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I am with you: PM to NDA MPs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday expressed concern over the repeated disruptions of parliamentary proceedings in the ongoing Monsoon Session and said the country has been unable to listen to the talented MPs elected in recent times.

The PM said this during a breakfast meeting with over 40 MPs from NDA constituents Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI), Shiv Sena, Republican Party of India (Athawale), Rashtriya Lok Morcha, AIADMK and UPPL. These remarks came amidst speculations about the introduction of amendments to the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA) Bill and the Delimitation and Women's Reservation Bills next week.

While 20 Lok Sabha members had left the TMC and joined the little-known



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets NDA MPs, including rebel TMC MPs who joined NCPI at his residence in New Delhi on Friday

NCPI in June, as many as six Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs deserted that party and joined the Shiv Sena, led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, taking Shiv Sena's numbers to 13 in the Lower House. The NCPI has joined

the NDA and the Shiv Sena continues to be a constituent of the ruling alliance.

The Muslim MPs of the NCPI — Khalilur Rahaman, Yusuf Pathan and Abu Taher Khan — who skipped the NDA parliamentary party meeting

'Mangal Milan' twice also attended the breakfast meeting. They had separately met Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday. Those who attended the breakfast meeting with the Prime Minister included RPI

(Athawale) chief and Union Minister Ramdas Athawale, Rashtriya Lok Morcha president and Rajya Sabha member Upendra Kushwaha, AIADMK leader M Thambi Durai, who is a Rajya Sabha member, and UPPL chief and Rajya Sabha member Pramod Boro.

Union Health Minister JP Nadda and BJP president Nitin Nabin were also present at the breakfast, which was a vegetarian affair along with desserts like *payosh* (*kheer*).

NCPI MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar said they were "overwhelmed" seeing the prime minister's knowledge, the way he treated them.

Modi is also learnt to have told the MPs that they should not worry about their needs for the development of their respective constituencies. "I am with you. The NDA is a family. We stand with our constituent parties," he is learnt to have told the MPs.

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Centre directs Meta to curb deepfakes

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has asked Meta to share a detailed plan to update its algorithms and improve content moderation. According to Government sources, the goal is to stop the spread of propaganda, deepfakes, and illegal material on Meta's platforms.

Senior Government officials gave these instructions to Meta representatives during meetings this week. Meta's technical team described how they currently handle harmful online content. Officials asked Meta to make specific changes to its algorithms to slow the spread of propaganda, deepfakes, altered images, and other illegal or manipulated material.

Sources said the Government also told Meta to fully follow India's data localisation rules and remove flagged content more quickly. The Centre asked Meta to work more closely with Quick Response Teams (QRTs) in different Government departments. This should help find and remove deepfake videos, altered images, and other mis-

leading content faster, so online misinformation can be addressed in real time.

Officials also said that as concerns grow about the misuse of artificial intelligence to create fake content, platforms MUST be more accountable. They stressed that social media companies need to use technology to stop the spread of manipulated material and must follow the law and regulations under the Information Technology Act.

These meetings come as the Government pays more attention to Meta after recent controversies. These include the temporary restriction of a video post by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and reports of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and deepfake content on Instagram and Facebook. Meta's top executives were asked about its content recommendation algorithms, whether it follows Indian laws instead of foreign ones, and what steps it takes to stop bots and illegal material. The company admitted there are gaps in its systems and told officials it is "working hard" to fix problems with deepfakes, CSAM, and related issues.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Mexico orders Meta to pay \$567M over kids' safety

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Santa Fe

A New Mexico court has ordered Instagram and Facebook parent company Meta to pay \$567 million to address harms to young people from its platforms in the second phase of a landmark trial the social media giant lost in March.

In a ruling late on Thursday, Judge Bryan Biedscheid said the bulk of the money — \$420 million — will be used for treatment services for young people. The rest will go toward awareness and pre-



vention, screening services and other costs over the next five years.

In the first phase, jurors had ordered \$375 million in civil penalties against Meta, determining that it knowingly harmed children's mental health and concealed what it knew about child sexual exploitation on its platforms.

In the second phase, prosecutors had asked the judge to impose fundamental changes at Meta aimed at reining in addictive features, improving age verification and preventing child sexual exploitation through default privacy settings and closer oversight.

The court said federal children's privacy laws prevent Meta from applying age-verification tools to children under 13.

The Bystander



How CBI exposed NEET-UG 2026 paper leak plot

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has detailed in its chargesheet how the NEET (Undergraduate) 2026 question paper was leaked weeks before the exam. According to the agency, three subject experts hired by the National Testing Agency (NTA) were behind the leak. It began in April 2026 during the confidential translation, back-translation, and proof-reading work at the NTA headquarters in Delhi.



The three experts were Manisha Gurunath Mandhare, who handled Botany and Zoology; Pralhad Vithalrao Kulkarni, also known as PV Kulkarni, who worked on Chemistry; and Manisha Sanjay Havaladar, who was responsible for Physics. They used their authorised access to take questions from the master sets. Investigators found that security in the confidential section on the first floor of the NTA office was not strict enough.

Experts were not checked when entering or leaving, and plain sheets meant for rough work were reportedly misused. Kulkarni, who did back-translation on 135 Chemistry questions from March 31 to April 2, is accused of writing short versions of the questions and answer options on small pieces of paper, which he hid and took out of the office.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

RBI curbs coercive loan recovery practices

RAJESH KUMAR
■ New Delhi

Borrowers who default on personal, home or vehicle loans no longer have to worry about the risk of their mobile phones or laptops being disabled by banks as a recovery tool, besides recovery agents hounding them.

Issuing this strict instruction, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has prohibited recovery agents from using abusive, threatening or intimidating language. Anonymous calls, repeated harassment, public humiliation or threats involving a borrower's family, assets or reputation are strictly forbidden. Besides restricting the use of device-locking technology, the rules also lay down fresh standards for recovery agents, the handling of borrower information, and the use of technology during the recovery process.

The RBI has barred banks from turning



off borrowers' laptops, tablets, and mobile phones except in cases where the device itself was financed by the lender.

Under its new loan recovery framework, banks and regulated lenders will have to follow stricter rules on how they contact borrowers, what recovery agents can say, when they can call and how they conduct field visits. Recovery agents are prohibited from using abusive, threatening or intimidating language. Anonymous calls, repeated harassment, public humiliation or threats involving

a borrower's family, assets or reputation are strictly forbidden.

Effective 1 January 2027, the RBI's new guidelines on 'Conduct of Regulated Entities in Recovery of Loans and Engagement of Recovery Agents' have been notified. The new guidelines lay down detailed rules governing how lenders and recovery agents can communicate with borrowers, conduct field visits, and even use technology to recover dues.

The new norms prohibited loan recovery agents from using harsh measures, such as use of abusive language, excessive calling or use of violence. Under the revised norms, recovery-related calls and visits will generally be permitted only between 8 am and 7 pm. Calls or visits outside these hours will be allowed only if the borrower has specifically requested or authorised them.

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Delhi power subsidy fails to reach the needy

RAJESH KUMAR
■ New Delhi

Delhi's electricity subsidy policy has failed to target the deserving and disadvantaged section of the population and instead its benefits are reaped by higher-consumption-bracket consumers.

With an outgo of ₹3,161 crore in 2022-23, more than 30 lakh consumers, within the 0 to 200 unit consumption bracket, received an average per connection subsidy of ₹6,000 per annum, whereas approximately 16.60 lakh consumers, with consumption of more than 200 units, received approximately 70



per cent higher average subsidy per connection of over ₹10,000 per annum, according to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report tabled by the Chief Minister Rekha Gupta in the

Delhi Assembly on Friday. The report said the rationale for having a high threshold value of 400 units of consumption, which covered approximately 80 per cent of domestic consumers, was

not found on record.

