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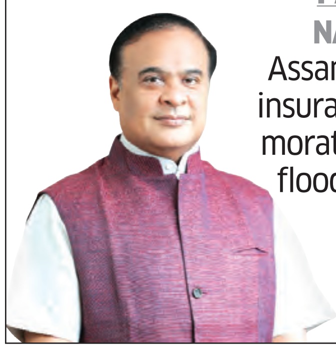
# The Pioneer

TRUSTED SINCE 1865
RNI No. 53466/91. Vol.36 Issue 211

NEW DELHI | SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 2026 | PAGES 16 | ₹5.00

PUBLISHED FROM: DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL RAIPUR BHUBANESWAR RANCHI CHANDIGARH DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYAWADA THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



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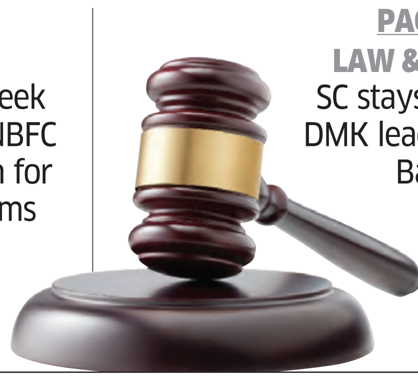

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# Life term for Tahir Hussain in Ankit Sharma murder case

## Rejecting the death penalty plea, the court says the case falls short of the rarest-of-rare threshold

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A Delhi court on Friday sentenced former AAP councillor Tahir Hussain and four others to life imprisonment for the murder of IB officer Ankit Sharma in the 2020 Delhi riots.

The court observed that although case did not fall within the rarest-of-rare category warranting the death penalty, the "manner of the crime was of utmost brutality". The Delhi Police had sought death penalty for Tahir Hussain and four other accused. The judgment was pronounced in the presence of Hussain and others amid tight security.

Hussain's family was so present in the court. The courtroom was packed with lawyers and senior Delhi police officials including Crime Branch's Joint Commissioner and DCP.

Police personnel standing guard outside Tahir's residence in the aftermath of the 2020 riots in Delhi PTI

Pronouncing the judgment, Additional Sessions Judge Praveen Singh said, "The savagery did not end with the murder. His body was dragged into a drain nearby as if the hatred was still not satiated." The judge said the prosecution failed to establish that they had such a violent disposition or criminal propensity that their continued existence, even in prison, would pose a menace to society. "The final test that law requires me to undertake before I conclude that this case invites capital punishment is whether the convicts are beyond redemption and there is no chance of reformation," the judge said.

"The State has not brought anything on record to establish that any of the convicts has a violent disposition or a propensity towards crime. It has also not been shown that any of the convicts had previously been involved in any violent crime... I find myself unable to agree that the convicts are beyond reformation or have such a fiendish character that their continued existence, even in prison, will be a menace to society," he added.

The judge also refused to accept arguments advanced by the prosecution during sentencing that Hussain had instigated or led the unlawful assembly by using his residence as an operational base.

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# Meta India head named in FIR over posts targeting PM

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi/Hyderabad

The Hyderabad Cyber Crime Police has filed two separate First Information Reports (FIRs) against Arun Srinivas, Meta India's country head, as well as the operators of several Instagram and Facebook accounts on complaints from two BJP supporters that objectionable content about the Prime Minister was shared during a recent Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)-led protest.


Representative image iSTOCK

The FIRs, filed on July 29, mention Sections 66C (identity theft) and Section 67 (publishing or sharing obscene material online) of the Information Technology Act, as well as Sections 353(2) and 336(4) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which deal with public mischief and making forged electronic records that harm reputations. Police have named unknown account operators and Meta's India head as co-accused.

T Saikiran Goud, 32, who is part of the Telangana BJP's social media committee in Nampally, filed one of the complaints. On July 29, he reported seeing about 20 Instagram reels and Facebook posts with allegedly altered images and negative content about the PM. He gave police the URLs of these posts, saying they appeared to threaten the country's sovereignty, integrity, and public order. Goud also said the content could spread hatred, misinformation, enmity, and risk national security.

In his complaint, Goud asked authorities to preserve electronic evidence from the accounts and posts, identify who runs them using legal means, and fully investigate possible violations of Indian law. He also requested that police work with Meta to get account details and digital evidence, and take action against Meta for allegedly allowing this content to remain on its platforms.

**COMPLAINTS BY TWO BJP SUPPORTERS LEAD TO FIRS AGAINST META EXECUTIVE AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT OPERATORS**

The second complaint came from S Aravind Reddy, a 29-year-old BJP supporter and businessman from Nampally. Reddy said he saw several digitally altered and AI-generated videos and images on Instagram showing the PM with people like US President Donald Trump and former Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan in what he described as an "obscene, derogatory and misleading manner." He warned that this content could mislead the public and spread misinformation, and called for legal action against both the people who posted it and Meta's India leadership for allowing the posts. He said that notices have been sent to Meta about the cases and the flagged links.

Police investigators are working to gather information to identify and arrest those who ran the accounts. By Thursday evening, all the reported links were inactive, but the investigation into where the content came from, how it spread, and whether Meta's safeguards were enough is still ongoing.

These cases come after recent criticism of Meta's content moderation in India, where automated systems temporarily removed legitimate posts.

Arun Srinivas, who became Meta's Managing Director and Country Head for India in July 2025, is now named as a co-accused. It is rare for a senior executive at a platform to be directly targeted, rather than only anonymous users.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

## The Bystander


# TASLIMA RETURNS TO KOLKATA

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Kolkata

Exiled Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen on Friday arrived in Kolkata to a roaring welcome at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport, 19 years after she was forced to leave the city in 2007 following violent protests from a section of right-wing Muslims who demanded her immediate ouster from the city.

Exiled Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasreen at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport, in Kolkata on Friday PTI

Nasreen greeted the waiting crowd with folded hands expressing her joy to be back. "*Khub bhalo lagche* (I am feeling very good to be back)," she said to the waiting people.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

## PIONEER IN SHORT

### US DEPORTED 4,840 INDIANS SINCE 2025

The US has deported 4,840 Indian nationals since 2025, including 1,273 between January and July 2026, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday. Addressing the weekly media briefing, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said 3,567 Indians were deported in 2025, while 1,273 have been sent back between January 1 and July this year. Jaiswal said India works with several Governments on deportation-related matters and carries out due diligence to verify the nationality of individuals before accepting their return. "As and when such issues are referred to us, we conduct due diligence on our side to confirm the nationality of the person being referred for deportation," he said. "Once we are fully satisfied that the person concerned is of Indian nationality, only then we facilitate their return to India."

### SC PAUSES NSE RTI RULING

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed a Central Information Commission (CIC) order holding the National Stock Exchange of India (NSEI) to be a "public authority" under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta issued notice to the CIC and other respondents, seeking their replies within four weeks while agreeing to hear NSEI's challenge. The exchange has contested a July 1 Delhi High Court judgment that upheld a single judge's 2010 ruling declaring NSEI a "public authority" under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act. The High Court had endorsed the CIC's 2007 decision, observing that bodies owned, controlled or substantially financed by the Government fall within the RTI framework. The division bench had agreed with the single judge's finding that NSEI is controlled by the appropriate Government, making it subject to the transparency law.

# Police kin allege one-sided narrative on July 20 clashes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Recalling broken helmets, blood-soaked uniforms and anxious hours spent outside hospitals, families of four Delhi Police personnel injured during the July 20 CJP-led march to the Parliament on Friday alleged that officers on duty came under attack in the crowd. Urging the Parliament to acknowledge the injuries suffered by policemen alongside allegations of police excesses, they said the trauma endured by police families had been largely absent from the public discourse.

