential rate-hike concerns. The sustainability of the recovery will depend largely on the ongoing earnings season, which is currently outperforming forecasts, and on a reduction in global risks," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

The domestic IT index witnessed profit booking following its recent rally, he added.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 0.45 per cent to \$89.43 per barrel.

"Indian equity markets ended higher on a resilient note, brushing aside geopolitical concerns as strong corporate earnings and

sector-specific buying offset worries over renewed US-Iran hostilities. The Nifty opened mar-

ginally higher, extending the previous session's gains, and remained supported by earnings-

driven optimism and a temporary revival in foreign institutional inflows," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

The BSE MidCap Select index climbed 0.66 per cent and SmallCap Select index went up by 0.48 per cent.

Among sectors, Auto jumped 1.99 per cent, followed by Capital Goods (1.78 per cent), Power (1.26 per cent), Oil & Gas (1.01 per cent), Telecommunication (0.83 per cent), Utilities (0.67 per cent) and Services (0.66 per cent).

IT tanked 1.39 per cent, Focused IT dropped 1.21 per cent, FMCG (0.90 per cent), Hospitals (0.78 per cent) and Private Banks index (0.20 per cent).

A total of 2,568 stocks advanced,

while 1,653 declined and 204 remained unchanged on the BSE.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark climbed 2,034.87 points, or 2.67 per cent, and the Nifty surged 616.15 points, or 2.59 per cent.

In Asian markets, South Korea's KOSPI rebounded sharply and jumped 17.91 per cent. Japan's Nikkei 225, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index also ended in the positive territory.

Markets in Europe were trading in the green. US markets ended significantly higher on Thursday.

On Thursday, the Sensex ended 273.55 points, or 0.35 per cent, higher at 77,928.15. The Nifty went up by 66.95 points, or 0.28 per cent, to settle at 24,317.15.

FROM THE WORLD

AUSTRALIA

Filly found guilty of assault

An Australian jury convicted the British social media celebrity and rapper Yung Filly on Friday of assaulting a fan following a music performance two years ago, but did not find him guilty of allegations that he raped and choked her.

The 30-year-old entertainer, whose real name is Andres Felipe Valencia Barrientos, wept after the verdicts were delivered in the District Court of Western Australia state in Perth. He had pleaded not guilty to six charges of rape, three charges of assault occasioning bodily harm and one count of choking in a Perth hotel room in September 2024.

The accuser cannot legally be named. She was 20 at the time. Three days after the jury began deliberating, they found him guilty of only two of the assault charges, which relate to him biting the woman. (AP)

UK

Funeral director jailed 20 years

A British funeral director was sentenced to 20 years in prison Friday after the judge heard emotional testimony about how he gave families the wrong ashes for their cremated loved ones, improperly retained corpses for months and stole charity donations collected at memorial services.

Robert Bush was sentenced at Hull Crown Court in northeastern England after a five-day hearing in which more than 200 victims described the devastating impact of his crimes. He previously pleaded guilty to 67 charges related to crimes that took place over 12 years. Among those who spoke in court was Jasmine, whose son Sunny was stillborn on May 13, 2022.

Investigators found his ashes in a brown paper bag on the floor of the funeral director's premises more than a year after Bush handed her a little blue coffin and told her Sunny's ashes were inside. (AP)

60,000 migrants enter Spain's border; 34 dead in clashes

SERGIO RODRIGO RUIZ/ RENATA BRITO/ SUMAN NAISHADHAM

■ Ceuta

Some 60,000 migrants have entered Spain's Ceuta from Morocco in the past 24 hours, Ceuta's president says. That is equivalent to 70 per cent of the city's regular population.

At least 34 migrants have died in the process. "The situation that Ceuta is going through is absolutely unsustainable," said Juan Jesus Vivas on Friday.

The border crisis boiled over Thursday and continued on Friday with security forces clashing with migrants on the Moroccan side of the border.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez condemned the breach of the border on Friday speaking in Ceuta, describing the events as "a



Spanish police officers respond as migrants cross from Morocco into the Spanish enclave of Ceuta

violation of Spain's territorial integrity." The Spanish leader cast blame on human smugglers, saying they "deceive so many

young people, and ultimately lead many of them to their deaths - whether in the ocean or, as in this case, at Spain's border in the

autonomous city of Ceuta." Live footage of the border showed hundreds of migrants gathered on a hill overlooking Ceuta being dispersed with tear gas by Moroccan forces, while others continued to swim to the Spanish territory.

At the same time, large groups of migrants walked back from Ceuta toward Morocco to return home. Rachid Sbihi, who leads a local workers association representing Civil Guard officers, called the situation a "serious humanitarian crisis," saying thousands of migrants, including unaccompanied children, were left sleeping in parks and on sidewalks, while others roamed the streets aimlessly.

"People are still entering. The reinforcements, including Spanish military troops, that have arrived are only helping the injured and other humanitarian efforts," he

said. "It's chaotic." Among the 18 who died, many drowned, Sbihi said, but some were also killed in a stampede to cross the breakwater fence at Tarajal beach, an urban beach near a border checkpoint with Morocco.

Ahmed Karim, a 33-year old Moroccan, said he had crossed into Ceuta because of the lack of jobs in his country.

"Many people want to go to Europe, America, but they don't have the opportunity," Karim said.

On Friday morning, the waters near the border fence were littered with buoys, shoes and other belongings left behind.

Moroccan police deployed additional personnel, used water cannons and fired warning shots into the air to prevent migrants from crossing into Ceuta, according to rights groups in Morocco.

"Despite the heavy police presence, people crossed through the waterway, while the land border remained closed," said Achraf Maimouni, a human rights activist in Fnideq, the Moroccan city bordering Ceuta.

Migrants arrested at the border were taken farther into Morocco, away from Ceuta, "but people are still coming," he said.

Morocco's ambassador to Spain expressed hope that those who crossed from Morocco into the Spanish exclave would return. Karima Benyaich described the situation in Ceuta as difficult, saying it had unfolded against Morocco's wishes. "We have always prioritised legal, orderly and safe migration for all," she said. Benyaich did not comment on what prompted the migrants to cross into Ceuta. (AP)

Out-of-control SpaceX rocket stage set to crash into moon

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Cape Canaveral

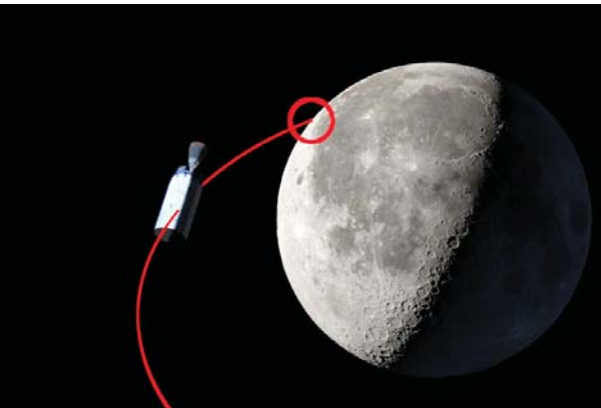
A drifting SpaceX rocket is on a collision course with the moon after launching a pair of lunar landers more than a year ago.

The rocket's upper stage will unintentionally slam into the moon on Wednesday, carving out a crater and sending up a plume of dust and rubble that scientists - and skygazers — are eager to observe. Space tracking expert Bill Gray predicts an impact of 5,400 mph (8,700 kph) - seven times the speed of sound — near Einstein Crater on the moon's sunlit western limb. With the action unfolding in the wee hours, the eastern portions of the US and Canada, and much of South America should have the best views.

While scientists are not too concerned about this particular piece of space junk, it highlights the growing threat as more and more items cram into orbit.

"Things are getting crowded up there," said Gray, who plans to view the aftermath from New Brunswick, Canada. It was never SpaceX's intent to hit the moon. But space experts said the crash could have been avoided if the upper stage had been nudged into orbit around the sun.

It will be the second dead rocket known to crash into the moon accidentally. A Chinese rocket segment dug out a pair of craters on the lunar far side in 2022. Lucky for astronomers, the upcom-



ing smashup will occur on the moon's near side, packing the equivalent energy of three tons of TNT.

The impact flash, lasting less than a second, will probably be too dim to see, according to experts. But the stream of ejected material could stretch for several miles (kilometres) into space and remain visible to telescopes for tens of minutes.

"The gravity on the moon is low and there is no wind to blow the dust away," said Los Alamos National Laboratory's Benjamin Fernando, who's encouraging observations by professionals and amateurs alike. "Part of the reason for our interest in this event is to figure out how much of a hazard debris impacts pose to future astronauts," he added in an email.