Audit observed that the subsidy policy of GNCTD for the power sector did not target the deserving and disadvantaged section of the population and paid it to nearly the entire domestic consumer base. Audit observed that the actual subsidy outgo per consumer was much higher for higher consumption bracket consumers. The audit report covered a period of four fiscal years from 2019-20 to 2022-23 when AAP was in power.

The report said subsidies constituted nearly 10 per cent of Delhi Government's total revenue expenditure.

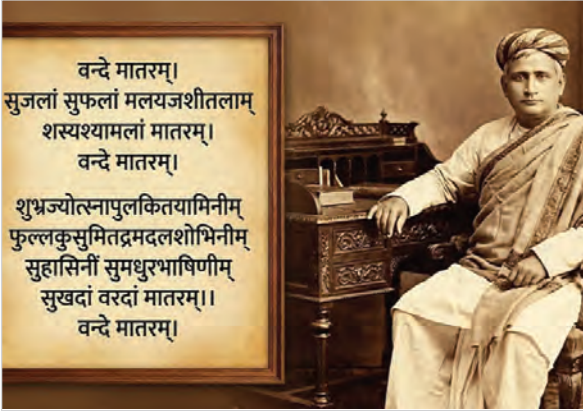
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80th Independence Day to feature Vande Mataram

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Vande Mataram will echo at the Red Fort ramparts for the first time on the 80th Independence Day, and all six stanzas of the national song will be played before the National Anthem at the conclusion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address.

The invitation cards issued by the Defence Ministry for the upcoming ceremony include all the stanzas of Vande Mataram. It will enable the invitees to sing along with the national song when it is played, it was learnt. They will also have to stand in attention.



Top ministers, military officers, bureaucrats, diplomats, students, and special guests, who have excelled across fields, attend the

ceremony and receive the invitation cards.

It comes just days after Parliament passed the Prevention of Insults to

National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which extends to Vande Mataram the legal protection previously available only to the National Anthem.

The Bill makes intentionally preventing the singing of the national song or disturbing an assembly engaged in its rendition punishable with imprisonment of up to three years, a fine, or both. A second conviction carries a minimum prison term of one year. The Legislation is awaiting Presidential assent. The rendition of Vande Mataram is now mandatory at official ceremonies.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

PM-Badal meet fuels reunion buzz

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal on Friday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, igniting speculation about the possibility of the Punjab-based party joining hands with the BJP again ahead of the Punjab Assembly elections next year. The SAD left the NDA six years ago over the farm laws issue.

Badal met the Prime Minister at his office in the Parliament House complex, sources aware of the meeting said. The details of the meeting were not known immediately but



the interaction ignited speculations that the SAD may join hands again with the BJP.

The SAD was one of the oldest constituents of the NDA with more than 20 years of association when it left the alliance in 2020 over

the three agriculture laws, which were later withdrawn by the Modi Government. Badal's wife and Lok Sabha MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal was also part of the Modi Government as a minister with Cabinet rank.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Man found dead inside locked car

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Lucknow

A 36-year-old employee of a digital lending company was found dead inside a locked car near the Saleh Nagar crossing under the Ashiyana police station in the early hours of Friday.

According to police, the matter came to light around 1am when the local residents noticed a foul smell emanating from a parked car and informed the police about it.

A police team rushed to the spot. Upon inspection, officers found the vehicle forced open the vehicle's door and found that the man inside had already passed away.

The exact cause of death will be known after the autopsy report is received.

Police combed the crime scene, gathered vital physical evidence and sent the body for an autopsy. Investigators traced the car's registration to Rae Bareilly. Authorities then located an identity card inside the vehicle and dialled the mobile number printed on it. The phone call connected them to the victim's brother, Sativendra Singh,

who identified the deceased as Gyanendra Singh (36).

The victim originally hailed from Nirala Nagar near the Hanuman Temple in Rae Bareilly but was currently living in a rented house in Pawanpuri area of Devikhera in Ashiyana.

During the preliminary inquiry, police learned that Gyanendra was married and is survived by his wife and a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter. He was working in Lucknow for a private company, a digital lending and fintech company that provides personal loans and other online financial credit services. Family members of the deceased have arrived at the scene following the tragic news. "The actual cause of death can be confirmed only on the basis of the post-mortem report and other scientific and physical evidence," the police said. Police said an investigation was underway.

Protest over CRPF jawan's death

Tension prevailed at the Budheshwar crossing on Friday early morning when family members and relatives of a deceased Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)

jawan blocked the Hardoi highway. The protestors, led by the jawan's wife, demanded a fair investigation and a second post-mortem examination, raising serious doubts about the official claim of suicide.

Vineet Kumar Singh Sikarwar (37) of Purvabajirao village in Kothawan area of Hardoi, was posted with the 112th Battalion of the CRPF in Manipur. On Friday around 3:15 am, his mortal remains arrived at the Amausi Airport in Lucknow and were being taken to his native village in Hardoi. The jawan's wife, Neha Singh, along with several women, stopped the ambulance carrying her husband's body at Budheshwar Chowk, leading to a massive traffic jam on the highway that lasted for about two hours. Neha alleged that her husband was being forced to perform duties despite being ill. She claimed that he had a high fever and body aches for the last three to four days, but he was not granted leave. While official reports from Manipur claimed that Vineet died of a gunshot wound fired from a personal weapon, the family strongly contested this version. Neha questioned how a person could possibly

shoot themselves three times in the chest. Pointing out the severity of the wounds, the family demanded a thorough probe and a fresh post-mortem examination. On receiving information about the blockade, senior police officials, including the ADCP, ACP Kakori, and police forces from Para, Kakori and nearby areas, rushed to the spot. After nearly two hours of persuasion and assurances of a fair inquiry by the administration, the family agreed to clear the highway and proceeded towards Hardoi with the body.

Vineet Kumar Singh Sikarwar joined the CRPF in 2009 and had recently been transferred to Jammu and Kashmir before being posted to Manipur. He is survived by his wife Neha, his 12-year-old son Rudra Pratap, and his brothers. Vineet's father, Deshraj Singh, was on his way to Baba Baidyanath Dham carrying a Kanwar when he received the news of his youngest son's death. He had to cut short his pilgrimage and return midway.

The mortal remains were later taken to Hardoi for the final rites, accompanied by an assistant commander and platoon from the CRPF Battalion.

Man sexually assaults woman, arrested

The police on Friday arrested a 40-year-old man for allegedly sexually assaulting a woman after false promise to marry her and subsequently threatening and abusing her.

The arrest was made by the police in the Naka area.

According to the police, the victim filed a complaint at the Naka Hindola police station. Based on her statement, an FIR was registered under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including Sections 69, 352, and 351(3), against the accused, Akhilesh Mishra.

The complainant alleged that Mishra established physical relations with her under the false pretext of marriage. When she confronted him later, he subjected her to verbal abuse, threatened to frame her in false cases and even gave her death threats.

On Friday, the police team apprehended the accused, Akhilesh Mishra of Shahnsahpur Jakhini under Rajatalab police station in Varanasi district, from a hotel in Pandariba. The arrested accused has been sent to jail and further legal proceedings are underway.

Man killed as car catches fire

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Lucknow

A 32-year-old car owner lost his life after his vehicle suddenly caught fire on National Highway-24 (the Lucknow-Sitapur highway) under the BKT police station on Thursday night.

An emergency alert was received around 10:30 pm stating that a Maruti car had burst into flames near the Virendra Dharm Kanta close to Saraiya Bazaar. The police and a fire brigade team

rushed to the scene. Although the firefighters brought the blaze under control, the vehicle was completely gutted. On inspecting the wreckage, authorities found the charred body of the car's owner on the driver's seat. The deceased was identified as Almas Haque (32) of Khurram Nagar. Police examined the accident site and collected evidence.