Addressing a press conference at the Constitution Club of India, the wives and children of four injured officers shared their ordeal. They maintained that they were not blaming the students who participated in the protest but alleged that "anti-social elements" had infiltrated the gathering and triggered the violence.

Upneet Kaur, wife of an Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), said the night her husband returned home injured was traumatic for the family, including their two-year-old daughter. "Behind every uniform is not only a police officer; there is also a wife, children, parents and an entire family. We want people to understand that," she said.

Family members of police personnel, who were injured during the CJP protest march, during a press conference, at the Constitution Club in New Delhi on Friday PTI

**PM FORGIVES JANTAR MANTAR ABUSES**

**New Delhi:** In a late-night video message posted on Instagram, PM Modi on Friday said he and his late mother were subjected to abusive remarks during protests at Jantar Mantar, but said he wanted to forgive those responsible rather than pursue legal action against them. *(PTI)*

The families displayed photographs of injured police personnel during the press conference alongside figures they claimed reflected the scale of the violence. According to the presentation, more than 250 police personnel were injured, while over 110 barricades, 300 body protectors, 350 helmets, 20 loudhailers, 10 hand-held metal detectors and an X-ray baggage scanner were damaged. They also claimed that more than 25 government vehicles and other public property were vandalised.

Seema, wife of an Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) who has served in Delhi Police for 33 years, recalled speaking to her husband on the morning of July 20 when he informed her that a large crowd had gathered and was preparing to march towards Parliament.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

# Drone shot down over Akhnoor, along LoC

MOHIT KANDHARI
■ Jammu

On Friday afternoon, a suspected Pakistani drone was shot down by the Indian troops along the Line of Control in the Khour area of Akhnoor sector in Jammu.

The drone was seen hovering over one of the vital security installations when the troops brought it down near Chakla village of Khour, Akhnoor. After recovering the drone, the troops handed it over to the forensic teams for a thorough investigation. According to preliminary investigations, the forensic teams have so far recovered a 64 GB SD card and are scanning the images possibly transferred by the drone camera to its handler operating it from across the Line of Control. The police teams have also heightened the vigil in the area to search whether any payload was air-dropped by the drone before it was brought down.

Representative image iSTOCK

The police teams have kept some of the overground workers under observation as part of ongoing investigations in the matter.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

# Parliament skit on Ram temple donations triggers VHP outrage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Parliament complex on Friday witnessed street theatre with saffron-clad independent MP Pappu Yadav and other Opposition MPs, including Rahul Gandhi, staging a skit depicting alleged theft of donations from the Ram temple in Ayodhya. It promptly drew the ire of Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), stating it hurt Hindus' religious sentiments.

The satirical skit saw an ascetic sitting cross-legged on the floor, locked in a heated argument with a woman over a temple donation. Moments after making an offering, she suddenly begins shouting, "*Chori ho gaya, chori ho gaya* " ("My money has been stolen"), accusing the ascetic of pocketing it.

Amid the commotion, a third person walks in and drops a handful of cash into a donation box. The ascetic immediately grabs the box and runs away, shouting, "*Chori hamare khoon mein hai*" ("Theft is in my blood"), as onlookers scoff at the spectacle.

The ascetic was MP from Purnia, Pappu Yadav. The woman was a Samajwadi Party MP. The man who walked in with the cash was Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi. Later, protesting in front of Makar Dwar of Parliament, the lawmakers raised '*Chadhawa chor, gaddi chhodh* (Donation thieves, leave the seat)'. The MPs kept donation boxes in front of the Makar Dwar steps while Pappu Yadav sat with the boxes.


Opposition MPs stage a street play over the alleged embezzlement of donations at Ayodhya's Ram temple during the ongoing Monsoon session of Parliament, in New Delhi, Friday PTI

Several prominent seers and office-bearers associated with the Ram temple and Ayodhya's religious institutions also hit out at the protest and demanded the expulsion of the MPs involved, and urged President Droupadi Murmu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to cancel their membership.

In a video statement, VHP international joint general secretary Surendra Jain alleged that Yadav, Gandhi and other MPs of the Congress and the Samajwadi Party staged a "vulgar" protest by wearing the attire of Hindu saints. He appealed to the Lok Sabha speaker to take strict action against the MPs. "By wearing the attire of a saint, they have not only insulted saints but also hurt the religious sentiments of Hindus. The people of the country will not forgive them," he alleged.

Akhil Bharatiya Sant Samiti national general secretary Jitendranand Saraswati alleged that the Opposition misused the Parliament premises to insult Sanatan Dharma by wearing saffron robes during the protest. "On the issue of the Ram temple, the saints of Ayodhya have already given their response. The alleged theft will be dealt with by the SIT and the Supreme Court. But using that as a pretext to malign Sanatan Dharma and the sacrifice and penance of saints will not be tolerated by the Akhil Bharatiya Sant Samiti," he said.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

# 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 replicated 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

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

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 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.

He was also fined ₹1,000 under IPC Section 188, ₹20,000 each under Sections 153A, 147 and 148, ₹50,000 under Section 365 and ₹5 lakh under Section 302, with default sentences prescribed for non-payment. The court noted that the State had not brought any material on record to show that any of the convicts had a violent disposition or previous involvement in violent crimes.

# 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 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 personnel, injured.

## IN FOCUS

A child siting on a pile of jackfruits during the three-day Halasu Mela, Jackfruit Festival, in Hubballi-Dharwad, Karnataka PTI

# CM Rekha to launch Delhi lakshmi portal, register first Beneficiary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi


The Delhi Government will formally launch the Delhi Lakshmi Yojana on Saturday, August 1, with Chief Minister Rekha Gupta inaugurating the online portal at a programme scheduled for 11 am at the District Magistrate East office in Geeta Colony. Post-inauguration, the applications from eligible women will open, and the Government will aim to complete verification in time to release the first instalment by Raksha Bandhan.

During the launch programme, the Chief Minister will personally register a few eligible women, marking the formal beginning of the application process. Applications from all other eligible beneficiaries will be accepted through the portal thereafter. The scheme provides ₹2,500 in monthly financial assistance to eligible women aged 21 to 60. A provision of ₹5,110 crore has been made in the 2026-27 Budget, and the scheme is expected to benefit over 17 lakh women across Delhi.

The Chief Minister said the Delhi Government has fulfilled one of its key promises to women and that the scheme is designed to strengthen their dignity, financial security, and self-reliance. She appealed to all eligible women to apply for the scheme and avail its benefits.

The launch on August 1 sets a compressed operational timeline. The Government must process applications, complete eligibility verification, and disburse the first instalment before Raksha Bandhan, which falls in August. Completing that cycle for a large beneficiary base across 13 districts within weeks of portal launch is the administrative test the scheme now faces.

Eligibility under the Delhi Lakshmi Yojana requires that applicants be women between 21 and 60 years of age with a family annual income not exceeding ₹2.50 lakh. Women who already receive benefits under any other Government financial assistance scheme or pension, income taxpayers, GST return filers, Government employees, women with more than three living children, families with annual electricity consumption exceeding 2,400 units, families with a member employed by any Government or PSU, families owning a four-wheeler, and women with a criminal record are not eligible.

# Wife stabbed with scissors in Jagatpuri, husband absconding

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA
New Delhi

A 54-year-old man allegedly stabbed his 50-year-old wife in the neck with a pair of scissors at their residence in East Delhi's Jagatpuri area on Wednesday night.