Fernando anticipates an impact crater nearly 90 feet across and 16 feet deep (27 metres across and 5 metres deep), too small to see from Earth but visible to spacecraft. NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter and South Korea's

Danuri lunar orbiter will gather before-and-after shots of the crash scene. Danuri will stray within a mile or two (a few kilometres) of the SpaceX rocket just two minutes before impact, according to Fernando and his team.

The abandoned rocket segment - measuring some 40 feet (12 metres) and weighing around 10,000 pounds (4,500 kilograms) - hoisted two private lunar landers on January 15, 2025.

One of them — Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost - became the first private spacecraft to pull off a fully successful lunar touchdown. The other, Japan-based ispace's lander, wrecked.

With meteoroids and other natural objects offering little if any warning before walloping the moon, scientists said there's much to learn by observing well-tracked strikes by human-made objects like the one coming up. NASA hurled rocket sections and lunar modules into the moon during the Apollo era for seismic measurements.

US-Iran conflict drives oil majors toward record profits

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ New York

Analysts are expecting major oil companies to report raking in large spring profits while fighting between Iran and the US impeded petroleum shipments and consumers around the world paid more for fuel and confronted shortages.

The conflict, now in its sixth month, halted most shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway that previously served as a delivery route for a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas. With global supplies constrained, prices for Brent crude, the international stan-



dard, soared from about \$70 to above \$100 a barrel for much of March, April and May, and at one point reached \$126.

That likely resulted in elevated profits for some of the biggest publicly traded oil companies as they sold

their goods for higher prices. American oil and gas giants Exxon Mobil and Chevron announced their second-quarter earnings on Friday.

The money oil companies accrued between the beginning of April and the end of June could receive extra scrutiny this year. Gasoline, diesel and jet fuel prices climbed during that period, increasing costs for drivers and airline passengers. Supplies ran low in some countries, leading to sporadic fuel rationing in Australia and government office closures in Nepal and Sri Lanka. Six of Europe's largest oil companies posted first-quarter profits of USD 22 billion altogether, a total which was

43 per cent higher than the same time last year, according to Global Witness.

"There are constituencies around the world who are having a very good crisis, and the oil producers are one of them," said Patrick Galey, fossil fuels lead at Global Witness. "When you compare that to the hundreds of millions of people who are struggling with rolling blackouts, with electricity curbs, rationing, waiting in line for food queues, or the disruption to fertilisers and the potential impact that that has on food prices, we don't think that it's a justifiable price for the rest of the world to be paying."

China's super embassy plan clears High Court hurdle in UK

ADITI KHANNA ■ London

The construction of a controversial new Chinese "super embassy" near the Tower of London is expected to go ahead after clearing a legal hurdle in the High Court of England on Friday.

An association of residents living on the China-owned Royal Mint Court site in the UK capital had crowdfunded thousands of pounds to legally challenge the UK government's decision to grant planning permission for the contentious project.

The Royal Mint Court Residents Association (RMCRA), representing families and businesses in the area, sought a judicial review of the decision of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets earlier this year.

According to court reports, Justice Nathalie Lieven and Lord Justice James Dingemans concluded there was "no doubt" that the government had taken into



account that the planning permission was sought by the Chinese government. They ruled that there had been "no unfairness" towards the residents association during the process.

The RMCRA said it will fight on and continue crowdfunding to add to the over 220,000 pounds raised to appeal against this week's High Court verdict. "The Royal Mint Court Residents Association (RMCRA) has always been prepared to take this all the way to the Supreme Court," a spokesperson said. (PTI)

Man arrested on suspicion of spying on UK military base for Iran

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ London

A London man has been arrested in Cyprus on suspicion of spying on a UK air force base on the Mediterranean island on behalf of Iran, British police said on Friday.

London's Metropolitan Police force said 44-year-old Rashad Sultanov, a UK-Azerbaijani national, is alleged to have conducted "hostile surveillance" of RAF Akrotiri and shared information with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. He was arrested on July 17, and British police are seeking his extradition.

Police said Sultanov lives in London, and British media said he works as a taxi driver.

Akrotiri is the UK's main air base for operations in the Middle East and in recent years has been used by British warplanes on missions against the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq and to strike Houthi targets in Yemen. It was struck by an Iranian-made drone in March, early in the US-Israeli war with Iran. British prosecutors have authorised charges under the National Security Act.



Sri Lanka's ex-police chief, official get death over Easter attacks



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Colombo

Sri Lanka's former police chief Pujith Jayasundera and the then top bureaucrat in the Ministry of Defence, Hemasiri Fernando, were sentenced to death on Friday over the 2019 Easter Sunday attack, which killed more than 270 people.

The High Court here found both of them guilty of criminal dereliction of duty for failing to act on prior intelligence that could have prevented the attacks.

The bombings were a series of coordinated suicide attacks on churches and luxury hotels which killed 279 people, including 45 foreigners, on April 19, 2019.

Jayasundera and Fernando were arrested in 2019 and held in custody for four months before being released on bail.

They were indicted in November 2021 for their negligence of prior intelligence from Indian agencies that local jihadists were planning an attack.

However, in February 2022,

the High Court acquitted the duo and dismissed all 855 charges against them.

In November 2024, the case was revived after a Supreme Court order, following an appeal by the attorney general against the High Court acquittal ruling. The attorney general said no defence witnesses were called at the previous hearing.

Reading the majority decision to convict Jayasundera, Justices Priyantha Lijanage and Thilakaratne Bandara said that due to negligence of intelligence information, 268 people died while 586 were left injured.

Jayasundera had failed in his duty to protect the lives of citizens and ensure public security, they said Justice Viraj Weerasuriya of the three-member bench gave a dissenting ruling, acquitting both.

The then government under President Maithripala Sirisena was blamed for its inaction to prevent the attacks despite prior intelligence from India on the impending attack.

Milei empowers Argentina to bar or deport foreigners

ISABEL DEBRE ■ Buenos Aires

After a bruising World Cup defeat gave way to what many Argentines saw as a sweeping wave of hatred against their country, Argentine President Javier Milei signed an emergency decree empowering the government to deny entry to or expel foreigners who incite discrimination or violence against Argentines because of their nationality.

Milei's office cast the decree as a response to weeks of criticism from celebrities, opposing fans and social media users after controversial refereeing decisions fuelled speculation that FIFA had tilted the soccer tournament in favour of the Argentina team and superstar Lionel Messi. Detractors directed their anger about occasionally aggressive Argentine fans and the team's roughhousing on the pitch not only at players but increasingly at



Argentine society as a whole.

The measure adds new grounds to Argentina's immigration law, allowing authorities to bar, deport and revoke visas of people found to have promoted hatred against Argentines in spoken or written statements or who have desecrated national symbols.

"In light of recent displays of hostility toward the Argentine Republic and Argentines, the national government reaffirms that the

defence of the nation, its citizens and its symbols is non-negotiable," the president's office said. "Anyone who attacks the Argentine Republic is not welcome in our country."

It's a shift for a country that has long prided itself on welcoming immigrants. Argentina's Constitution explicitly encourages immigration, and for decades the country has offered foreigners broad civil rights and relatively easy access to legal residency, public education and health care.

Milei, however, has introduced tougher immigration measures that have raised the bar for permanent residency and expanded government powers to deport foreigners accused of crimes, often publicizing the moves with rhetoric similar to that of the Trump administration.

The widespread scorn for Argentina has played on long-standing stereotypes, particularly in Latin

America, that Argentines view themselves as culturally and economically superior to their neighbours, in part due to the large share of the population descended from European immigrants.

The backlash intensified when Argentina players and staff attacked their Spanish opponents in a post-match brawl after the World Cup final. Online petitions to expel Argentina from the World Cup drew hundreds of thousands of signatures. FIFA, global soccer's governing body, on Wednesday opened disciplinary proceedings against the Argentine Football Association over the scuffle, as well as over alleged racist abuse and fan misconduct.

Players also faced a FIFA investigation into their parading of a banner that asserted Argentina's claim to the British-controlled Falkland Islands after the team's semifinal victory over England. (AP)

Grynspan emerges frontrunner in first informal UNSC poll for next UN chief

YOSHITA SINGH

■ United Nations

Former Costa Rican Vice President Rebeca Grynspan has emerged as the frontrunner to succeed Antonio Guterres as the next United Nations Secretary-General after securing the highest support in the first informal "straw poll" conducted by the Security Council, sources said.