The identity of the vehicle owner was verified through the e-challan app database

and the family was informed about the tragedy.

The police sent the body for an autopsy. Authorities have launched a detailed inquiry to determine the exact technical or mechanical causes behind the sudden fire. Police confirmed that no complaint has been submitted by the family so far. Further legal and investigative actions will be executed strictly based on post-mortem examination report, available forensic evidence, and any complaint received.

One hurt as dumper rams into truck

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Lucknow

A dumper belonging to the Lucknow Swachhata Abhiyan (LSA) rammed into a stationary truck from behind on the Lucknow Ring Road early Friday morning.

The accident took place near the Chilouli underpass around 4:15 am.

The impact of the collision was so severe that the front cabin of the LSA dumper was badly crushed, trapping the driver inside.

On getting information, police, fire service personnel, and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) teams rushed to the spot.

The teams pulled the trapped driver out of the

mangled cabin.

The injured driver was identified as Ganesh (40) of Bharawan. He was rushed to the Trauma Centre and is undergoing treatment there.

The collision caused a temporary traffic jam on the Ring Road. The police removed the damaged vehicles from the road to restore normal traffic flow.

Cyber fraudsters hack BDO's CUG number, demand money

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Lucknow

Cyber fraudsters hacked the Mohanlalganj block development officer's (BDO) official (CUG) mobile number and demanded thousands of rupees by sending WhatsApp messages to panchayat secretaries and others. The scam was exposed only after recipients, surprised by messages from the BDO's official number, called him to verify the details. Upon learning of the incident, the BDO lodged a complaint at the police station and demanded action. On Friday morning, fraudsters hacked the BDO's official mobile number and sent WhatsApp messages to his acquaintances, panchayat secretaries, and others, demanding Rs 48,000.

When some recipients raised objections due to suspicion, the fraudsters threatened to hack their numbers

as well. The BDO was shocked when several people called him to ask about the messages. He immediately visited the police station, informed the officers, and demanded action. The police have initiated an investigation. BDO Shivkumar stated that the number was hacked following a phone call received on the CUG line.

Woman beaten by lover's wife

A woman who had come to meet her lover in a village in Mohanlalganj was brutally beaten and left bloodied by his wife. The injured woman was treated at the CHC where she required 38 stitches across her head, hands and palms. She has lodged an FIR accusing her lover's wife and family members of the brutal assault.

Meanwhile, police officers investigating the case were

astonished to learn the details of the romantic affair.

A young woman residing in a village in Mohanlalganj had been called by her alleged lover to meet him near a forest area.

It is alleged that instead of the lover, his wife arrived at the scene; and upon seeing the mistress, she flew into a rage and attacked her. She reportedly beat the woman severely with sticks and clubs, causing a head injury. She threatened her with dire consequences if she attempted to her husband again.

Villagers nearby rushed to intervene upon witnessing the assault and informed the police. The police arrived at the scene and transported the injured woman to the community health centre.

A first information report has been registered based on the injured woman's complaint, and an investigation is underway.

The Pioneer CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I Sultan Ali S/o Anvar Ali DOB 22.07.2001 Azad Nagar Bilhaur 209202 have changed my name to Mo Sultan Ali S/o Anwar Ali DOB 21.07.2001, for all future purposes.

NOTICE

My surname has been incorrectly recorded as AGARAWAL, whereas the correct spelling is AGARWAL. In the future, I should be known as ANJU AGARWAL W/o. Shri Vineet Kumar Agarwal. R/o.111/460, Brahm Nagar, Kanpur.

NOTICE

I, SHAKRA BANO, D/o Shri Sharafat Hussain Khan, W/o Syed Ahad Ahmad Ashrafi, R/o 85/24-A, Cooper Ganj, Kanpur Nagar, declare that SHAKRA BANO and SHAKIRA BANO are both my names. Henceforth, I shall be known and identified as SHAKRA BANO for all future purposes.

NOTICE

I am changing my son's name from 'Prinshu' to 'Pranshu Mishra'. The same name should be recorded in all government, non-government, educational, and other official records. Both names refer to the same person. Anantaram, son of Devnarayan, resident of Kanhaiyyadeen Purwa, Ramlok, Dhaurahra, Kheri.

NOTICE

my name is wrongly recorded as SANJAY AGARWAL in some documents, my correct name, as per my PAN Card ,Aadhaar Card, is SANJAY AGGARWAL. Henceforth, I shall be known as SANJAY AGGARWAL for all future purposes.S/o Shri Trilok Chand Aggarwal, R/o 401A, Jyoti Heights, Juhı Kalan, Hamirpur Road, Kanpur.

NOTICE

This is to inform the general public that Unit Nos. 23, 24, 25 and Unit No. 218, Kapoorthala Complex, Aliganj, Lucknow, were allotted to Mrs. Usha Tandon, wife of the Late Shri Hari Om Tandon, originally residing at 530/34, Sheikhpur Bada Chandganj, Lucknow, and presently residing at C-718, Sector-C, Mahanagar, P.S. Hasanganj, Lucknow.Mrs. Usha Tandon passed away on 18 October 2025. Her daughter, Namrata Tandon, is now the legal heir entitled to the above-mentioned property. Apart from her, there is no other legal heir of the deceased.If any person has any objection to the transfer of the above property in the name of the above-mentioned legal heir, they should submit their objection, along with supporting evidence, to the undersigned within 15 days of the publication of this notice by Registered Post. A copy of the objection should also be sent by Registered Post to:Krishna Colonisers Pvt. Ltd., 1, Naval Kishore Road, Hazratganj, Lucknow. Any objection received after the prescribed period will not be accepted. **Namrata Tandon Daughter of Late Mrs. Usha Tandon Resident of: C-718, Sector-C, Mahanagar, P.S. Hasanganj, Lucknow.**

NOTICE

It is hereby informed to the general public that my name was previously written as (RAJAT SRIVASTAVA) which has now been changed/updated to (RAJAT). In the future, I shall be known and recognized by this name (RAJAT).

सूचना

मैंने अपना नाम मुकीन (MUKIN) से बदलकर मुकीम (MUKEEM) कर लिया है। भविष्य में मेरे सभी सरकारी, गैर सरकारी व अन्य अभिलेखों में मुझे मुकीम (MUKEEM) के नाम से ही जाना जाये। ग्राम व पोस्ट- बसुदह, थाना- सदरपुर, तहसील-बिसवाँ, सीतापुर।

सूचना

मैंने अपना नाम सुफियान (SUFYIAN) से बदलकर मो० सुफियान खान (MOHD SUFYIAN KHAN) कर लिया है। भविष्य में मेरे सभी सरकारी, गैर सरकारी व अन्य अभिलेखों में मुझे मो० सुफियान खान (MOHD SUFYIAN KHAN) के नाम से ही जाना जाये। ग्राम व पोस्ट-बसुदह, थाना- सदरपुर, तहसील-बिसवाँ, सीतापुर।

NOTICE

I, Abhilash Jain resident of Saravgi, Kasba & post Dariyabad District Barabanki UP state that my minor daughter correct name is Pankhudi Jain. Her name has been wrongly recorded as Aakshi Jain on the Aadhaar Card. Her all the educational Certificates recorded as Pankhudi Jain. In future she must be known as Pankhudi Jain.