The man fled the scene before police arrived. A PCR call reporting the murder was received at Jagatpuri police station at around 9 pm, and multiple teams are now searching for the absconding accused. The deceased has been identified as Komal, 50. Her husband, the accused, has been identified as Kamal, 54. The FIR has been registered on the basis of the statement of the couple's son, Gaurav, at Jagatpuri police station.

Police personnel, including the SHO and the investigating officer, rushed to the address after the PCR call was received and found Komal lying dead on the floor. The crime team inspected the scene and collected evidence. The body was shifted to Dr Hedgewar Hospital, where doctors declared her dead, and was subsequently sent to the Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital mortuary for post-mortem examination.

The case has been registered under Section 103(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which deals with the offence of murder. Investigators have launched a search operation to trace Kamal, who remains absconding. Police said multiple teams are working to locate him.The exact motive behind the killing has not yet been established. Police said they are examining all possible angles and are awaiting the post-mortem report, which is expected to provide further clarity on the cause of death and the specific nature of the injuries.

The incident fits a grim pattern of domestic violence resulting in death that has marked Delhi's crime calendar in recent weeks. Wednesday night's Jagatpuri incident is distinct from both of those cases in that the weapon was not a firearm but a household item, a pair of scissors, which makes the attack a matter of close-range physical violence in a domestic space. The use of scissors also means the attack was sustained rather than instantaneous, and the post-mortem findings on the wound to the neck are expected to be significant for the investigation's account of what happened.

The fact that the accused fled the scene and has not been found as of the time of reporting suggests either that he had a plan for his movements after the attack or that the flight was panicked and unplanned.

# Four minor Kanwar pilgrims drown in Ganga canal in Haridwar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Haridwar

SDRF personnel carrying the body of a Kanwariya after four pilgrims allegedly drowned while bathing in the River Ganga in Haridwar PTI

Four minor Kanwar pilgrims from Chandigarh drowned in the Ganga Canal near Jatwara Bridge in Haridwar on Friday after they ventured into the midstream, apparently misjudging the depth of the water amid low water levels caused by silt-cleaning operations, police said.

The deceased, aged between 16 and 18, were part of a group that had come to Haridwar for the Kanwar Yatra and were returning after collecting Ganga water. According to police, the group stopped at a ghat along the Ganga Canal near Jatwara Bridge in the Jwalapur area to bathe.

During this time, one of the Kanwariyas began to drown. His three companions entered the canal in an attempt to rescue him but failed to gauge the depth of the water, and all four went missing.

Police said it was reported that the water level in the canal was low due to ongoing silt-cleaning operations, prompting the Kanwariyas to venture into the midstream, where they became trapped and drowned. \

Panic spread at the spot following the incident. On receiving information, Water Police, local police and other rescue agencies reached the site and launched a search operation. Haridwar Superintendent of Police (City) Abhay Pratap Singh said the bodies of all four Kanwariyas were recovered from the canal after an extensive search operation.

The bodies have been sent to the district hospital for post-mortem examinations, he said. The deceased were identified as Shivanshu (16), Nitesh (17) and Bharat (17), all residents of Sector 16 in Chandigarh, and Rohit Prajapati (18), a resident of Sector 26/30.

In a separate incident at Haridwar's Kangra Ghat, two Kanwariyas who were swept away by the strong current of the Ganga were rescued by a State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) team. They were identified as 18-year-old Sudhish Thakur and 28-year-old Rahul, a resident of Baghpat.

The Kanwar Yatra, which spans about a fortnight, commenced on Thursday. The Ganga is currently in full spate due to continuous rainfall in the state in recent days.

Singh said that during the Kanwar Mela, police and the administration have been constantly urging devotees to bathe only at designated and safe ghats and avoid venturing into the main currents or deep waters of the Ganga and Ganga Canal to prevent such tragic incidents.

# CID grills ex-PSC chief for 8 hours for third time over exam irregularities in Jharkhand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Ranchi


The CID on Friday questioned former Jharkhand Public Service Commission chairman L Khiangte for around eight hours as part of its probe into alleged irregularities in examinations conducted by the agency, an official said.

This was the third round of questioning that the former state PSC chairman faced. He appeared before the CID sleuths around 11 am and came out of the agency's office around 7 pm, the official said. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) grilled Khiangte for about nine hours on Tuesday and around eight hours on Wednesday.

Khiangte resigned as the JPSC chairperson on July 22, a day before the CID sleuths searched multiple locations, including his official residence, in connection with its investigation into the alleged irregularities in the JPSC examinations. On Monday, Khiangte said he "voluntarily chose to resign" to ensure an impartial investigation into the matter.

He was appointed to the post of JPSC chairman in February last year after he retired as the state's chief secretary. The CID has so far arrested 11 people in connection with the alleged irregularities in the examinations conducted by the JPSC.

The commission postponed the JPSC Combined Civil Services Mains Examination, scheduled from July 25 to July 27, citing "unavoidable circumstances", amid protests by the opposition BJP. The CID on Thursday arrested a candidate who cleared the preliminary test of the 14th JPSC Combined Civil Services Competitive Examination.

Meanwhile, a group of students, who have been on an indefinite dharna near Jaipal Singh Stadium here for the past several days to press for a CBI probe into the alleged JPSC exam irregularities, opposed the participation of political parties in their demonstration.

The agitators termed the sit-in an apolitical protest and said they would not allow members from any political party to share the stage.

# Kerala not insisting on specific AIIMS site to avoid delays: Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Thiruvananthapuram

Kerala Devaswom and Health Minister K Muraleedharan on Friday said the state Government would not insist on locating the proposed AIIMS at any particular place, as it did not want regional disputes to delay the project's allotment.

Speaking to reporters, Muraleedharan said the Government had submitted details of multiple proposed sites for the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), including survey numbers, to the Union Health Ministry.

"We are not mentioning any specific location. We have pointed out locations. Including survey numbers, we have communicated the details to the Union Health Ministry. AIIMS can be established anywhere in Kerala and we will be happy with that because the project should not be lost over regional disputes. The Government has taken an open stance on this," he said.

Responding to queries on the Devaswom Recruitment Board, the minister said the Government had not taken any decision to transfer its recruitment powers to the Kerala Public Service Commission (PSC).

He clarified that the Government's decision pertained only to the Guruvayur Devaswom, where the Kerala High Court had held that the Devaswom Recruitment Board Act was not applicable in view of the Guruvayur Devaswom Act, which had received Presidential assent in 1978.

"The previous Government had filed an appeal against the High Court judgment. We have decided that there is no need to spend public money pursuing an appeal before the Supreme Court. We have no objection to implementing the law that received the President's assent in 1978," Muraleedharan said.

"There is no obstacle to the functioning of the Devaswom Recruitment Board for other Devaswom Boards. Their laws were enacted by the state Government and were not subject to Presidential assent. Recruitment for those boards will continue through the Devaswom Recruitment Board," he said.

# Delhi Police ban drones, UAVs for 15 days ahead of Independence day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Police has prohibited the flying of drones, UAVs, hot air balloons, para-gliders and other sub-conventional aerial platforms across the national capital for 15 days ahead of Independence Day celebrations, citing security concerns.

In an order issued on Friday, Delhi Police Commissioner Anurag Kumar said intelligence inputs indicated that criminal, anti-social elements or terrorists inimical to India could use such aerial platforms to pose a threat to the general public, dignitaries and vital installations.

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### Life term for Tahir Hussain in Ankit...