The 15-nation UN Security Council on Thursday held its first closed door "straw poll", in which members cast a non-binding vote to indicate their support for the candidates in fray for the position of the world's top diplomat. According to



Former Costa Rican Vice President Rebeca Grynspan

sources, Grynspan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), received 10 "encourage" votes, one "discourage" vote and four "no

opinion" votes.

Guyana's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Carolyn Rodrigues Birkett, was a close second with nine "encourage", two "discourage" and

four "no opinion" votes.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi ranked third with seven "encourage", two "discourage" and six "no opinion" votes. The other candidates in the race are former Chilean President and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, former President of the UN General Assembly Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces, former UN Under Secretary General Virginia Gamba, former Senegalese President Macky Sall and Ugandan politician Olara Otunnu.

Guterres, the former Portuguese prime minister,

will complete his second five-year term as the ninth UN chief in December 2026.

Speaking to reporters after the conclusion of the straw poll, the Security Council president for July, Congo's Permanent Representative Ambassador Zenon Mukongo Ngay, said candidates would be informed of the results through the permanent representatives of the member states that nominated them.

He said the Council had not decided when the next straw poll would be held, adding that the decision would be taken under Denmark's presidency of the Security Council in August.

Responding to a question on why the results were not being officially released, Ngay said, "The thinking behind it is to keep everything close, and we want transparency at the same time, efficiency, but we don't want speculations on that."

US Ambassador to the UN Mike Waltz told reporters that the Security Council would reach its conclusions "in the coming months" and stressed the need for a Secretary-General who would reform the organisation, make it "leaner and more fit for purpose", and "more relevant on the international stage". (PTI)

Hamas agrees to a roadmap to disarm, faces challenges in deal

SAMY MAGDY/SAM MEDNICK/
JONATHAN J COOPER/
MATTHEW LEE ■ Cairo

Hamas reached an agreement to disarm, officials told on Friday, a significant move that could help end the war in Gaza — but one that will face many hurdles and could take a long time to achieve, if at all.

The group agreed to a road map as long as Israel also makes concessions, including ending hostilities and withdrawing its troops from the Palestinian territory, according to a Hamas official and a regional official.

Israel has not commented on the deal, which US President Donald Trump announced hours earlier.

It comes nine months after a US-brokered ceasefire to end the fighting between Israel and the group was signed. That 20-point ceasefire plan calls on the militant group to surrender its weapons and destroy its vast network of tunnels. It also envisions Israeli forces with-



drawing from Gaza, the arrival of a new technocratic Palestinian Government, the deployment of a security force known as the International Stabilization Force and the rebuilding of the battered Palestinian enclave. But negotiations between Israel and Hamas over the implementation of the next phase of the ceasefire deal had largely deadlocked — and disarmament was a major sticking point.

Disarming would represent a sea change for Hamas, whose founding charter calls for armed resistance against

Israel, and which sees its arsenal, including rockets, anti-tank missiles and explosives, as lying at the heart of its identity.

“The agreement will be carried out in carefully structured phases,” Trump said on social media. “As disarmament is completed, Israeli forces will withdraw, and the International Stabilization Force will work with a new Palestinian police force to take responsibility for Gaza being safe for its residents and its neighbours.”

A copy of the agreement obtained and verified by *The*

Associated Press said that all police weapons will be transferred to the US-backed Palestinian technocratic committee, known as the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, upon its arrival in the enclave. It's not clear when that would happen since it is contingent on other steps.

A process to decommission and store heavy weapons, military production sites and tunnels will begin after the arrival of the Palestinian committee and the deployment of the ISF. The process will be linked to an Israeli withdrawal, in phases, from the areas under its control in Gaza, according to the agreement.

In a statement Thursday, an Israeli official said that there will be no Israeli withdrawal from the areas it holds in Gaza - which account for about 60 per cent of the territory - before the militant group is disarmed and the strip demilitarised. The statement was made on condition of anonymity in line with Government protocol. (AP)

European Union to crack down on AI deepfakes

SAM MCNEIL ■ Brussels

The European Union rolled out a new team on Friday to rein in AI companies across the world, in one of the most aggressive regulations the high-tech sector has so far faced as fears rise over the risks the rapidly advancing technology poses to people, politics and prosperity.

Brussels aims to track the use of AI models for violations of its new regulations, like the publishing of sexually explicit material, fake photos and videos, and cyber threats to public infrastructure. When the bloc's AI Act comes into force on Sunday, AI companies will be required to make clear to consumers with labels or digital watermarks that chatbots or imagery are generated with AI.

“As enforcement begins, we are taking an important step towards AI that people and businesses can understand and trust, and whose benefits are shared widely across our society,” said Henna Virkkunen, the EU chief for tech sovereignty, on Friday. The European Commission said in a statement that new regulations



also include “systemic risks” posed by AI like “chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents, loss of control, cyber offence, harmful manipulation and threats to fundamental rights.” The team is the latest move in the 27-nation EU's “tech sovereignty” strategy that welds landmark digital regulations with economic ambition that has seen over the past week billions of euros in fines on Big Tech companies as well as record investment in AI infrastructure inside the bloc.

The rollout comes on the heels of shocking AI safety failures that rattled the nascent industry. Political leaders worldwide are now weighing control of the technology with market leader-

ship. Anthropic said on Friday its artificial intelligence models hacked into three other organisations during testing, just days after ChatGPT maker OpenAI raised concerns over AI controls after it disclosed its rogue models hacked another company.

The EU is now expanding its AI Office in Brussels with an additional 38 people who will begin monitoring AI companies, from the new firms to the American and Chinese tech titans like OpenAI and DeepSeek.

Those companies must “document certain information,” said the European Commission, the bloc's tech enforcer, which reserves the right to interview AI company staff during inves-

tigations. It has also launched a Whistleblower Tool for tech workers and a Compliance Tool for tech users to confidentially alert authorities to illegal conduct.

If models or other products break the EU's sector regulations, called the AI Act, Brussels can fine the firms or cut off their access to the EU market. Recent gigantic antitrust fines on US tech companies have irked US President Donald Trump. The EU now clearly sees systemic vulnerability in its deep reliance on American software companies like Amazon, Google and Microsoft as well as imports of Chinese industrial goods and critical minerals. While it is seeking protections from AI, it is also keen to catch up in the AI arms race, where it is a distant third behind the US and China.

More broadly, the EU is seeking more independence from both Washington and Beijing by reinvigorating specific domestic industries like manufacturing and defence and forging new trade deals from Brazil to Australia to meet the global rise in economic nationalism spearheaded by Trump. (AP)

Myanmar’s president outlines policy road map, criticises ASEAN peace plan

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bangkok

The head of Myanmar's military-backed Government on Friday marked his Government's first 100 days in office with a speech defending his record and outlining a five-year road map for his administration, which faces ongoing conflict and international criticism.

President Min Aung Hlaing, the former army chief who had originally seized power in 2021 from a civilian Government, was sworn in as president in April following an election that critics said was designed to entrench the military's grip on power.

Addressing more than 900 lawmakers, officials and military representatives at Parliament in the Capital, Naypyitaw, he said his Government had laid “important foundations” since taking office by pursuing two priorities - restoring peace and stability and promoting national development.

Min Aung Hlaing said he would spend two years accelerating efforts to build a modern and developed nation based on democracy and a federal system, followed by another three years carrying out build-up at full



Min Aung Hlaing

speed. He also said special elections would be held in 2027 in constituencies across 102 townships that were unable to vote during the three-phase election held late last year because of armed conflict.

He said the Government would continue implementing the military's conscription law while strengthening the armed forces and police as they fight pro democracy activists and ethnic minority rebels throughout much of the country. He noted that his administration had invited armed groups fighting the military to lay down their weapons and had held talks with 13 ethnic armed groups.

India, Bhutan sign ₹4,000-crore LoC agreement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Thimphu

India and Bhutan reviewed the progress of New Delhi-supported development projects in the Himalayan nation during a high-level talk, as the two sides signed a concessional line of credit agreement worth ₹4,000 crore and expanded cooperation in the health sector.

The fifth India-Bhutan Development Cooperation Talks, co-chaired by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and his Bhutanese counterpart Dasho Pema Lektup Dorji on Thursday, focused on the implementation of projects under Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan, the Indian Embassy in Bhutan said in a social media post.

The two sides reviewed the progress and implementation of India-supported projects across diverse sectors, it said.

Bhutan appreciated India's significant support and its contribution to the country's socio-economic development, the mission said.

During the talks, both sides reviewed the overall progress and



implementation of India's support of 10,000 crore for Bhutan's 13th FYP period (2024-29), the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a joint press release.