NOTICE

My daughter's school records incorrectly mention my name as "Deepika Rajpoot". However, my correct name, as recorded in my Aadhaar Card and other official documents, is "DIIPIKA RAJPOOT". Therefore, I kindly request that the spelling of my name in my daughter's school records be corrected from "Deepika Rajpoot" to "DIIPIKA RAJPOOT. Dipika Rajpoot W/o Gaurav Kumar Rajpoot, R/o. 355/51, Saripura, Alam Nagar, Lucknow-226017

NOTICE

I, Manju Shukla, widow and daughter of Ex-Serviceman (Late) Naib Subedar Krishna Nand Bajpai, Service No. JC159196L, R/o 1043/31, Dshli Sujanpur, Kanpur Nagar, state that my name and DOB have been incorrectly recorded in my father's service records as Manju Rani and 27 Jan 1970. My correct name is Manju Shukla and my correct DOB is 27 Jun 1970, as recorded in my Aadhaar Card and PAN Card, for all future purposes.

Morning walker deprived of gold chain

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Lucknow

A morning walker fell victim to a brazen chain-snatching incident near the Janta Inter College under the Gudamba police station on Thursday.

According to police reports, the crime took place around 7 am. The victim was identified as Dr Pawan Kapoor, a native of Lakhimpur Kheri. He currently resides in Sector-J of Jankipuram area in Lucknow.

Preliminary investigations reveal that Dr Kapoor was taking his routine morning walk in the lane behind his residence when two unidentified individuals riding a two-wheeler, both wearing helmets, approached him. As they passed by, one of them snatched the gold chain

from his neck before speeding away from the scene.

On receiving an emergency alert a police team rushed to the location.

Authorities are currently reviewing footage from multiple CCTV cameras installed in and around the neighbourhood to track down the escape route of the suspects and identify the vehicle used in the crime. Police have stated that an official first information report (FIR) will be registered under the relevant sections of the law upon receiving a complaint from the victim. Special police teams have been deployed to crack the case.

One held for attacking man

The Lucknow Police on Friday arrested a key

Youth attacked over old rivalry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Lucknow

A youth was allegedly beaten with sticks and iron rods by four people in Bhairampur village of Nigohan due to an old election-related rivalry.

The police registered a case against all four named accused on Friday following a complaint by the victim, Anil Kumar of Bhairampur in Meerapurwa.

He stated that the incident took place on around 7:30 pm August 4. He had gone to a shop near the Bhairampur culvert to buy provisions.

According to the complaint, four locals, Khushiram, Akul, Mintu and Ramesh, surrounded him and launched a brutal assault using sticks and wooden rods, leaving him with serious injuries. When the victim tried to resist, the accused hurled abuses, issued death threats and fled the scene. Police said that a search is underway to apprehend the suspects and further legal proceedings are ongoing.

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सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि मेरे पुत्र का सही नाम मिहिर राज सिंह (MIHIR RAJ SINGH) पुत्र चरन सिंह है। जो उसके शैक्षिक अभिलेख में अंकित है। बुद्धिधर्म मेरे पुत्र के आधार सं. XXXXXXXX8164 में उसका नाम तेजस राज सिंह अंकित हो गया है जो कि गलत है। भविष्य मे मेरे पुत्र को उसके सही नाम मिहिर राज सिंह पुत्र चरन सिंह के नाम से जाना व पहचाना जाए। एतद द्वारा प्रमाणित किया जाता है कि उपरोक्त सम्बन्ध में विधिक औपचारिकताये स्वयं मेरे द्वारा पूर्ण की गई है। **चरन सिंह पुत्र नरू लाल प्लाट नं-14 के नं-28602683 पटल पुरम, नियर गायत्री मंदिर गोमतीनगर, लखनऊ उत्तर प्रदेश-226010**

Children made to clean school roof; BSA orders inquiry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Lucknow

A serious case of negligence regarding child safety has come to light at the Lalumar Primary School in Mohanlalganj.

On Friday, young students were made to climb onto the school roof to clean it.

Villagers captured the footage of the children performing this hazardous task — despite the presence of overhead power lines — and the video went viral on social media.

The viral video caused a stir within the Basic Education Department, prompting the district basic education officer to order an investigation.

Villagers allege that the children were sent to the roof during the rainy season without any safety precautions and a major tragedy could have occurred had a child slipped or come into contact with the live power lines.

The controversy escalated when parents alleged that, after the video went viral, the school's headmistress and other teachers visited their homes and threatened to strike out the names of the videographers' children from the school rolls.

Public outrage grew further after a video of this alleged threat also circulated on social media.

Villagers state that the school building has long

been in a dilapidated state; the walls are damp, the paintwork has peeled off, and necessary repairs have been ignored.

They allege that the school's condition has not improved despite the receipt of the composite grant (funds for school maintenance).

Block Education Officer Sushil Kumar stated that complaints had previously been received against the headmistress, and she had also been found absent during inspections.

He added that the utilisation of the composite grant would be investigated and a report on the entire matter would be prepared and sent to the district basic educa-

tion officer for further action.

Tools stolen

On Thursday night, a thief raided a carpenter's workshop in the Mau area of Mohanlalganj and escaped with tools and machinery worth lakhs of rupees.

After identifying the accused through CCTV footage from nearby houses, the police apprehended him and brought him to the station. Ashok Sharma, a resident of Mau in Mohanlalganj, is a carpenter who runs a workshop near his home. On Thursday night, an unidentified thief entered the workshop and stole tools and machinery valued at approximately Rs 2 lakh.

Cash, valuables looted from house

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Kanpur

Armed criminals raided the house of a transgender person and looted cash and valuables worth lakhs of rupees in Shastri Nagar near Dakari village under the Gangaghat police station of Unnao late Thursday night.

The criminals took the transgender person and the driver hostage, assaulted them, and fled after looting approximately Rs 10 lakh in cash, 100 grams of gold and an Apache bike.

The accused also took the DVR from the CCTV cameras with them.

The victim, Vaishali, had been living in this house with driver, Mohammad Asif, for the past eight years. Around 2 am, three to four miscreants entered the premises, took both of them hostage at gunpoint, tied their hands and feet with ropes and beat them severely, leaving them injured.

The miscreants ransacked

the cupboards and stole approximately Rs 10 lakh in cash, 100 grams of gold jewellery and an Apache bike parked outside the house. The criminals even took the DVR of the CCTV cameras installed in the house.

After the miscreants fled, the victims somehow untied their ropes and called UP 112 to inform the police.

Upon receiving the information, the PRV, the local outpost and the Gangaghat police station in charge arrived at the scene.

Superintendent of Police Jaiprakash Singh and Circle Officer Vinny Singh also visited the scene. SP Jaiprakash Singh stated that the case is being investigated based on the victim's complaint.

Two arrested

Two inter-district ganja smugglers were arrested in Bidhnu police station area late Thursday night.

They were identified as Rohit and Shivam. Police

recovered approximately 219 kg of ganja from their possession. They had hidden the contraband in the trunks of two cars.

Police investigation revealed that the ganja was being brought from Odisha and transported to Chitrakoot and surrounding districts. Police are now investigating to uncover the entire syndicate.

Worker electrocuted

A contract employee was electrocuted while installing a smart meter in Colonelganj police area.

Anshuman Sharma (22), son of Tilak Sharma of Barra Vishwa Bank, a technician at a Kesco-affiliated company, worked as a smart meter installer.

According to family members, Anshuman had gone to a house in the Chhote Mian Hata area on Thursday to install a smart meter. It is alleged that after installing the meter, company officials pressured

him to reconnect the electricity connection.

It was reported that while trying to connect a broken underground cable, he received a severe electric shock and became stuck to the wire. Bystanders freed him with sticks and rushed him to the hospital in a critical condition, where he died during treatment.

Te family members and colleagues gathered at the post-mortem house on Friday and created a ruckus, demanding action against company officials and compensation of Rs 20 lakh. They claimed that the employee was forced to perform work that was not his responsibility.

They also created a ruckus, alleging misconduct by the police.