"It must be recalled that the prosecution has failed to prove the allegation that Tahir had instigated or let any unlawful assembly. The allegation of Tahir Hussain putting his house as a launchpad or base for riots was neither a part of the charges framed against him, nor was specifically sought to be proved in evidence," the judge said. On being asked about his sentence, Hussain said, "Justice may be delayed, but it will not be denied. I will get justice from the high court. The match was fixed."

The court further treated the educational background of four of the convicts as a mitigating circumstance. It observed that Qasim, Nazim and Javed were illiterate while Anas had studied only up to class 4, making them more susceptible to misinformation and communal propaganda in the atmosphere prevailing during the riots.

Reacting to the judgement, Delhi law minister, Kapil Mishra expressed hope that the sentence would be converted into the death penalty by the Delhi High Court. In a post on X, Mishra wrote, "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."

Tahir was also fined Rs 1,000 under IPC Section 188, Rs 20,000 each under Sections 153A, 147 and 148, Rs 50,000 under Section 365 and Rs 5 lakh under Section 302, with default sentences prescribed for non-payment.

Hussain's co-convicts were awarded life imprisonment under Section 302 IPC with a fine of Rs 25,000 each. They were also sentenced to six months under Section 188, three years under Section 153A, two years under Section 147, three years under Section 148 and seven years under Section 365 IPC, along with fines ranging from Rs 1,000 to Rs 10,000 under the respective provisions. All the sentences will run concurrently.

The judge, however, said that the offences had been committed with complete disregard for law and human life and said the convicts must face the full force of law for the remaining offences.

"All the sentences of all the convicts shall run concurrently. Benefit of section 428 Cr.P.C/ 468 BNSS shall be given to the convicts. Out of aforesaid fine imposed upon the convicts, Rs.5 lakh shall be paid as compensation to the family of the victim", the judgement said.

Sharma, 26, IB officer was dragged by the mob and attacked with knives, sticks, rods and stones before his body was dumped in a drain during the violence that swept through northeast Delhi in February-end. The body with at least 51 knife wounds was found the next day.

### Taslima returns to Kolkata

Nasreen is expected to take part in an anti-fundamentalism literary meet on Saturday in Kolkata likely to be attended amongst others by Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari and veteran Bengali novelist Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay.

She was forced to leave the city in November 2007 when the then Buddhadeb Bhattachaarya Government had to call out the military to contain restive crowd after the then Imam of Tipu Sultan Barqati had given a call to blacken her face. Former Trinamool Congress MP late Idrish Ali had led a crowd protesting against her putting up in Kolkata and demanded her exit from the city.

The Left Government then asked her to go away. Before return to Kolkata Nasreen recalled her compelled exit saying she was returning to the city of joy, "with joy, but also with pain", recalling how Kolkata that had given her a home, friends, readers and a sense of nearness also forced her to leave.

"I would not leave Kolkata on my own ... the then West Bengal Government compelled me to leave... but still I always dreamt of coming back," she had said.

### Police kin allege one-sided narrative...

Hours later, she received another call informing her that he had been admitted to Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital. "When I spoke to him, he told me that some anti-social elements in the crowd attacked police personnel with stones, flower pots, slippers and shoes. After that, his phone battery died, and I was terrified," she said.

She said her husband returned home around 11 pm with his protective helmet broken. "Had another stone struck his head after the helmet broke, he might not have survived. But for days, the only narrative discussed was that the police used brutality against students. That is only one side. We want what happened to police personnel and their families also to be discussed in Parliament," she said.

Kunjal, a Delhi University student whose father, a sub-inspector, was injured in the clashes, said her father had served for 15 years as a Marine Commando in the Indian Navy before joining Delhi Police. She alleged that on July 25, while deployed near the stage at Jantar Mantar, her father was pulled into a mob, "almost lynched," and remained unconscious for nearly four hours at Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital. "When my father's colleagues brought him home around 10 pm, his uniform was soaked in blood. It was painful to see him in that condition," she said.

Kunjal also said she was deeply distressed by the reaction on social media. "When I opened social media, my father had already been declared a criminal. Later, I learnt that those accused of attacking police personnel had approached the Supreme Court. I felt I also had to seek justice for my father. We too have equal rights as citizens, and we hope justice will be done," she said.

Lakshya Singh, son of another injured ACP, said he was shocked when he first saw his father after the head injury he suffered during the violence. "His head had been shaved, and there were stitches. I was frightened," he said, adding that his father later told the family that while many people had gathered for the protest, some individuals were intent on creating chaos.

He said it was frustrating that discussions on the incident had largely focused on allegations against the police. "Whenever I go online, I see videos portraying only the police as criminals. There is no discussion, even in Parliament, about the police personnel who were injured. We only want our side to be heard," he said.

The press conference came a day after a group of retired police officers defended Delhi Police's handling of the July 20 march, arguing that the public narrative had become one-sided and had failed to acknowledge the injuries suffered by police personnel during the clashes.

### Drone shot down over Akhnoor, along LoC

With the situation remaining volatile in Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK), the troops deployed along the International Border (IB) and the LoC in the frontier districts continue to maintain a tight vigil to prevent any misadventure at the behest of terrorist handlers.

At the same time, frequent incidents of drone incursions and infiltration bids have been attempted, facilitated by the Pakistani troops to divert the attention of the foot soldiers on the ground. Official sources claimed that since June 2026, around one dozen incidents of drone incursions and infiltration bids have been reported across the Jammu region.

### Meta India head named in FIR over posts...

Complainants say Meta did not do enough to prevent or quickly remove deepfake-style and manipulated content that could harm public figures and threaten public order.

Cybercrime officials said the investigation will look at both the people who created and shared the content, and whether the platforms' current tools for detecting AI-generated and manipulated media are effective.

### Parliament skit on Ram temple donations...

BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj alleged that it was a "conspiracy" orchestrated by Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and the entire opposition.

Among others who criticised the protest were Ram Temple trustee Mahant Dinendra Das, Hanumangarhi temple Mahant Raju Das, Ramdal Trust president Kalki Ram, spiritual leader Swami Dipankar, Mahamandaleshwar Vishnu Das Maharaj, Sant Satyendra Das Vedanti and Swami Sachchidanand Maharaj of Chitragupt Peethadhishwar.

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

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

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 prosperity," 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.

# Government confirms over 1,000 Indians nationals deported from US in 2026

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

The Indian Government has confirmed that 1,076 Indian nationals have been deported from the United States to India so far in 2026, highlighting ongoing cooperation between the two countries to address illegal migration while safeguarding lawful travel.

Speaking at a weekly media briefing on Friday, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said that the deportations are part of regular immigration enforcement by US authorities. He also noted that 3,567 Indian citizens were deported during 2025, reflecting the continued crackdown on undocumented migrants.

The United States has intensified its efforts to curb illegal immigration as part of stricter border and immigration policies introduced after President Donald Trump assumed office last year. These measures have led to increased deportations of undocumented migrants from several countries, including India.

According to official data shared by the Indian Government, the number of deportations recorded in 2025 was the highest in the past 16 years. Earlier figures show that 734 Indians were deported in 2009, with the number rising to 1,303 in 2016 and 2,042 in 2019, before reaching a record level last year.

Jaiswal said that India and the United States remain in close coordination on matters related to deportation, migration, and mobility. He emphasized that both Governments are committed to preventing illegal migration while ensuring that legal avenues for travel, education, employment, and family reunification are not disrupted.

The issue of the treatment of deported Indian nationals has also remained a priority for the Indian Government. In December last year, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar informed Parliament that New Delhi had engaged with US authorities to ensure deportees are treated with dignity. India specifically requested that women and children should not be restrained with handcuffs or chains during deportation flights.