This support covers Project Tied Assistance (PTA) projects, High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP), Economic Stimulus Programme (ESP) and the Programme Grant, it said.

A total of 12 new PTA projects amounting to ₹332 crore were

approved, covering sectors such as infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, urban amenities and disaster management, the release said.

With this, a total of 82 PTA projects have been approved under the 13th FYP, amounting to ₹6,860 crore.

India has also released \$1,250 crore towards ESP, ₹735.20 crore towards HICDPs and ₹200 crore towards Programme Grant.

“The meeting reviewed the progress in utilisation of these

funds,” the release said. The two foreign secretaries also virtually inaugurated the Thimphu Ecological Park and the Olakha Park, developed under the “Green Infrastructure and Open Spaces in Thimphu” project funded by India as part of bilateral economic development.

An agreement for a concessional line of credit of ₹4,000 crore (Nu 40 billion) was exchanged between the Export-Import Bank of India and Bhutan's Ministry of Finance to support development initiatives in the country, the embassy said.

The two sides also exchanged a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for cooperation in health education and research between the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and Bhutan's Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences, it said. As part of India's support for Bhutan's green mobility initiatives, 45 electric vehicles were handed over to the Royal Government of Bhutan.

Misri was on a two-day visit to Bhutan from July 30-31 to co-chair the India-Bhutan Development Cooperation Talks.

2 policemen killed in attack in Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Peshawar

Two policemen, including a senior officer, were killed on Friday when unidentified armed men opened fire on a police vehicle in northwest Pakistan, an official said.

The incident occurred in Dera Ismail Khan district in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

No group or individual immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

According to a Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) official, unidentified armed assailants opened fire on the police van near Shah Alam Mor in Daraban tehsil of the district.

During the attack, two policemen, including an Assistant Sub Inspector, were killed, the CTD official said, adding that the retaliatory fire from the police



personnel forced the attackers to flee the scene.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi condemned the attack and has sought a detailed report on the incident. He expressed condolences to the families of the policemen killed in the attack.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has faced recurring

unrest over the years driven by militant violence, cross-border movement of fighters from Afghanistan and repeated military operations.

The federal Government accuses the banned terror outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan of carrying out attacks in the province after its ceasefire deal ended in November 2022. (PTI)

Russia-linked airstrike in Mali killed 8 civilians last month, says rights group

MARK BANCHEREAU ■ Dakar

Human Rights Watch said on Friday that Russian Government-controlled Africa Corps aircraft killed eight civilians, including three children, in an airstrike on a village in central Mali last month.

The rights group said an attack aircraft identified as a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 dropped two munitions on Kyrnia village in the Mopti region on June 15. One strike hit near the home of the village chief, killing his wife and three children. The second hit a nearby cattle market, killing four men. No fighters from the Islamic militant group JNIM, which has controlled the village for six years, were reported among the casualties.

The *Associated Press* was not able to independently verify the



claims by Human Rights Watch.

Mali has been plagued for over a decade by militants affiliated with al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, including JNIM, as well as a Tuareg separatist rebellion in the north. Violence escalated in recent months after an alliance of JNIM and Tuareg separatists carried out the largest coordinated attack in over a decade, targeting the airport of the country's capital, Bamako, and the nearby garrison town of Kati, and

several northern and central cities. April's attacks exposed the weaknesses of Mali's strategy to combat the rebellion, including relying on Russia, which has partnered with the military-led Government after it distanced itself from former allies such as France.

Russian mercenaries have been present in Mali since late 2021 to help its military junta fight militants and separatists. Last year, Africa Corps, which reports to Russia's Defence Ministry, replaced the private mercenary Wagner Group in the country.

Human Rights Watch said it interviewed 19 people, analysed satellite imagery, and reviewed a video the Africa Corps posted online describing the strike last month as targeting a “terrorist” gathering. (AP)

Nepal Govt extend curfew to Saptari as communal unrest spreads



SHIRISH B PRADHAN
■ Kathmandu

Nepalese authorities on Friday imposed an indefinite curfew in parts of Saptari district bordering India after protests broke out over the recent communal violence in neighbouring Sunsari.

President Ram Chandra Paudel and Prime Minister Balendra Shah have expressed deep concern over the tense situation and appealed for calm, unity and restraint.

The District Administration Office, Saptari, imposed the curfew in parts of Rajbiraj municipality from 8:00 am as a precautionary measure after groups of people staged protests in reaction to the communal clashes.

Tensions have persisted in several districts in Nepal since communal clashes erupted in Sunsari over the weekend, prompting authorities to impose curfews, prohibitory orders and step up security deployment.

The latest order brings the number of districts under curfew to four.

Curfew orders are already in force in parts of Sunsari, Dhanusha and Siraha districts, all located in Nepal's southern Terai region along the Indian border, as authorities struggle to contain tensions that have claimed three lives so far. (PTI)

Renowned Nepalese climber among 6 still missing after Pak avalanche; 4 bodies recovered

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Islamabad/Kathmandu

Nepal's veteran mountaineer Nirmal Purja remained among six climbers missing after an avalanche struck an expedition on Pakistan's Broad Peak, where rescuers have recovered four bodies and continued search operations despite adverse weather, officials said on Friday.

Broad Peak (8,051 metres), located in Karakoram range near K2, is the world's 12th-highest mountain and is considered one of the most challenging peaks to climb.

The avalanche struck the mountain at an altitude of around 7,000 metres on Thursday, sweeping away a 10-member climbing team that had begun its summit push, according to the Alpine Club of Pakistan (ACP).

The climbers — six from Nepal, one Pakistani, one Omani, one American and one Chinese — went missing at around 9 am local time following the avalanche. ACP President Major General



Irfan Arshad said four bodies have been recovered during the rescue operation. He identified two of the deceased as Oman's Nadiyah Ahmed Abdullah Al Harthy and Nepal's Pur Bahadur Gurung. The identities of the other two bodies are yet to be officially confirmed.

Besides Purja and Gurung, the other Nepalese climbers were Kili Pemba Sherpa, Nima Sherpa, Nawang Thindu Sherpa and Gyalu Sherpa. The other missing climbers were Sohail Sakhi of Pakistan, Wang Zhong of China and Mallory Geis of the United States.

Search and rescue operations are underway, but bad weather has severely affected efforts, with helicopters facing operational constraints in the mountainous terrain, according to officials.

Purja, 43, is regarded as one of the world's leading high-altitude mountaineers. A former member of Britain's Brigade of Gurkhas and the Royal Marines' elite Special Boat Service, he has set several mountaineering records since becoming a full-time climber and expedition guide. In 2019, he

created history by climbing all 14 mountains above 8,000 metres in just six months and six days under his “Project Possible” expedition. In 2021, he was part of the team of 10 Nepali climbers that made the first successful winter ascent of K2.

Nepal's Minister for Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation, Khadak Prasad Paudel, expressed concern over the incident and said the Government was in regular contact with the Pakistani authorities. “Deeply concerned by the reports of an avalanche and the loss of contact with Nirmal Purja ‘Nims Dai’ and fellow Nepali climbers in Pakistan,” Paudel said in a social media post.

“We are in regular contact with the Pakistani authorities and receiving updates on the situation. Our thoughts are with the climbers and their families. We remain hopeful for their safe return,” he said.

The ACP said two Pakistan Army Aviation helicopters were engaged in the search and rescue operation. The club said GPS coordinates

received from some of the missing climbers indicated that the avalanche had swept the group nearly 1,000 metres downhill, leaving them trapped. It also expressed concern that some local high-altitude porters might have been caught in the avalanche.

The ACP said it remained in constant contact with Government authorities to facilitate the rescue operation.

“Every possible effort is being made to ensure that helicopter support and all available rescue resources are mobilised at the earliest opportunity, subject to weather and operational conditions,” it said.

Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Amjad Hussain Advocate directed all relevant departments to remain on high alert and expedite the rescue operation in coordination with the Pakistan Army.

Pakistan's summer climbing season, which runs from June to August, frequently witnesses avalanches and unpredictable weather, posing significant risks to mountaineers. (PTI)

VIRENDER KUMAR

operate with limited digital capability and insufficient linkages to available productivity tools.