After nearly two hours of discussions, the company provided immediate financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh to the family of the deceased and also assured them of government assistance.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby brought to the notice of the public at large, that, Original Lease Deed dated 03.08.2015, registered as document no.13905 executed by UPSIDA, favor of M/s Agro Food Industries in respect of Industrial Plot No. E-16, admeasuring 4227.50 Sq. Mtrs., situated at Unnao Sileh, Tehsil Sadar, Distt. Unnao, Uttar Pradesh has lost/not available, as confirmed by UPSIDA vide Letter dated 07.07.2026. The Public at large is hereby informed that M/s Agro Food Industries (partnership firm) who has availed and for shall avail credit facilities from HDFC Bank Ltd. by way of mortgage on Industrial Plot No. E-16, admeasuring 4227.50 Sq. Mtrs., situated at Unnao Sileh, Tehsil Sadar, Distt. Unnao, Uttar Pradesh, after publication of this notice. Any person, who comes in knowledge or possession of said original lease deed, may please return the same to above mentioned property address or at below mentioned address of Advocate. Any person or authority dealing with the said document and / or the aforesaid Property and/or deriving any benefit by impersonation or claiming any interest in the aforesaid Property on the basis of said lease deed or at in any manner whatsoever, he/she/it shall do so at his/her/its own cost, expenses and risk or may also send his/her/their claims in writing to the undersigned along with documentary evidence in support of the claim within 15 days. **Sushil Kumar Singh (Advocate)** 121, Ansal Chsl., Bhilai, Came Place, New Delhi-110085

**उत्तर प्रदेश पावर ट्रांसमिशन कारपोरेशन लिमिटेड**
कार्यालय अधीक्षण अभियन्ता
विद्युत परांपेग मण्डल-द्वितीय, कानपुर
निविदा सूचना

निविदा संख्या एवं कार्य का संक्षिप्त विवरण
जेम बिड संख्या- GEM/2026/B/7879716, विद्युत परांपेग खण्ड-द्वितीय, कानपुर के अन्तर्गत विभिन्न उपकेन्द्रों पर 120 वॉट की एल०वी०ओ० आउटडोर स्ट्रीट लाइटों की आपूर्ति का कार्य। जेम-निविदा के प्रथम भाग के खुलने की तिथि- 20.08.2026 है। समय- 16:30 बजे, जेम बिड संख्या- GEM/2026/B/ 7883058, विद्युत परांपेग खण्ड-द्वितीय, कानपुर के अन्तर्गत 132के०वी० विद्युत उपकेन्द्र घाटमपुर पर 132 के०वी० घाटमपुर टाँएस०एस० 'बे'- द्वितीय के निर्माण एवं सम्बन्धित सामग्री की आपूर्ति का कार्य। धरोहर धनराशि रु० 7000/- (रु० सात हजार मात्र)। जेम-निविदा के प्रथम भाग के खुलने की तिथि- 21.08.2026 है। समय 14:30 बजे, जेम बिड संख्या- GEM/2026/B/ 7883613, विद्युत परांपेग खण्ड-द्वितीय, कानपुर के अन्तर्गत 132 के०वी० विद्युत उपकेन्द्र घाटमपुर पर 132के०वी० घाटमपुर-घाटमपुर टाँएस०एस० एकल परिपथ लाइन को द्वि-परिपथ लाइन में बदलने (स्ट्रिंगिंग) का कार्य। धरोहर धनराशि रु० 30000/- (रु० तीस हजार मात्र)। जेम-निविदा के प्रथम भाग के खुलने की तिथि- 21.08.2026 है। समय 13:30 बजे, जेम बिड संख्या- GEM/2026/B/7885363, विद्युत परांपेग खण्ड-द्वितीय, कानपुर के अन्तर्गत 220 के०वी० विद्युत उपकेन्द्र नौकनरा पर मेरिटेन्स कार्य हेतु सामग्री की आपूर्ति का कार्य। जेम-निविदा के प्रथम भाग के खुलने की तिथि- 21.08.2026 है। समय 14:30 बजे। विस्तृत विवरण साईट <https://gem.gov.in> पर उपलब्ध है, अंग्रेज़ समस्त सूचनायें बेबसाइट पर ही प्रदर्शित की जायेंगी।
अधीक्षण अभियन्ता
विद्युत परांपेग मण्डल-द्वितीय, कानपुर
पत्रांक:310 / वि०पार०म०डि०(का०) /TR/ टी०-1 दिनांक: 07.08.2026
"राष्ट्र हित में विजली बचाए"

CM reaffirms govt’s commitment to welfare of weavers, artisans

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday reaffirmed the state government’s commitment to the welfare of weavers and artisans, stating that the handloom and powerloom sector provides livelihood to nearly three million people across the state.

Addressing the National Handloom Day celebrations and the Sant Kabir State-Level Handloom Awards ceremony at Lok Bhavan in Lucknow, the chief minister said the government had extended electricity-related benefits worth Rs 109 crore to more than 40,000 artisans.

He emphasised the need to strengthen the sector by integrating design innovation, modern technology, improved packaging, and effective marketing to expand the global reach of Uttar Pradesh’s handloom products. During the event, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath presented awards to outstanding weavers, distributed financial assistance to beneficiaries under various government schemes, visited an exhibition showcasing handloom products, and witnessed the exchange of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with major buyers of handloom goods.

Highlighting the significance of the sector, the chief minister said around 2.5 lakh



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath honouring a woman entrepreneur during the National Handloom Day celebrations in Lucknow on Friday

families, or nearly 1.5 million people, were directly associated with handloom weaving. Including those engaged in the powerloom industry, the number rises to approximately three million, making it one of the state’s largest sources of self-employment, he added.

Calling the current period an era of healthy competition, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath urged artisans to

adapt to changing consumer preferences by embracing contemporary designs and quality improvements.

He noted that districts including Lucknow, Varanasi, Mau, Azamgarh, Bhadohi, Mirzapur, Barabanki, Ambedkar Nagar, Sant Kabir Nagar and Gorakhpur have earned national and international recognition for their traditional handicrafts.

The chief minister cited

Bhadohi’s carpet industry as an example of successful revival, saying exports from the district have grown significantly and its carpets now adorn India’s new Parliament building. He also highlighted the establishment of the Carpet Expo Centre in Bhadohi and the Trade Facilitation Centre in Varanasi to strengthen exports, design capabilities and market access. The chief minister

said the state government was also investing in skill development, noting that scholarships were provided to 450 students last year through the Varanasi Trade Facilitation Centre for training in design, technology and packaging.

He added that the PM MITRA Textile Park is being developed over 1,000 acres in Lucknow and that five textile parks named after Sant Kabir

SP RULE NEGLECTED HANDLOOM DEVELOPMENT, ARTISANS: YOGI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday launched a fresh attack on Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, alleging that the previous SP government lacked vision for development, and failed to ensure security which ended up hurting the prospects of artisans and traders.

Without naming Yadav but referring to him as ‘Babua’ while addressing a state-level function organised to mark National Handloom Day, Yogi Adityanath said some people “remain children throughout their lives”.

“Some people can never detach themselves from what they are associated with. Some remain children throughout their lives.

‘Babua’ would wake up at noon, get ready by 2 pm, head to the gym by 5 pm, and gatherings would begin after 7 pm. Their connect with the country and the world would end there,” he said in an apparent swipe at the former chief minister.