These concerns gained prominence after reports emerged of the alleged mistreatment of 73-year-old Harjit Kaur during her deportation in 2025. Separately, the use of restraints on women and children aboard a deportation flight in February last year sparked widespread criticism, prompting India to lodge a formal protest with the US Government.

Despite these concerns, both countries continue to work together on immigration-related issues, focusing on stronger cooperation to combat illegal migration while maintaining smooth and lawful movement of people between India and the United States.

# 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 Suvendu 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

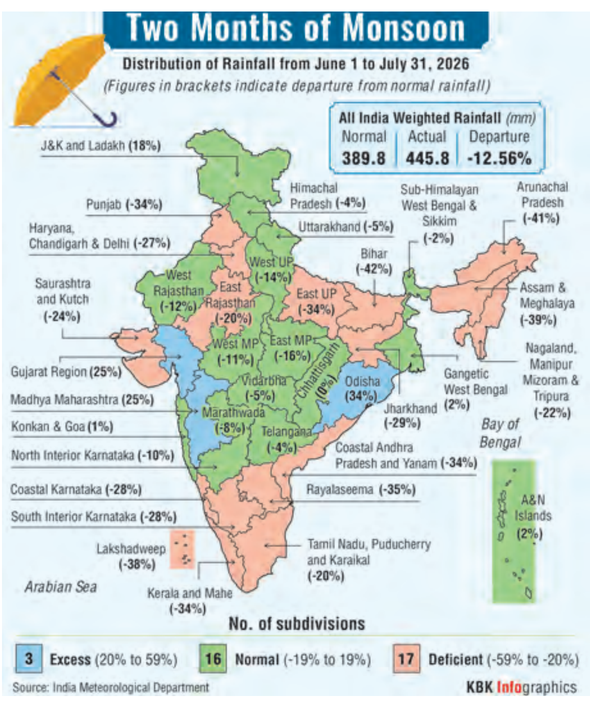
India as a whole is most likely to witness below-normal rainfall during the second half of the southwest monsoon from August to September, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its monthly forecast issued on Friday.

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-




normal rainfall is very likely over many parts of the country, except some parts of peninsular India, central India, northern parts of northwest India, and east and northeast India, where normal to above-normal rainfall is likely."

For the month of August, rainfall over the country as a whole is also expected to be 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.

# 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, Chariadeo, 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, etc.

"For the four districts of Sivasagar, Chariadeo, 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 desiltation 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, avoiding 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 hydroelectric 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 cli-


matic 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 Bhoiwada 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 Bhoiwada 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 Frida 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 Fadnavis 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 Amarnath 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 Suvendu 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 documents 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.


DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
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प्रधानमंत्री
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The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | SATURDAY | AUGUST 1, 2026



## Editor's TAKE

### Communal violence clouds Balen Shah's 100-day tenure

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

Prime Minister Balen 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 Balen 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

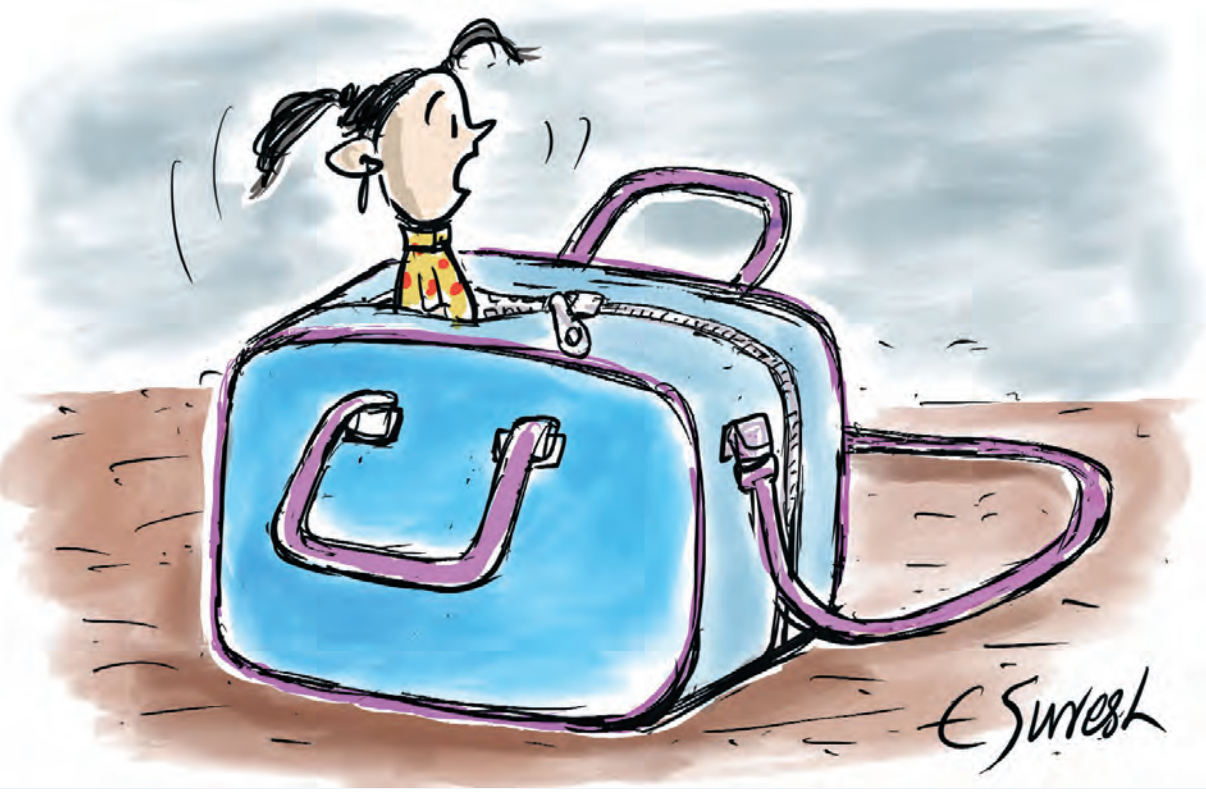
New Delhi's response should therefore be firm but restrained: reinforce border vigilance and information-sharing, remain in close contact with Kathmandu, and avoid any perception of interference in Nepal's internal affairs. India has a direct interest in a stable, democratic and inclusive Nepal, but 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 Kumari ((Jharkhand) Bhagyashree (Karnataka) one each from Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

> 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

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!

*The writer is a political and social activist*

# 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*

## PIC TALK

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



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### 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.

### 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**

The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | SATURDAY | AUGUST 1, 2026



# 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, 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.

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

# 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 Coller 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 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.

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The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | SATURDAY | AUGUST 1, 2026



# 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.

## 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)

# 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 considerable 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 Thaawarchand 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.

# Muslims offer *namaz* at site near Bhojshala complex

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Dhar

A day after the Supreme Court granted permission, Muslims offered prayers on Friday at a site near the Bhojshala-Kamal Maula 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 Maula 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 disputed Bhojshala complex. It directed the Madhya Pradesh Government to ensure that Muslims are allowed to offer *namaz* at the site between 1 and 3 pm on Friday.

Accordingly, the administration made necessary arrangements for the namaz, officials said.

The prayer time was set from 1 to 3 pm. Around 2.30 pm, more than 150 Muslims arrived for prayers, officials said. Although it was raining at that time, the worshippers offered their prayers, they said. A meeting was held prior to this between the district administration and the Muslim community. Barricades were erected around the Bhojshala complex for security purposes, the official said.