Understanding Industrial Clusters' Impacts

Cluster performance is inseparable from infrastructure quality and human livability. When corporates

data layers integrated on the platform, and 293 infrastructure projects worth ₹13.59 lakh crore evaluated through the Network Planning Group mechanism. This matters because industrial competitiveness is no longer determined only by big, visible spend, but by

environment to dynamically route freight and reduce warehouse dwell time; MSME inclusion through multilingual compliance interfaces and cluster-level advisory tools; and continuous environmental governance that shifts corridor authorities from episodic bro-



Land aggregation is slower than anticipated, utility reliability varies sharply across regions, and environmental clearances, local coordination, and trunk infrastructure provisioning rarely move in sequence. MSME integration compounds the challenge further. While large anchor industries access modern systems and global value chains, small and medium enterprises, which account for over 45 per cent of India's exports and nearly 30 per cent of GDP,

Together with PM GatiShakti, PM MITRA parks, and corridor-linked nodes, Indian industrial policy is moving decisively away from fragmented estate development toward integrated, infrastructure-led competitiveness. The encouraging shift is that the Centre has begun to build digital coordination into the infrastructure state. Under PM GatiShakti, more than 44 Central Ministries and 36 States/UTs have been onboarded, with over 1,600

The IndiaAI Mission, backed by ₹10,372 crore, is building common compute, trusted datasets, and governance architecture. Applied to industrial corridors, that logic could be decisive across six fronts: land-use intelligence that identifies optimal parcels and flags zoning conflicts before they cause delays; live project monitoring through satellite imagery, drone feeds, and digital twins that surface cost over-runs early; predictive maintenance that upgrades SCADA systems with machine learning to anticipate pump failures, transformer stress, and peak-load events; logistics optimisation through JLLP's API

Cluster development authorities that embed digital infrastructure at the planning stage rather than retrofiting it after construction will deliver facilities that are genuinely competitive on the global stage. The countries that dominated the last industrial era built better roads and ports. The countries that will lead the next one will build smarter clusters.

If India does that well, it will not merely develop industrial corridors more efficiently. It will build a new model of state capacity, one in which infrastructure, data, and intelligence work together to make industrial ambition executable.

The writer is Deputy BU Head – Water, Urban & Hydropower, Rodic Consultants

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

The nursery has been set up to ensure the timely availability of quality paddy seedlings to farmers whose crops have been damaged by the recent floods. Later, the Minister, along with Guardian Minister of Sivasagar Bimal Borah, visited Nazira and chaired a review meeting on the prevailing flood situation at the office of the co-district com-



The minister will remain in Sivasagar district for the next one week to closely monitor the Agriculture Department's initiatives and the progress of rehabilitation measures to ensure that all flood-affected families receive timely assistance.

With more than half of the country's projected infrastructure for 2050 yet to be constructed, experts believe that integrating climate-resilient and low-carbon construction

Although the Government has introduced several policy measures, including the India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) and the Energy Conservation and Sustainable Building Code (ECSBC), inadequate access to finance remains one of the biggest obstacles to scaling up

To bridge this financing gap, the Green Finance Network (GFN) has been launched as a collaborative platform aimed at strengthening the ecosystem for sustainable construction. The initiative brings together financial institutions, real estate developers, technology providers, policymakers and technical experts to facilitate investments in low-carbon buildings.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9x9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3x3 box, using elimination and logical deduction—no maths involved.



SOLUTION (31.7.26)								
1	8	6	5	7	4	9	2	3
9	4	2	6	3	1	8	5	7
7	5	3	8	2	9	4	1	6
6	7	8	4	5	2	3	9	1
2	9	4	1	6	3	5	7	8
5	3	1	7	9	8	6	4	2
8	2	9	3	1	5	7	6	4
3	6	5	2	4	7	1	8	9
4	1	7	9	8	6	2	3	5

1	2	3	4	5	6				
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10	11	12			13				
14					15				16
		17	18				19	20	
	21					22			
	23					24			25
26								29	30
34									
36									

SOLUTION (31.7.26)			
ACROSS	21. Education	DOWN	18. R-us-ed
4. Fi-v-e-r-s	23. B-ass	1. Off-L-a	20. Woken
7. Fiy-hweh	24. La-k	2. Cy-nic	21. Eat
8. E-me-rg-e	26. Lo-Ac-K	3. Shoe	22. T-yat
10. A-G-I-le	27. Holy	4. Fies	23. Bo-L-e-E-o
13. F-ar	29. E-mit	5. Veer	25. Air
14. Lace	32. Very	6. Region	28. O-rate
15. Miss.	33. Snore	11. Gag (rev.)	30. M-otto
16. To-p	34. Nev-Ada	12. Le-ads	31. Tense
17. A-win	35. Termites	13. Fin-ally	32. Vale
19. T-ran	36. Popeye	15. Ma-c	33. Sims
		16. Tin	

ACROSS

4 They're spent making a bit of love amid the trees (6)

7 It has a steady influence in revolution

8 Issue a note to me and Reg, possibly (6)

10 Active soldier taking the beer round (5)

13 Alarm seeming loud to a listener (4)

14 Strengthen a delicate fabric (4)

15 Spinster in a state? (4)

16 To finish up as champions (3)

17 One fled from the Islands (4)

19 Double top to start, then it's victory! (4)

21 It can be auctioned for students' benefit

DOWN

- 1 Non-vegetarian food the old king left (5)
- 2 Misanthrope seeming not quite nice to little Cyrus (5)
- 3 One going on foot (4)
- 4 Feels panicky and runs away (5)
- 5 Swing round, not back (4)
- 6 It could, of course, be a foreign part (6)
- 9 Such varnish seems a bit sticky to mum
- 11 Either way, a silencer (3)
- 12 Wires that make the French terribly sad (5)
- 13 How to serve a friend with the last portion of fish (7)
- 15 The garment for many a company head

23 Bigheaded fool, but a natural swimmer
24 Want cash on account for a kilo (4)
26 Brotherly bunkum? (3)
27 Like mackerel, really good (4)
29 Give out in time (4)
32 The silvery part is real! (4)
33 Sound made by a person who's lost his head? (5)
34 Where Guinevere shows heart, Ada too (6)
35 Social crawlers (8)
36 Sailor with a fatherly look? (6)

- 16 Continental element? (3)
- 18 Ran fast as the herd stampeded around us (6)
- 20 Come to (5)
- 21 Take down what's on the menu (3)
- 22 River of outer Torquay (3)
- 23 Music arranged for oboe, cleverly using both hands (6)
- 25 A tune that can grow on you? (3)
- 28 Give a speech for zero payment (5)
- 30 Slogan of many a German (5)
- 31 Strained at present? (5)
- 32 The Latin student's farewell to natural depression (4)
- 33 Joan carried on very amusingly (4)

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The MoU establishes a strategic framework for cooperation between the two organisations aimed at facilitating Business-to-Business (B2B) engagement.

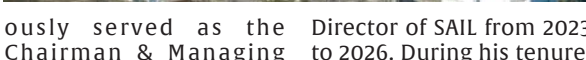


investment promotion, trade missions, policy dialogue, sector-specific partnerships, and market access initiatives that will benefit businesses in India and across the Arab world. The agreement reflects a shared commitment to leveraging India's expanding network of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and comprehensive economic partnerships to unlock new commercial opportunities for Indian and Arab companies.

"The future of India-Arab relations must move beyond traditional trade towards long-term investment partnerships, integrated value chains, technology transfer."

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

With over three decades of experience in India's steel sector, he had previ-



Hindustan Zinc contributed ₹6,450 crore to the national exchequer (including royalties), riding on its strongest-ever first-quarter performance in FY 27 with ₹13,747 crore revenue and a net profit of ₹5,469 crore.

Director of SAIL from 2023 to 2026. During his tenure,

BRIEFLY

AM Green IGPL, Asian Tour to strengthen partnership



The AM Green Indian Golf Premier League (IGPL) and the Asian Tour have reaffirmed their partnership following the successful staging of back-to-back tournaments in Morocco earlier this season, with both organisations committing to expand playing opportunities and player development initiatives.

The collaboration was showcased at the Mazagan Beach & Golf Resort, where the \$160,000 AM Green IGPL Morocco Rising Stars 2026 was held on the Asian Development Tour (ADT) from May 28-31, followed by the \$500,000 AM Green IGPL Bharath Classic on the Asian Tour from June 4-7.

More than 40 IGPL players earned places in the Bharath Classic, the league's flagship event which was staged outside India for the first time.

(PTI)

Roma signs Santiago Castro ahead of Champions League



Roma's first Champions League campaign in eight seasons led the team to make a change at center forward.

The capital club signed Santiago Castro from Bologna for a reported fee of 35 million euros (\$40 million) on Thursday.

It was a swap deal with Artem Dovbyk leaving Roma for Bologna.