He alleged that before 2017, Uttar Pradesh suffered from poor law and order, inadequate electricity supply and poor road connectivity. “There was no security for daughters, traders, artisans or craftsmen. Markets remained deserted due to frequent riots and curfews, directly affecting handloom workers, artisans, students and women,” he said. Yogi alleged that the previous SP government had “no interest in jobs or development” and that available resources were “looted by one family”.

are being planned across Uttar Pradesh to boost employment. The chief minister observed that women now constitute more than 70 per cent of the workforce in the handloom sector, describing it as a significant achievement. He also said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi frequently presents Uttar Pradesh’s handcrafted products as official gifts to foreign

dignitaries, bringing global recognition to the state’s artisans. Referring to the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the scheme had strengthened branding and market access for traditional products, while technology, design and packaging had further enhanced their competitiveness.

He noted that Uttar

Yogi: SP scuppered monsoon session

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Ambedkar Nagar

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday accused the Samajwadi Party of scuppering the monsoon session of the state Assembly by creating a ruckus.

Addressing a public function in Ambedkar Nagar, the chief minister said that he had hoped for a bipartisan discussion on Rs 59,000 crore worth of projects that included jobs for the youth, development programmes for farmers, and women’s self-reliance.

“However, the Samajwadi Party did not allow the Assembly proceedings to continue; they created a massive uproar. Everyone witnessed the kind of



commotion they caused,” he said. The Bharatiya Janata Party leader said that under the SP’s rule, criminals operated with abandon, riots were not uncommon in places like Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Moradabad, Hapur, Aligarh, Etah, Mathura, Lucknow, Kanpur and Prayagraj. “These riots tarnished the atmosphere of UP so much that people disliked even seeing the youngsters from the state,

creating an identity crisis for the young people,” he said. Apparently referring to Maulana Tauqeer Raza, the chief minister said, “There was a goon in Bareilly who would trigger riots ... I told officials to tackle him once and for all... Today, the Maulana is in jail. He is rubbing his nose and asking for mercy.” Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the SP and Congress failed to rein in criminal activities because they disrespected India’s heritage.

“Recall how the Samajwadi Party and the Congress insulted Maharaja Suheldev. They did not allow a memorial to be built for him. Instead, they initiated the ‘Ghazi Miyan’ fair in the name of the foreign invader Salar Masood,” he said.

AKY cites Guv’s remarks to target govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party government in Uttar Pradesh, citing remarks of Governor Anandiben Patel on shortcomings at a university in Gorakhpur and alleged that the state’s governance model was exposed.

Taking to social media, Yadav shared a video of Patel’s address at the convocation ceremony of Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University on Thursday. During her speech,

Patel expressed concern over the quality of food that students eat from outside, the functioning of hostels, ongoing repair work, the mess and canteen arrangements, and the growing menace of drug abuse among the youth. She said that such concerns were prevalent in Gorakhpur, considered the political stronghold of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

Referring to the governor’s remarks, Yadav in a post on X said, “While exposing the ‘Gorakhpur Model’, the irregularities of the so-called ‘Gujarat Model’ have also come to light by way of compari-

son. What is common between the two is that both are governed by the BJP, and both are marked by massive corruption under Bharatiya Janata Party rule. Their internal conflict has turned the ‘double engine’ into a ‘trouble engine’.”

Governor Anandiben Patel on Thursday expressed displeasure over the lack of a mess facility in the boys’ hostels of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University, claiming it poses serious risks because tiffins can be used to smuggle drugs and may lead to substance abuse among students.

Lucknow to get four mega smart parking facilities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

To address the growing pressure of population and vehicles, Lucknow is set to receive four major multi-level smart parking facilities.

These projects, to be developed by the Lucknow Municipal Corporation and the Lucknow Development Authority, will cost Rs 222.30 crore.

Besides parking, the complexes will feature open plazas, children’s recreation zones and green spaces. A senior official of the LDA said that located about one kilometre from Patrakarpuram crossing, a fully smart parking facility would include automated parking, valet services, smart vehicle guidance, advanced CCTV surveillance, and electric vehicle charging stations. “An urban plaza and kids’ recreation zone will be developed above the parking area, featuring an open-air theatre, outdoor

gym, solar canopy, landscaped lawns, stepped greenery and seating areas,” he said.

An 808-vehicle parking facility will be constructed at the CG City at a cost of Rs 58.17 crore on an area of 7,635.8 square metre.

“This parking facility, to be built near Fine Dine Street, will have two basement levels, each covering 6,510 square metre. It will accommodate 458 two-wheelers and 350 four-wheelers simultaneously. Additionally, a 3,900.5 square metre park will be developed alongside the project,” the official said. A mechanical parking lot will be constructed at Ambedkar Park at a cost of Rs 49.63 crore, covering an area of 4,750 square metre.

“Considering the space constraints in this busy area, the project will feature a mechanical parking system. The 3,200 square metre parking structure will maximise parking capacity within a limited footprint,” he said. He

said that a green public space would be constructed at Patrakarpuram at a cost of Rs 67 crore. “This project will offer more than just parking. It will include open green spaces, walking paths and seating areas, creating a citizen-friendly public space for residents and visitors,” he added.

The key benefits for the city will be that it will help reduce parking shortages and traffic congestion in busy areas such as Gomti Nagar, Indira Nagar and Patrakarpuram.

“EV charging infrastructure and solar canopies will promote sustainable and environmentally friendly urban development. The plazas and children’s recreation zones built above the parking facilities will provide new leisure and recreational spaces for the public,” he added.

According to Lucknow Municipal Corporation officials, the primary objective of these projects is to transform Lucknow into a “Smart and Green City”.

Una case: Maya urges Gujarat govt to challenge acquittals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati has criticised the acquittal of most of the accused in the 2016 Una Dalit atrocity case in Gujarat and urged the state government to challenge the verdict in the High Court to ensure justice for the victims.



In a statement posted on X on Friday, Mayawati expressed concern that the victim families from Una in Gujarat’s Gir Somnath district are facing significant financial and other challenges in pursuing justice after a local court acquitted 35 of the 40 accused in March. She said the development had caused deep anxiety, particularly among the Bahujan community.

Recalling her visit to the victims after the 2016 incident, Mayawati said she had personally met the affected families, assessed the situation, and demanded strict action

against those responsible.

She argued that the acquittals, despite widespread protests and public outrage across the country following the incident, appear to reflect what she described as the government’s hostility towards Dalits and its neglect of their welfare and security. The BSP chief said the Gujarat government still had an opportunity to rectify the situation by pursuing a strong appeal in the High Court and ensuring that those found guilty receive stringent punishment. According to her, this would provide justice to the victims’ families and serve as a deterrent against similar crimes. Mayawati also called on the state government to provide legal representation to the victims’ families at government expense. She referred to the legal aid measures introduced during her tenure as UP CM, saying her government had made provisions for free legal assistance for economically disadvantaged people. The 2016 Una incident, in which Dalit men were publicly assaulted after being accused of cow slaughter while skinning a dead cow, triggered nationwide protests.

Eight major cos to invest over ₹45K crore in UP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh has received a significant boost to its industrial growth ambitions as eight leading companies have announced investments exceeding Rs 45,000 crore in Gautam Buddha Nagar.

The proposed projects are expected to generate more than 25,000 direct employment opportunities, reinforcing the state’s position as one of India’s fastest-growing manufacturing and investment destinations.

The investments are expected to accelerate Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s

vision of transforming Uttar Pradesh into a \$1 trillion economy.

The state government attributes this growing investor confidence to its industry-friendly policies, transparent governance, world-class infrastructure, expanding expressway network, industrial corridors, and a streamlined system for providing incentives and approvals.

The companies committing fresh investments or expanding their operations include HCL-Foxconn (India Chip Pvt Ltd), Avaada Electro Ltd, Amber Enterprises India Ltd, SAEL Solar Pvt Ltd, Oriana

Power Ltd, CESC Green Power Ltd, IB Solar, and Ascent Circuits. Together, these projects are expected to strengthen the state’s industrial ecosystem while creating large-scale employment opportunities.