A large police force was deployed in and around Bhojshala as a precautionary measure. The prayers were offered at survey land number 612. Abdul Samad, a member

of Kamal Maulana Welfare Society, representing the Muslim side, said, "We presented our demands before the Supreme Court. They listened to them with complete seriousness and issued an order directing us to offer *namaz* at the location adjoining the Kamal Maula mosque."

They specified survey numbers 611, 612, and 596. They instructed us to arrange and offer prayers within whichever survey numbers provided, and make arrangements, he said. "By cooperating with the administration, we offered namaz on survey number 612 and relinquished survey number 611 so that no one's sentiments or faith is hurt," he said.

Additional Superintendent of Police Vijay Dawar said, "Discussions and dialogues have continuously being held with the Muslim community since Thursday evening. The decision was taken by the administration and the police department to conduct the *namaz* peacefully at the same place today."

A police force of approximately 800 to 900 personnel was deployed to facilitate offering of *namaz*, including the Special Task Force (STF). In addition, a surveillance team was deployed in sensitive areas through CCTV to maintain peace and order in the city, he said. SDM Rajkumar Haldhar said, "The administration made excellent preparations as approximately 150 Muslim brothers offered *namaz* peacefully on survey number 612."

Earlier, Dhar Collector Rajiv Ranjan Meena told reporters that all necessary administrative arrangements had been made for offering of *namaz*.

In May this year, the MP High Court, while ruling that the ancient site was a temple dedicated to Goddess Saraswati, had quashed a decades-old Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) order that had allowed the Muslim community to offer Friday prayers at the complex.

# 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 Joaymalya 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.

# 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-deepwater 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.

## 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)*

# 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 undertaken 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 the Reserve Bank suggests that efforts of some of the banks in the matter were not adequate," the central bank said in a circular, which asked the banks to review their processes so as to further strengthen their capacity and preparedness to identify, impound and report FICNs effectively.

The banks have also been advised to undertake certain specific measures.

In addition to the existing instructions, "the banks shall ensure that the branches in the districts with international borders are equipped with note authentication /sorting machines", the circular said.

# Small aluminium manufacturers hit by high cost of raw materials

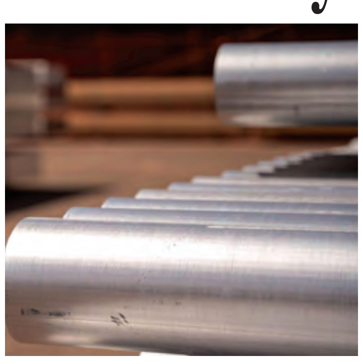
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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 continued, 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 marginally higher, extending the previous session's gains, and remained supported by earnings-driven optimism and a temporary revival in foreign institutional inflows," Ponmudi 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.

# The Pioneer

NEW DELHI | SATURDAY | AUGUST 1, 2026




## 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. 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. (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 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.

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

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)

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

**YOSHITA SINGH**
United Nations

Former Costa Rican Vice President Rebeca Grynspan

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 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 w ant speculations on that." (PTI)

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

**ASSOCIATED PRESS** London

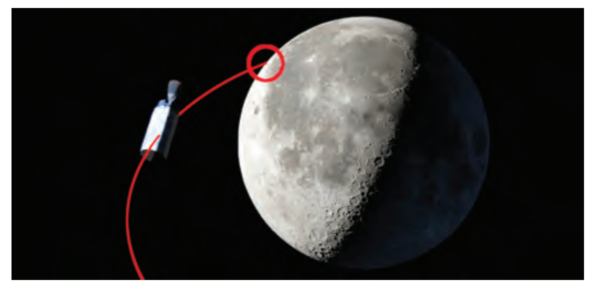
A London man has been arrested in Cyprus on suspicion of spying on a UK air force base on the Mediterranean island on behalf of Iran, British police said on Friday.

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.

# 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 upcoming 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.

# 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 withdrawing 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 leadership. Anthropic said on Friday its artificial intelligence models for cyber defence found in 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.

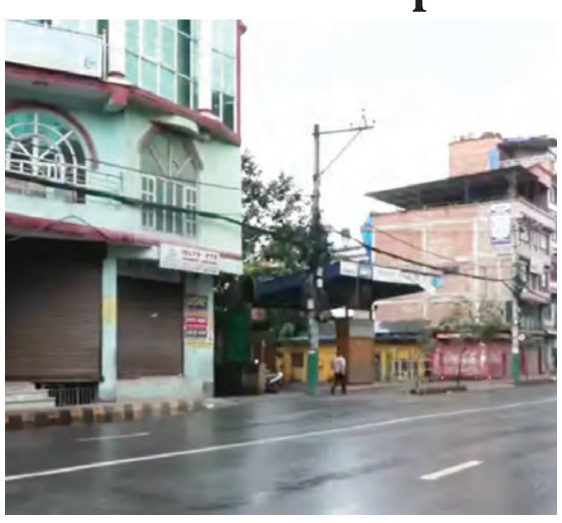
Those companies must "document certain information," said the European Commission, the bloc's tech enforcer, which reserves the right to interview AI company staff during investigations. It has also launched a Whistleblower Tool for tech workers and a Compliance Tool for tech users to confidentially 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*)

# Nepal Government 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*)

# 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 isolation.

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 speed. He also said special elections would

Min Aung Hlaing

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, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a joint press release.

# The architecture of ambition: Industrial clusters as the digital spine of economic transformation

VIRENDER KUMAR

As India accelerates its manufacturing ambitions, the fusion of intelligent infrastructure and spatial planning is forging a new era of globally competitive industrial corridors. Industrial clusters, defined by co-located firms, specialised suppliers, knowledge networks, and supporting institutions, have long been recognised as powerful drivers of economic transformation. From the Pearl River Delta to Germany's Baden-Württemberg, the evidence is consistent: geographic concentration of related industries produces productivity gains that dispersed industrial development simply cannot replicate.

For India, this logic is not new. What is unprecedented is the scale of ambition. Manufacturing currently contributes approximately 16 to 17 per cent of GDP and employs over 27 million workers, yet official policy targets a 25 per cent share as the country moves toward a developed-economy horizon. The Government's push through the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme, PM MITRA textile parks, and DMIC nodes represents a generational bet on clusters as the structural backbone of manufacturing-led growth.

Whether that ambition is realised depends on whether these clusters can be built, operationalised, and governed at the pace and quality the economy demands. The answer is increasingly technological.

**The Present State: Potential Meets Friction**

India's industrial cluster landscape is defined by a paradox. The country hosts over 350 notified Special Economic Zones, hundreds of industrial estates, and a growing network of planned corridors. Yet productivity within these clusters frequently falls short of international benchmarks. Logistics costs consume approximately 13 to 14 per cent of GDP, nearly double the share in advanced economies.

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, 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 liveability. When commercial, residential, and social infrastructures are co-planned alongside industrial zones, workforce productivity improves, attrition falls, and the cluster's ability to attract skilled talent strengthens. This live-work-play model reduces long-term maintenance costs and supports urban viability that sustains industrial activity across decades.

The transition from isolated manufacturing units to integrated industrial hubs alters the economic geography of a nation. Clusters reduce transaction costs, foster rapid skill transfer, and create a critical mass of demand that justifies high-quality shared infrastructure. This spatial agglomeration is particularly vital for MSMEs. When smaller firms are integrated into well-planned corridors, they gain access to the same reliable power, water, and logistics networks that anchor industries enjoy, catalysing a nationwide uplift in productivity.

The results are already visible. Completed Phase-I cities including Dholera, Shendra-Bidkin, IIT Greater Noida, and Vikram Udyogpuri have together allotted 350 industrial plots and attracted approximately ₹2.02 lakh crore in investments. That is credible evidence that corridor-led industrialisation can move from blueprint to balance sheet when execution is consistent.