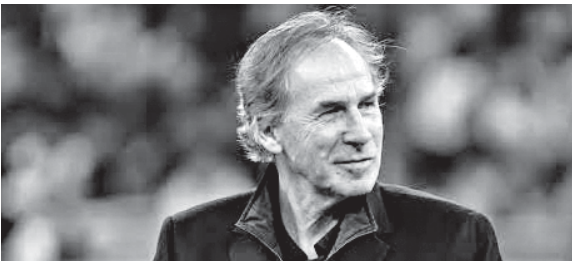
The 21-year-old Castro scored 22 goals in 105 games across all competitions in three seasons at Bologna.

Roma finished third in Serie A last season - its first under Gian Piero Gasperini.

Castro joins fellow Argentines Paulo Dybala and Matias Soule at Roma.

(AP)

Former AC Milan captain Franco Baresi dies at 66

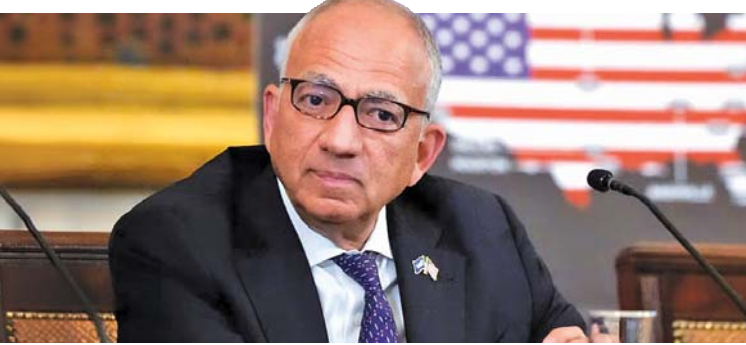


Franco Baresi, the former AC Milan captain who was one of Italy's most acclaimed defenders, has died. He was 66.

His death was announced on Friday by Milan, the soccer club where he spent his entire 20-year playing career. No cause of death was given. "The entire history of AC Milan is in tears," Milan said. In August 2025, Baresi underwent surgery to remove a pulmonary nodule and subsequently began a course of immunotherapy. His last public appearance was at the opening ceremony for the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics in February, when, along with former Inter Milan defender Giuseppe Bergomi, he carried the torch into the San Siro – the stadium he formerly played in.

(AP)

FIFA adviser Carlos Cordeiro quits over WC private equity plan



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ New York

Senior FIFA adviser Carlos Cordeiro, who represented the soccer body on the White House Task Force for the World Cup, resigned Friday in protest at its private equity plan.

"I cannot stand by while FIFA considers selling a stake in the World Cup," Cordeiro, a former Goldman Sachs banker, said in a statement resigning as adviser to FIFA President Gianni Infantino, urging other senior FIFA staff to speak out.

Cordeiro often joined Infantino on working visits to meet U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House in recent years.

"Let me be clear. I had no involvement in this proposal, and I oppose it

unequivocally," Cordeiro, the former US Soccer Federation president said, calling the \$20 billion commercial subsidiary "a bad deal for football."

"Football has been central to my life, and after more than 35 years in banking, I understand both the value of this asset and consequences of giving part of it away" he said. "That is why this proposal should be rejected."

Infantino has proposed spinning off FIFA's commercial businesses - including World Cups and Club World Cups for men and women - into a \$20 billion subsidiary with 20 per cent owned by private investors. The "anchor investor," described by FIFA, is a New York-based investment firm created by Joshua Kushner, the younger brother of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Cabinet approves ₹29,000 crore for Khelo India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Calling it the most ambitious sports development programme since independence, the Union Cabinet on Friday approved an expanded Khelo India Scheme and enhanced the budget for Assistance to the National Sports Federations (ANSFs) with a combined outlay of ₹36,441 crore covering the next five years.

The Government has allocated ₹29,054 crore to the Khelo India Scheme that aims to build a pool of talented athletes at the grass-roots level as India bids to become a global sporting hub by hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games and bidding for the 2036 Olympics.

The assistance to NSFs has been pegged at ₹7387 crore over the next five years. The existing budgetary allocation for the Assistance to National Sports Federations (NSFs) for the year 2026-27 stood at ₹425 crore.

"The approved outlay is nearly eight times that of the previous Khelo India Scheme, reflecting the Government's commitment to making sports a cornerstone of youth development, nation-building and India's emergence as a global sporting powerhouse," read a statement from the Government.



Khelo India was launched in 2017 and has been receiving the lion's share of allocation from the Union sports budget annually.

The scheme currently has close to 2800 athletes on its roster, and they are provided Government funding for nutritional and training needs through scholarships.

A nationwide network of Khelo India Centres of Excellence (KICoEs), Khelo India Accredited Academies (KIAAs), Khelo India Centres (KICs) and Youth Sports Companies (YSCs)

of the Armed Forces is currently in operation to train athletes.

To strengthen the school sports ecosystem, the Government has introduced two new initiatives — Khelo India Feeder Schools (KIFS) and Khelo India Utkrisha Vidyalayas (KIUV) — which will "integrate sports with mainstream education and enable early identification and systematic nurturing of talented children."

The Assistance to National Sports Federations (ANSF) Scheme for the period 2026-31 will financially support athletes' coaching, modern equipment, international expo-

sure, engagement of foreign experts and participation in major international competitions. The scheme is designed to help NSFs conduct camps and tournaments.

"It will also support sports cooperation with countries of the Global South and promote India's indigenous sports internationally," the Government stated.

"Special emphasis has been placed on expanding opportunities for women athletes, para-athletes, indigenous sports, and

sports as a tool for peace, inclusion and community development.

"The scheme also provides support for organising the National Games and hosting major international sporting events in India," it added.

The scheme also envisages a unified digital sports platform on which athlete databases, infrastructure, competitions, coaching resources, talent assessments, funding and Fit India participation would be integrated.



Unnati Hooda, Tanvi Sharma enter semifinals in Taipei Open



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Taipei

India's Unnati Hooda and Tanvi Sharma won their respective women's singles matches to enter the semifinals of the Taipei Open badminton tournament on Friday.

Kiran George, however, lost his men's singles quarterfinal match against Japan's fourth-seeded Yudai Okimoto 21-12 21-10 in 33 minutes. Hooda clinched a straight-game 23-21 21-16 victory over compatriot Devika Sihag to reach the last-four stage, while Tanvi got the better of Thailand's

Supanida Katethong 21-15 18-21 21-14 in a gruelling 54-minute quarterfinal clash.

Earlier in the day, the all-Indian quarterfinal contest between Hooda and Sihag started with a fiercely contested first game, where the former held her nerve to win it 23-21. Hooda was off to a great start, racing to an 11-3 lead before Sihag staged a spirited comeback to level the scores at 21-21. However, Hooda held her composure in the closing stages, winning the next two points to clinch opening game.

CWG boxing: Arundhati, Jaismine, Preeti, Ankush storm into finals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Glasgow

Arundhati Choudhary stunned defending champion Rosie Eccles of Wales in a split decision in the 70kg class, while world champion Jaismine Lamboria (57kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg) and Ankush Panghal (80kg) also sailed into the Commonwealth Games final after dominant displays in their last-four round bouts in Glasgow on Friday.

Arundhati beat her Wales opponent 4-0 in a messy and often ill-tempered women's 70kg category semifinal as the Indian held on to her good show in the first two rounds, forcing Rosie to receive a standing count during that time.

Jaismine was so dominant in the semifinal bout that she won in a Referee Stops Contest (RSC) decision after the Lesotho boxer received her third



standing count in the closing seconds of the second round. Meanwhile, Preeti out-punched Zambia's Catherine Mwape 5-0 while Ankush brushed aside Joshua Ofori by a similar margin. The 22-

year-old from Bhiwani, Preeti, who is an Asian Games bronze medallist, powered to a 5-0 win to set up a clash with Canada's Scarlet Delgado, who defeated England's Lauren Mackie 4-1 in her semifinal bout.

The Indian outpaced Mwape for most of the bout, cleverly drawing her in for effective counter-attacks with her left straight being particularly effective.

On comeback trail, discus thrower Seema collects CWG bronze

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Glasgow

Indian discus thrower Seema Kaliramna, who overcame post-pregnancy arthritis to resume her sporting career just last year, clinched a bronze medal at the Commonwealth Games here despite marginally falling short of her personal best in the event.

Compatriot Nidhi Rani ended fourth in the same competition on Thursday.



Seema produced the medal-winning throw of 58.65m in her third attempt and went on to foul the

remaining three chances. Jamaica's Samantha Hall won the gold with a throw of 61.66m, while Canada's Julia Tunks took silver with 60.67m.

"I could not achieve my personal best but I was determined to do well," Seema said after the event, referring to the 59.73m effort she achieved in the National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships held in Bhubaneswar earlier this year.