According to the state government, Uttar Pradesh’s Industrial Investment and Employment Promotion (IIEP) Policy-2022, FDI/FCI and Fortune-500 Investment Promotion Policy-2023, and the Semiconductor Policy-2024 have played a pivotal role in attracting these investments. Six of the eight projects have been approved under the IIEP-2022 policy,

while Ascent Circuits has received support under the FDI Policy-2023, and HCL-Foxconn’s semiconductor project has been incentivised under the Semiconductor Policy-2024. The renewable energy sector has emerged as the biggest beneficiary of the new investment commitments. Avaada Electro Ltd has announced the largest investment of Rs 16,139 crore, which is expected to create around 7,400 jobs. SAEL Solar Pvt Ltd will invest Rs 8,000 crore, generating approximately 7,760 employment opportunities. In addition, Oriana Power Ltd will invest Rs 4,500 crore, while CESC

Green Power Ltd has committed Rs 3,805 crore, further strengthening Uttar Pradesh’s renewable energy manufacturing ecosystem.

The state is also making significant strides in the semiconductor and high-tech manufacturing sectors. HCL-Foxconn (India Chip Pvt Ltd) will invest Rs 3,706 crore under the state’s Semiconductor Policy, creating nearly 3,000 jobs. Meanwhile, Ascent Circuits has announced an investment of Rs 3,250 crore, contributing to the expansion of UP’s advanced electronics and semiconductor value chain.



NOTICE INVITING TENDERS FOR LEASING OF OFFICE PREMISES

Indian Bank, a Public Sector Bank invites tenders under 2 bid system (Technical & Financial Bid) from owners of office premises willing to offer on lease basis (Readily built / Premises Under construction), Commercial Building in **Near Burlington Chauraha, Hussainganj, Lucknow Pincode-226001** measuring in the range of **1500 Sq.ft. to 1600 sq.ft.** carpet area preferably in Ground Floor with parking facility for a lease period of **15 years** for setting up their Branch/Office.

The tender forms can be obtained from the following address from **08.08.2026 to 24.08.2026** on payment of Rs. 250 (non refundable) by way of DD/IOI favouring **INDIAN BANK**. Last date for submission of bids **24.08.2026** Details of the tender can be obtained from our Website: **www.indianbank.bank.in**

The Bank reserves the right to reject any or all offers without assigning any reasons whatsoever. **Zonal Manager Indian Bank, Zonal Office, Hazratganj Lucknow**

PTC INDUSTRIES LIMITED
Registered Office: Sarai Sahjadi, Bank, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh 226401, India
Ph: +91 522 7111017, Fax: +91 522 7111020, Email: companysecretary@ptcl.com, Web: www.ptcl.com (CIN: L27109UP1963PLC002931)

NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that the following original equity share certificates of PTC Industries Limited ("the Company") have been reported lost/misplaced. Applications have been received from the claimant(s) for issuance of duplicate share certificate(s), the details of which are given hereunder:

Folio No	Name of Shareholder	No. of Share	Share Certificate No.	Face Value	Distinctive Nos.
000774	Shivraj Gupta	100	2158	10	From 3416801 to 3416700
000774	Shivraj Gupta	100	2159	10	From 3416701 to 3416800

Any person(s) having objection to the issuance of duplicate share certificate(s) or claiming any right, title, or interest in respect of the above-mentioned shares may notify the Company in writing within 7 (seven) days from the date of publication of this notice, along with relevant supporting documents, at the Company's Registered office. If no objection is received within the stipulated period, the Company shall proceed to issue duplicate share certificate(s) without any further notice.

Place : LUCKNOW
Date : 06.08.2026

For PTC Industries Limited
Sd/-
Pragati Gupta Agrawal
Company Secretary and Compliance Officer



COUNCIL OF SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH (CSIR)
Anusandhan Bhawan, 2, Rafi Marg, New Delhi-110001
Adv. No. 03/2026

CSIR invites applications/nominations for the position of Director, CSIR- National Botanical Research Institute (CSIR-NBRI), Lucknow, in Level 15 of pay-matrix (Rs.1,82,200-2,24,100) plus allowances as applicable in CSIR.

For eligibility criteria and other conditions, please see the detailed/complete advertisement No. **03/2026** on CSIR website **www.csir.res.in**. Applications /nominations may be sent alongwith complete bio-data and list of publications/patents etc. through email at **drc.hqrs@csir.res.in** or by post to Director Recruitment Cell, Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), Anusandhan Bhawan, 2, Rafi Marg, New Delhi -110001 on or before **15/09/2026**.
CBC 36202/11/0015/2627



बैंक ऑफ बड़ौदा
Bank of Baroda
India's International Bank

Rajajipuram Branch:
E-Block, K-16/1-2, Chandra Guest House, Rajajipuram, Lucknow-226017

DEMAND NOTICE

Notice Under Section 13(2) of 2002 for Enforcement of Security Interest

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorized officer of **Bank of Baroda** Issued Demand Notices under Section 13 (2) of SARFAESI ACT 2002 to the Borrower's/Guarantor's herein below mentioned, Consequent upon the dispatch of such Notices through Post And returned Bank undelivered from the Borrower's/Guarantor's addresses. Through this Publication they are hereby called upon to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of publication of said notice failing which the bank will take the possession of the immovable and movable property will sell it through the process in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 8 & 9 of the security interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Sl. No	Name & Address of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/Date of Demand Notice	Outstanding Amount Date of NPA	Description of Property
1.	Mr. Ahmar Khan (Borrower) S/o Ansar Ali, Add: C-5087 Sector-13 Rajajipuram Lucknow-226017 Mrs. Sabeena Siddiqui (Borrower) W/o Ahmar Khan, Add: C-5087 Sector-13 Rajajipuram Lucknow-226017 Date of Demand Notice: 22.07.2026	Rs. 8,47,764.13 as on 20.07.2026 (Contractual Dues) as on date of notice (including interest upto 19.07.2026) Date of NPA: 08.06.2026	Equitable, Mortgage of Flat No. 11/168 First Floor (F-30), G+3 Gokul Gram Yojana-11, Bibikhara, Lucknow Admeasuring Super Plinth Area 30.38 sq.mtr. Owned By Ahmar Khan, Bounded as: East: As per site plan, West: As per site plan, North: As per site plan, South: As per site plan

Date: 07.08.2026 **Place: Lucknow** **Authorised Officer, Bank of Baroda**

IN FOCUS



Kanwariyas carrying holy water from the Ganga river for the annual Kanwar Yatra during the holy month of Shravan in Haridwar

PTI

Karnataka Govt committed to caste census: Shivakumar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

Karnataka Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday said his Government was committed to implementing its socio-economic survey to ensure social justice for all sections of society and called for a caste census to provide equal opportunities.

Inaugurating the 11th National Convention of the National OBC Federation at Jnanajyothi Auditorium here, Shivakumar said his Government had conducted a socio-economic survey.

The Congress was committed to the principle of “equal share and equal opportunity” and asserted that a caste census was necessary to reduce disparities



CM DK Shivakumar felicitates newly-elected State MLC AV Gayathri Shantegowda during the latter's swearing-in ceremony

PTI

among communities.

The socio-educational survey was taken up by the previous Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The nine-member panel was headed by former Advocate General Madhusudan R Naik, who submitted his report to the

state Government on May 27, 2026.

The report aims to identify the backward communities, their size, problems and ways to elevate their socio-educational status. “We are moving forward on the principle of equal share

and equal opportunity for all. Discussions on equality were held even during British rule. Therefore, a caste census was conducted around 1931.

Through it, equal opportunities must be provided to all sections of society,” Shivakumar said.

He underlined that the Congress leadership is committed to conducting a caste census.