The policy framework backing this transition reflects serious financial commitment. Public capital expenditure has grown from ₹2 lakh crore in FY2014-15 to an estimated ₹12.2 lakh crore in FY2026-27, funding a shift toward plug-and-play and walk-to-work urban-industrial models. In August 2024, the government approved 12 new NICDP projects worth ₹28,602 crore, expected to generate 1 million direct and up to 3 million indirect jobs. The BHAVYA scheme followed with ₹33,660 crore to develop 100 plug-and-play industrial parks covering utilities, value-added facilities, and worker housing.

Together with PM Gati Shakti, PM MITRA parks, and corridor-linked models, 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 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 how much is spent, but by whether transport, utilities, land, environment, and logistics data are planned together.

**Technology and AI: The Nervous System of the Cluster**

If infrastructure is the body of a well-functioning cluster, technology is its nervous system. Industry 4.0 tools, including IoT-enabled utilities, AI-driven logistics optimisation, digital twins, and GIS-based planning platforms, are no longer frontier ambitions. They are practical requirements for competitive cluster management.

The numbers are persuasive. Industrial parks deploying smart utility systems have reported energy savings of 20 to 30 per cent. Digital twin platforms have reduced design iteration time by up to 40 per cent in documented international deployments. Real-time sensor networks have cut reactive maintenance costs while improving service reliability.

Within India's cluster context, the most immediate opportunities lie in three areas: digital platforms providing real-time visibility into power availability, water pressure, and road conditions; GIS-integrated planning tools that overlay land use, utility networks, and environmental constraints for more defensible decisions; and AI-assisted compliance systems that reduce administrative burden without compromising regulatory oversight.

The technology diffusion challenge is real, particularly for MSMEs. Cost, capability, and awareness barriers mean smaller enterprises frequently cannot access what their anchor neighbours use. Shared digital infrastructure, subsidised platforms, and cluster-level data utilities are essential to prevent productivity gains from concentrating only at the top of the value chain.

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 overruns early; predictive maintenance that upgrades SCADA systems with machine learning to anticipate pump failures, transformer stress, and peak-load events; logistics optimisation through ULIP's API 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 inspections to real-time, risk-based enforcement.

But AI will only deliver if embedded within credible governance: interoperable data standards, secure access, clear accountability for automated decisions, and genuine public-purpose data sharing. In corridor development, the real question is not whether AI can be used, but whether institutions are willing to use it to improve execution rather than merely decorate policy language.

The deeper promise of industrial clusters lies in compounding effects. Well-governed corridors lower the cost of doing business, increase formal employment, deepen supplier ecosystems, improve export readiness, and widen the manufacturing footprint beyond established metros. They allow India to move from opportunistic assembly to durable ecosystem-building, where design, testing, component manufacturing, logistics, and services grow together. NICDP now spans 32 projects across 4 phases and 11 corridors, with 4 already completed and 4 near completion. If these mature into reliable industrial ecosystems, India can produce not merely more, but better: shorter lead times, stronger domestic value addition, and deeper integration into global value chains.

**The Way Forward**

Industrial clusters will define the next phase of India's manufacturing trajectory. But their transformative potential will be realised only if the physical and the digital are built together, not sequentially. For policymakers and planners, the priority is to treat technology integration not as a future upgrade but as a foundational design requirement.

Cluster development authorities that embed digital infrastructure at the planning stage rather than retrofitting 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*

# Assam Minister Pijush Hazarika reviews flood situation in Nazira

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Assam Minister for Agriculture, Irrigation and Parliamentary Affairs, Pijush Hazarika, on Friday visited the flood-affected Demow and Nazira Legislative Assembly Constituencies (LACs) of Sivasagar district to review the relief and rehabilitation measures being undertaken by the district administration. He also reviewed the initiatives taken by the Agriculture Department to assist flood-affected farmers.

Earlier in the day, the Minister, accompanied by Cabinet Minister Sushanta Borgohain, visited 2 no Bhatgaj Gaon under Demow LAC and inaugurated a community paddy seedling nursery established for flood-affected farmers.

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 commissioner. The meeting was attended by MLA of Nazira LAC Shri Mayur Borgohain, the Director of Agriculture, Assam, the District Commissioner of Sivasagar, officials of the Nazira Co-District Administration, senior officers of the Agriculture Department and other line departments.

During the meeting, Hazarika reviewed the overall flood situation, the progress of rescue and relief operations, and the measures being taken for the rehabilitation of flood-affected people. Stressing that rehabilitation is now the Government's highest priority, he directed the officials concerned to immediately initiate the reconstruction of houses that had been damaged or completely destroyed in the floods.

Hazarika observed that Nazira Legislative Assembly Constituency has been the worst affected by the recent floods. He said that rehabilitation efforts in the constituency would receive the highest priority.

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.

# GFN to boost investments in low-carbon buildings

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

As India continues to witness rapid urban growth, the demand for environmentally sustainable and energy-efficient buildings is becoming increasingly significant.

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 practices into major housing programmes such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) offers a crucial opportunity to promote sustainable development.

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 green building projects across the country.

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.

## DAILY SUDOKU

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 7 | 6 | | 1 |
| 1 | | 6 | | 9 | | | | |
| | | 7 | | | 5 | 2 | | |
| 5 | | 4 | | | 9 | | 1 | |
| 7 | 8 | | | | | | 4 | 6 |
| | 9 | | 4 | | | 3 | | 7 |
| | | 5 | 3 | | | 4 | | |
| | | | | 8 | | 1 | | 5 |
| 2 | | 3 | 9 | | | | | |

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

**HOW TO SOLVE IT**

Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9×9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3×3 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 |

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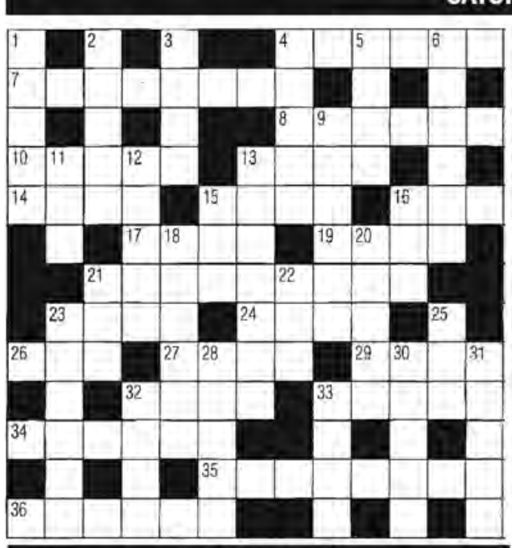
## DOUBLE CROSSWORD SATURDAY | AUGUST 1, 2026



**ACROSS**

4 They're spent making a bit of love amid the trees (6)
7 It has a steadying 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
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)

**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
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)

**SOLUTION (31.7.26)**

ACROSS
4, Fi-ve-rs
7, Flywheel
8, E-me-rge
10, A-Gi-le
13, F-ear
14, Lace
15, Miss.
16, To-p
17, A-ran
19, T-win
21, Education
23, B-ass
24, L-ac-K
26, Rot
27, Holy
29, Emit
32, Very
33, Snore
34, Nev-Ada
35, Termites
36, Popeye

DOWN
1, Offa-L
2, Cy-nic
3, Shoe
4, Flees
5, Veer
6, Region
9, Ma-stic
11, Gag (rev.)
12, Le-ads
13, Fin-ally
15, Ma-c
16, Tin
18, R-us-hed
20, Woken
21, Eat
22, T-ay
23, Bo-L-e-R-o
25, 'Air
28, O-rate
30, M-Otto
31, Tense
32, Vale
33, Sims

# IACCIA, ASSOCHAM sign MoU to strengthen India-Arab ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi


In a significant step towards advancing India-Arab economic relations, the India & Arab Countries Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture (IACCIA) and the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) on 30 July 2026 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote bilateral trade, investment, industrial collaboration, and business partnerships between India and the 22 Arab countries.