Asian soccer body joins UEFA opposing FIFA equity plan

GRAHAM DUNBAR ■ Kuala Lumpur

Asia's soccer body joined opposition to Gianni Infantino's plan for private investors to buy stakes in the World Cup and said on Friday FIFA must urgently review its management style.

The Asian Football Confederation said it "stands in solidarity" with European body UEFA and North America's CONCACAF, which on Thursday respectively threatened a boycott of FIFA competitions and rejected Infantino's offer of one-off \$20 million payments to each member federation.

"Football should never have been placed in such a position," said the Asian soccer body, which counts 46 of FIFA's 211 member federations that Infantino gave a September 19 deadline to accept the \$20 million offer.

Infantino has proposed spinning off FIFA's commercial businesses - including World Cups and Club World Cups for men and women - into a \$20 billion subsidiary with 20 per cent owned by private investors.

The "anchor investor," described by FIFA, is a New York-based investment firm created by Joshua Kushner, the younger brother of US



President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

"(T)he proposed (FIFA Forward Enterprise) cannot realistically achieve the necessary broad consensus and unity required to move forward" and must be reconsidered, the AFC said.

The statement did not name Infantino yet criticised FIFA for problems beyond the content of the private equity plan plus failing to consult about a secretive proposal that was revealed Tuesday in media reports.

"Rather, it has exposed fundamental weaknesses in FIFA's consultation and decision-making processes that must now be addressed," the AFC said.

(AP)

Real Madrid signs Spanish striker Carlos Espi

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Madrid

Real Madrid has signed 21-year-old striker Carlos Espi from fellow Spanish club Levante, the powerhouse said on Friday.

Madrid reportedly paid 25 million euros (\$28 million) for one of the sensations of La Liga last season. Levante said the transfer was a club record for a homegrown player without confirming the fee mentioned in local media.

Espi's team-high 11 goals in 25 appearances last season for Levante helped it avoid relegation. He has also played for Spain's youth sides. He could fill the rotation spot currently occupied by Gonzalo Garcia, a backup striker who is reportedly close to a move to Fulham in the Premier League. Madrid has been busy in the transfer market after not winning any titles last campaign. In addition to bringing back coach Jose Mourinho, it has also signed Marc Cucurella, Bernardo Silva, Ibrahim Konate and Denzel Dumfries.



Jersey row: Tirkey unaware; Hockey India secretary says all knew

MONA PARTHSARATHI/
SAUMOJYOTI S CHOUDHURY
■ New Delhi

The furore over the Indian hockey teams' new saffron jerseys has triggered a bit of wrangling within Hockey India, with President Dilip Tirkey calling it a decision that was taken without his knowledge and secretary Bhola Nath Singh insisting that "all officials were aware" of the change.

The Indian hockey teams, traditionally attired in blue, will be donning saffron kits during the World Cup in the Netherlands and Belgium starting August 15. The change in the uniform's colour, which was announced on July 27, invited scathing criticism from former players such as Vasudevan Baskaran, Viren Rasquinha, Ajit Pal Singh and Pargat Singh among others.

All of them questioned the logic behind such a move, asserting that it would affect the team's identity built over decades.

Till yesterday, HI, including Tirkey, maintained that it was a purely tech-



nical call to avoid visual similarity with the blue turf on which games are played. The body stated that the colour similarity affected "on-field clarity and visibility for the players".

However, in an internal mail to HI officials, Tirkey stated that the decision was taken "without being placed before the Executive Board for discus-

sion and without my prior knowledge."

"I request the concerned HI officials to provide me with a written clarification at the earliest, outlining the basis for the decision, the process followed and the circumstances under which the change was approved and implemented. This will enable me to respond appropriately and accurately," he said in the mail.

The said explanation has been sought by the Odisha government, which is the primary sponsor of the team.

"I have also been asked by the Government of Odisha to provide clarification regarding the matter. I therefore request the concerned Hockey India officials to provide me with a written clarification at the earliest, which will enable me to respond appropriately and accurately," Tirkey said.

HI secretary Bhola Nath Singh, however, maintained that HI merely implemented what the players had demanded after due consultation.

"The decision to change the colour was circulated in our internal

group, so all officials should be aware of it. We never thought it would be such a big issue. There was no outside pressure on us from anywhere to make the colour change. It is being unnecessarily politicised," Singh told PTI. Asked



whether HI would rethink the decision, Singh said, "I alone can't take decisions; there is a president and other office-bearers, we need to sit and discuss. At the end of the day, it was the demand of players and coaches, and we obliged."

"The players and coaches also need to be spoken to. We never thought it would be such a big issue."

Justifying the position he took on Thursday, Tirkey, in his email, said that he did that to avoid any controversy ahead of the World Cup.

"The matter has since attracted considerable media attention and unfortunately political interpretation in certain quarters. With the WC (World Cup) approaching, I have publicly clarified that the change was purely a sporting decision so that the focus remains on the team and its preparations," he said.

Tirkey insisted that the choice of saffron colour is not his

concern, but the decision should have been taken in consultation with the elected leadership.

"My concern is not with the choice of saffron itself. A decision of this significance, involving the identity and representation of our national team, should ideally have been discussed with the elected leadership and the EB board members before implementation," he said in the email.

"This is not to attribute blame but to ensure transparency, accountability and adherence to our established decision-making processes going forward," he insisted.

A reliable source said that following the backlash, HI officials have sent an email to the Odisha government on July 30. The source also said that a separate mail has been sent by Tirkey to HI Director General Cdr RK Srivastava seeking his clarification.

When contacted, a member of the body's EB told PTI that he had had no prior information about this decision and came to know of it only after the jersey was launched on social media. (PTI)

Commitment, professionalism set Rahane apart: Rohit Sharma



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

For long-time teammate Rohit Sharma, "commitment and professionalism" set Ajinkya Rahane apart, while Shubman Gill hailed him as a wonderful "role model" as tributes continued to pour in for the 38-year-old, who announced his retirement from international cricket.

Rahane on Thursday bid adieu to top-flight cricket after a 12-year-long career in which he played 85 Tests, 90 ODIs and 20 T20Is.

"We've shared the dressing room for so many years, and I know how much hard work has gone into everything you've achieved. Your commitment and professionalism have always set you apart. Congratulations on a wonderful career. Best wishes!" Rohit wrote on X.

India's Test and ODI skipper Gill said Rahane led the national side through some of the toughest days.

"What a career, what a role model. Ajju bhai led us through some of Indian cricket's toughest days and made us believe anything was possible. Thank you for the memories and the lessons on and off the field. All the best for the next innings!" Gill wrote.

Ravi Shastri, who was India's head coach during their historic 2-1 victory over

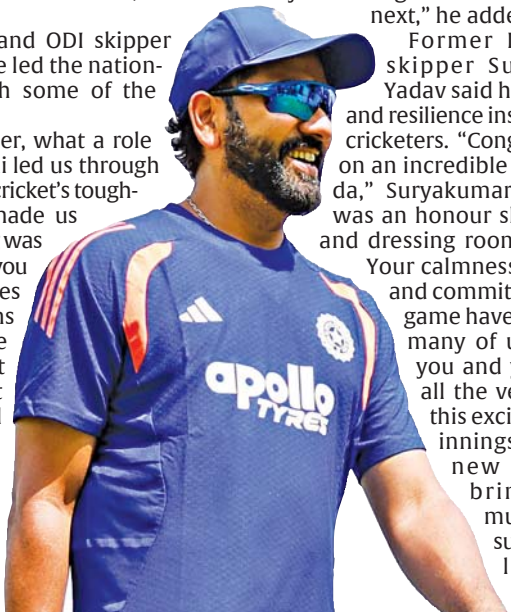
Australia with a heavily depleted side under Rahane in 2020-2021, said he gave yeoman service to India and Mumbai cricket.

"One of India's most committed cricketers who was an integral part of my tenure as coach and gave yeoman service to Mumbai and Indian cricket. Well done, Jinks," Shastri said.

Rahane, who returned to captain Mumbai in domestic cricket after being dropped from the national side, led them to a record-extending 42nd title win in the Ranji Trophy in 2023-2024.

"It felt good to share the dressing room with you, Ajju bhai," wrote Rishabh Pant. "Calm in every situation, selfless in every role and a leader by example. Thank you for everything you have done for Indian cricket. Wishing you nothing but the best for what's next," he added.