The MoU was signed by Saurabh Sanyal, Secretary General, ASSOCHAM, and Dr Waiel Awwad, Secretary General, India & Arab Countries Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture (IACCIA).

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.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Dr Waiel Awwad, Acting Secretary General of IACCIA, emphasised that the partnership marks an important milestone in strengthening institutional cooperation between India's business community and the Arab world.

"The future of India-Arab relations must move beyond traditional trade towards long-term investment partnerships, integrated value chains, technology transfer, innovation, and sustainable economic cooperation. This MoU is not merely an agreement between two institutions; it is a commitment to creating practical business opportunities that connect Indian enterprises with the dynamic markets of the Arab world," Dr Awwad said.

The partnership also aims to enhance awareness of investment opportunities created by India's growing network of trade agreements and strengthen engagement with sovereign wealth funds, financial institutions, investment agencies, chambers of commerce, and private-sector organisations across the Arab region.

The MoU underscores the shared vision of IACCIA and ASSOCHAM to build a stronger institutional bridge between India and the Arab world by fostering sustainable partnerships, encouraging cross-border investment, and creating long-term value for businesses and entrepreneurs on both sides.

# Hindustan Zinc reports record Q1 profit of ₹5,469 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi


Hindustan Zinc Limited, the world's largest integrated zinc producer and among the top 10 silver producers globally, appointed Amarendu Prakash as the chief executive officer and whole-time director of the company effective August 1.

With over three decades of experience in India's steel sector, he had previously served as the Chairman & Managing Director of SAIL from 2023 to 2026. During his tenure, he led transformative initiatives spanning operational excellence, capacity expansion, digital transformation, and organisational performance across one of India's largest steel producers.

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.

The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | SATURDAY | AUGUST 1, 2026



## 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.

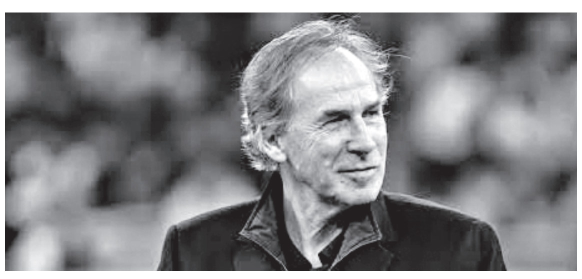
It was a swap deal with Artem Dovbyk leaving Roma for Bologna.

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)

# 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 grassroots 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 Utkrishta 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 exposure, 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 Scarlett 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.


BCCI Secretary Devajit Lon Saikia addressing media about the upcoming Assam Premier League 2026 in Guwahati and announces the cancellation of all cultural activities associated with the event in view of devastating floods in the State

## 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.

## 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.

## 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.

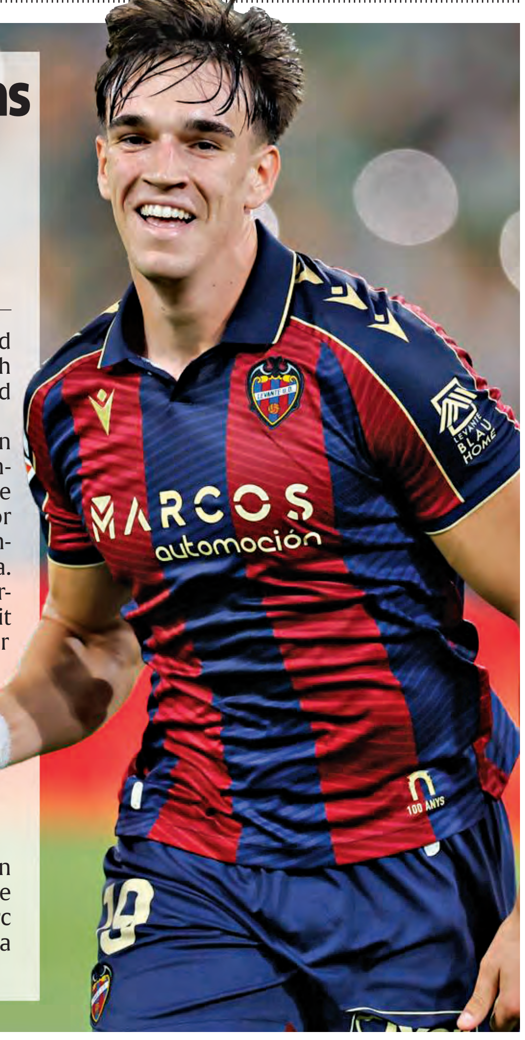
"(T)he proposed (FIFA Forward Enterprise) cannot realistically achieve the necessary broad consensus and unity required to move forward" and must be reconsidered, the AFC said.

The statement did not name Infantino yet criticised FIFA for problems beyond the content of the private equity plan plus failing to consult on 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, Ibrahima 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 Bhaskaran, 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 technical 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 discussion 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.

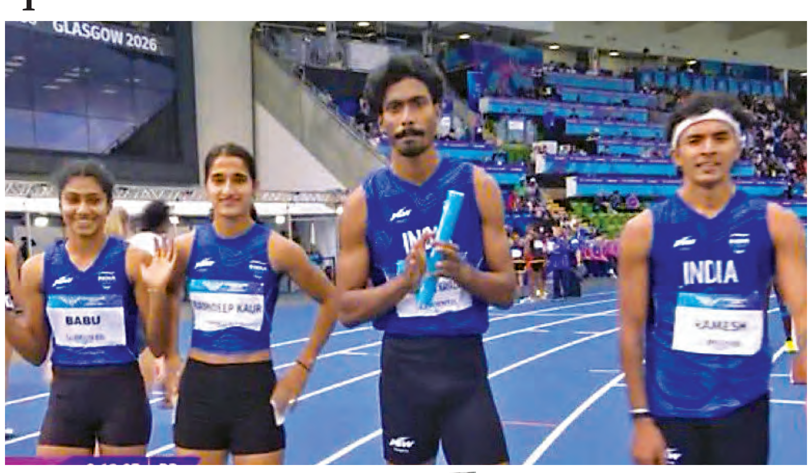
India need to win seven of their remaining nine Tests of this World Test Championship cycle in order to remain in contention for a summit clash berth.

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.

THE INDIAN QUARTET CLOCKED 3:20.98 TO TAKE THE FOURTH SPOT IN HEAT 2 TO SNEAK INTO 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.

# 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.



**Printed and published by Kushan Mitra for and on behalf of CMYK Printech Ltd., Regd Office:- 201-205, 208-210, 2nd Floor, Pratap Bhawan 5, B.S.Z. Marg, New Delhi-110002 Phone: 011-46035729, and printed at The Indian Express Ltd., A-8, Sector 7, Dist. Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) Noida-201 301, Ph: 01202470700. Executive Editor Deepak Kumar Jha. AIR SURCHARGE of ₹ 2.00 East: Calcutta, North: Leh West: Mumbai & Ahmedabad South: Bangalore & Chennai. Central : Khajuraho. Lucknow Office: 4th Floor, Sahara Shopping Centre, Faizabad Road, Lucknow-226 016. Phone:- 9415089265**