Former India T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav said his calmness and resilience inspired many cricketers. "Congratulations on an incredible career, Ajju da," Suryakumar wrote. "It was an honour sharing field and dressing room with you. Your calmness, resilience and commitment to the game have inspired so many of us. Wishing you and your family all the very best for this exciting second innings. May this new chapter bring you as much joy and success as the last," he added.



Bumrah clears fitness test; set to play Sri Lanka Test series

KUSHAN SARKAR ■ New Delhi

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah has been cleared to play next month's two-Test series against Sri Lanka by the BCCI's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru.

Bumrah was picked subject to fitness as he had suffered an impact injury during the recent ODI series against England. He had to sit out of the third ODI at Lord's due to the injury.

"Jasprit Bumrah has recovered from his impact injury. He has cleared the fitness Tests mandated by the COE. Hopefully he will be available for both games as he is integral to the team's plans," a senior BCCI official told PTI on condition of anonymity.

The two-Test series against the islanders will get underway on August



15 in Galle, and the second match will be played in Colombo from August 23.

India need to win seven of their remaining nine Tests of this World Test Championship cycle in order to remain in contention for a summit clash berth.

Winning the Sri Lanka series by a 2-0 margin is very important before embarking on an away series against New Zealand, which is expected to be a tough assignment.

Already, India are without the services of Harshit Rana and Nitish Reddy, who are out with hamstring and quadriceps injuries respectively.

Washington Sundar has been ruled out of the first Test with a hamstring injury, and Akash Deep is in the middle of a long lay-off following stress reactions on his back. (PTI)

Indian mixed 4x400m relay team qualifies for CWG final



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Glasgow

The Indian mixed 4x400m relay team qualified for the final after finishing seventh overall in the round one heat races in the Commonwealth Games on Friday.

The Indian quartet of Vishal TK, Anisa Babu, Rajesh Ramesh and Rashdeep Kaur clocked 3:20.98 to take the fourth spot in Heat 2 to sneak into the final to be held on Saturday.

The top three finishers in each of the two heats and the next two fastest advance to the

final.

Nigeria took the overall top spot, winning Heat 1 with a time of 3 minutes 14.58 seconds while England (3:15.11) and Australia (3:15.21) were second and third respectively.

The season best for the Indian mixed 4x400m relay team is 3:17.06, while the national record stands at 3:12.87.

Fractured finger rules out Masood for the 2nd cricket Test against WI



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Islamabad

Pakistan in-form batter Shan Masood was ruled out of the second cricket test against the West Indies due to a fractured left index finger.

Masood was the only bright batting spot in Pakistan's 90-run defeat in the first test at Trinidad when the left-hander scored a century in the first innings.

"Following a scan and clinical assessment, Shan is currently undergoing treatment from the Pakistan team medical panel," the Pakistan Cricket Board said in a statement late Thursday.

Masood was relieved of the captaincy before the two-test series against

the West Indies after Pakistan lost 12 of the 16 test matches under his leadership. Babar Azam returned as skipper, but could not prevent Pakistan's eighth successive away loss in test matches at Trinidad as the team continued to struggle in red-ball cricket. Fast bowler Jayden Seales' short ball struck Masood on the index finger in the first innings before the left-hander went on to score his seventh test hundred.

Masood did not take the field in the West Indies' second innings, but came out to bat at No. 8 after Pakistan was reduced to 53-6 while chasing 211. He visibly looked in pain before getting caught at point for three, and Pakistan's chase folded for 120 runs.

Harsh pips vastly experienced Australian judoka for historic men's 60kg gold

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Glasgow

India's Harsh Singh clinched a historic gold at the Commonwealth Games as he became the first male judoka from the country to win the title, pulling off an upset win over Australia's vastly experienced Joshua Katz in the men's -60kg final on Friday.

The 23-year-old, competing in his maiden Commonwealth Games, claimed the biggest title of his career with a composed and tactically astute performance against the Australian Olympian, who was widely regarded as the favourite for the gold.

After a closely fought contest in which neither judoka was able to establish a clear advantage, Harsh struck decisively with just 41 seconds remaining on the clock.

He executed a superb waza-ari — the second-highest scoring technique in judo — to take the lead, and then defended resolutely for the remainder of the four-minute bout to secure a memorable victory.

The result was a major surprise considering Katz's decorated resume.



The 28-year-old has won multiple Oceania Championships and Australian national titles, represented Australia at the Olympics and claimed a bronze medal at the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games.

Unfazed by his opponent's pedigree, Harsh remained composed throughout the contest, refusing to be overawed by the occasion. His decisive waza-ari ultimately proved enough to

seal the Australian's fate and deliver India its second judo gold of the day.

Katz also comes from a distinguished judo family, with both his parents being former judokas, while his father has served as Australia's national judo coach at previous Olympic Games. That only added to the significance of Harsh's breakthrough triumph, which stands as the finest achievement of his young career.

Diksha fires 69 to break into top-10 at AIG Women's Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lytham St Annes (UK)

Indian golfer Diksha Dagar continued her impressive run with a composed 2-under 69 in the opening round to move into a share of eighth place after the first day of the AIG Women's Open, the final women's Major of the season at the Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club. The 25-year-old left-handed Indian, still chasing her first victory of the year despite a string of strong finishes, recovered from an early bogey with three birdies to position herself inside the Top-10.

Fellow Indian Aditi Ashok endured a difficult day, carding a 3-over 74 to finish tied for 75th and will need a much-improved second round to make the 36-hole cut. Thailand's Jeeno Thitikul produced the round of the day, firing a superb 7-under 64 to establish a two-shot lead over South Korea's Haeran Ryu and Japan's Shiho Kuwaki, who both opened with 66s. Making her seventh appearance at the Women's Open, Diksha bettered a shaky start with calm, patient golf on the demanding Royal Lytham & St Annes layout. Her best finish in the championship remains a tied-21st in 2023, while she finished tied-46th last year. Backed by Hero, Diksha began with two pars before dropping her only shot of the day at the third. She responded immediately with a birdie on the fifth and settled into an impressive rhythm, reeling off eight consecutive pars. Birdies at the 13th and 16th lifted her into red figures, and she comfortably closed with pars over the final two holes for a confidence-boosting 69 on the par-



71 course. Aditi, playing in her record 39th Major championship — the most by any Indian golfer, male or female — made a bright start with a birdie on the second in her ninth Women's Open. However, bogeys at the fourth, fifth, 15th and 18th left her with a 74. Aditi's best Women's Open result remains tied-22nd in 2018, and she has previously made the cut only twice in the championship.

World number 2 Thitikul was in sparkling form throughout the day. She built momentum with three consecutive birdies from the fourth through the sixth, added another at the eighth and picked up further birdies on the 11th, 13th and 15th to finish with a flawless 64.

The Thai star has fond memories of Royal Lytham & St Annes, having won the Smyth Salver as the leading amateur here in 2018.

Two-time Major champion Haeran Ryu, fresh from victories at the KPMG Women's PGA Championship and the Amundi Evian Championship, continued her outstanding form with a 5-under 66. She was joined by Japan's Shiho Kuwaki in second place.

American Yealimi Noh and France's Celine Boutier shared fourth place at 4-under 67. Boutier's bogey-free round featured an eagle on the sixth along with birdies at the ninth and 13th. Japan's Chisato "Chizzy" Iwai and Thailand's Chanettee Wannasena were tied sixth at 3-under 68, while a group of nine players at 2-under 69 included Diksha, England's Lottie Woad and Charley Hull, Singapore's Shannon Tan and Spanish amateur Paula Martin Sampedro.

Caption No-13001/1353/2627
 Bhanjanagar Municipality
 Dist: Ganjam, Odisha, PIN-761126
 E-Mail: bhanjanagar.hud@nic.in, Ph. No. 06821-241107.
 Letter No: 26540
 Dtd: 30/07/26
 EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)
 Bhanjanagar Municipality invites EOI from experienced, competent and eligible Agencies/Bidders for Preparation of DPR for Renovation and Development of Town Hall of Bhanjanagar Municipality.
 The Tender Schedule will be available at Development Section of Bhanjanagar Municipality @ Rs 1000/- (Rupees One Thousand) only from Dt- 30.07.2026, 11.00A.M. to 5.00P.M. of 17.08.2026 (With in Office Hour) and the tender schedule received with in stipulated time period will be open on 18.08.2026 at 11.00 A.M. in presence of the respective quotationers and their authorized representatives.
 Any other clarification regarding EOI may contact Development Section of Bhanjanagar Municipality or Email:- bhanjanagar.hud@gmail.com.
 The authority reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel any or all the quotations without assigning any reason thereof.
 Executive Officer
 Bhanjanagar Municipality
 OIPR-13001/13144/1/2627/0007