The chief minister said backward classes accounted for 52 per cent of the country's population and claimed that Congress Governments had historically worked to protect the interests of all sections. Reservations for OBCs were provided during the reign of Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar himself, he pointed out.

Wrong-side driving cases up by 113% in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Enforcement against wrong-side driving has increased by 113 per cent, with 2,321 FIRs registered, Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) TS Sandhu shared on X on Friday. He noted that this is part of an intensified drive to check traffic violations, including unauthorised parking.

The LG assessed traffic management and enforcement across Delhi in a meeting with the Delhi Police Commissioner and other officers, considering the ongoing monsoon season, Kanwar Yatra and Independence Day arrangements.

Highlighting encouraging progress this season, Sandhu said waterlogging hotspots fell sharply to 65 from 169, while Project Sangam



strengthened citizen participation to boost local traffic management.

During the meeting, the LG emphasised that visible policing and active community participation are critical to tackling congestion, violations, and encroachments.

He said safe, disciplined, and seamless mobility directly impacts the quality of life of every citizen. He said there will be zero compromise in ensuring efficient traffic management across the Capital.

Manoj Dwivedi takes charge as NDMC chairperson

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Manoj Kumar Dwivedi, a 1997 batch IAS officer of the AGMUT cadre, assumed charge as Chairperson of the New Delhi Municipal Council on Friday. Dwivedi succeeded Keshav Chandra, who has been appointed Secretary in the Ministry of Coal, Government of India.

Shortly after taking charge,



Dwivedi held an interactive meeting with all Heads of Departments and senior officers of NDMC, taking stock of the council's ongoing activities, key initiatives, and priority areas. He emphasised the need for coordinated efforts, efficient service delivery, and a citizen-centric approach to strengthen civic amenities and public services in the NDMC area.

Keshav Chandra had led NDMC from November 2024 to

July 2026, during which the council undertook initiatives in urban governance, public infrastructure, sanitation, digital transformation, and citizen-centric service delivery.

Prior to his NDMC appointment, Dwivedi served as Additional Secretary in the Department of Personnel and Training and earlier as Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce under the Ministry of

Commerce and Industry.

Born on July 9, 1972, Dwivedi holds a Bachelor of Technology in Chemical Engineering from IIT Delhi. He is also the author of a book titled Decode Life, described as a guide to deciphering the code of life and unlocking individual potential. His administrative career spans nearly three decades, primarily in the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir cadre.

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I am with you: PM...

Modi also reportedly said that he stood not only with the NDA members but with every MP.

Shiv Sena RS member Jyoti Waghmare said Modi emphasised smooth functioning of Parliament and expressed concern over the repeated disruptions by the Opposition protests.

“The Prime Minister said those who are with the NDA for the last 20 years or even one year are all family members. He said we will work hard for the development of West Bengal and the eight northeastern States. We all will work together. This is a very good message he has given to us, we all will work together,” she told reporters at the Parliament House complex.

“The PM said due to the disruption in Parliament, the country could not listen to the talented and new MPs. He said the country's issues should be discussed in Parliament,” he said. NCPI leader Sudip Bandopadhyay said the Prime Minister asked the MPs to do yoga regularly for maintaining good health.

Another NCPI MP Satabdi Roy said the PM welcomed all of them and interacted with each of the MPs present at the breakfast. Roy said Modi advised that those who crossed the age of 40 should practice yoga regularly and health check-up every year.

Since the Monsoon Session began on July 20, Lok Sabha proceedings have been repeatedly disrupted by Opposition protests. Six bills have been passed without discussion amid din.

The Opposition parties initially protested over the NEET paper leaks and alleged theft of donations at the Ayodhya Ram temple. They later pressed for a discussion on police action against students protesting over the NEET paper leak and also demanded the presence of Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah and their statements.

Meanwhile, the Government is making a fresh attempt for passage of a Constitution Amendment Bill to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures in 2029 and redraw the Lok Sabha constituencies to increase its numbers to 816 in the ongoing Monsoon Session by reaching out to principal Opposition party Congress and NDA allies, nearly four months after a similar effort failed due to lack of numbers.

Last time, the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill fell short of the constitutionally mandated two-thirds majority in Lok Sabha, with 298 members voting in favour against 230 opposing it. The Government's numbers have since improved marginally. The NDA's strength in the Lok Sabha now stands at 299 following the merger of seven Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs with the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

Among the 20 NCPI MPs, three Muslim law makers remained non-committal about their allegiance towards NDA. However, in the eventuality of all 20 voting in favour of the bill, the government has assured the support of 319 votes. But it is still well short of the 360 votes required to pass a constitutional amendment based on the current effective strength of the House.

Centre directs Meta to curb deepfakes

Government sources said Meta has been told to follow the Indian Constitution and local laws. One official said, “You cannot run your platform in India and follow the US Constitution,” pointing out that Indian law allows certain limits on speech. The Centre said it will keep working for improvements, and more technical discussions are expected. Earlier this year, regulations became stricter. In February 2026, MeitY announced changes to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

These changes officially brought synthetically generated information, like deepfakes, under a clear due diligence process. Platforms now have to label AI-generated or altered audio-visual content with clear markers and add traceable

metadata. Major social media companies must also ask users to say if their uploads are synthetic and use technical tools to check those claims.

The amendments also reduced the time platforms have to comply. Now, unlawful content must be taken down within three hours of a valid government or court order, instead of the earlier 36 hours. For sensitive cases like nudity or impersonation, the response time is two hours. If platforms do not meet these rules, they could lose safe-harbour protections under Section 79 of the IT Act.

With over a billion internet users, India needs strong content moderation. Deepfakes and AI-made propaganda have raised concerns about threats to public order, personal dignity, elections, and financial safety. The Government has supported local detection technologies through the IndiaAI Mission, approving several projects to spot synthetic media in real time.

Officials said the recent talks with Meta are not meant to punish the company but to improve cooperation and make sure platforms take responsibility. By asking for a formal plan, changes to algorithms, and better coordination with QRTs, the Centre wants to stop harmful content before it spreads widely. Meta is still a major player in India, with Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp used by hundreds of millions. The company's efforts to work with the government and share clear plans will be watched closely in the coming days.

Sources said both sides have agreed to keep talking until all concerns are settled. As artificial intelligence tools become easier to use and more advanced, global platforms will face more pressure to align their systems with national priorities. More meetings are expected, and the government says lasting trust between platforms and Indian users depends on clear, ongoing improvements to protect against propaganda, deepfakes, and illegal content, sources added.

RBI curbs coercive loan recovery practices

The agents cannot resort to intimidating or publicly humiliating the borrowers or their relatives, referees, friends or co-workers. The RBI has also instructed recovery agents to exercise sensitivity in exceptional circumstances. Borrowers should not be approached during situations such as bereavement, medical emergencies or family celebrations like weddings.

There is a new layer of transparency around physical visits too. Before the first in-person visit by a recovery agency, the borrower must be informed at least one day in advance. The bank must provide details of the agency assigned to the case. Borrowers should ordinarily be contacted at a place of their choice. A recovery agent can visit the borrower's home or workplace if no preference has been given, or if the borrower repeatedly fails to appear at the chosen location.

And if someone does turn up, they cannot simply say they are from the bank and demand money. Recovery agents must carry an identity card, an authorisation letter and the relevant notice. The authorisation letter must also include contact details for the agency and the bank's grievance officer.

The misuse of social media has also been addressed. Recovery agents cannot publish or circulate a borrower's personal information, photographs, videos or audio recordings to pressure or shame them into repayment.

The RBI has further tightened accountability for lenders by requiring them to closely supervise recovery-related conversations and maintain details such as call timings and phone numbers. These records are generally required to be preserved for at least six months.

Such documentation will help resolve disputes if borrowers allege misconduct by recovery agents. The RBI has made it clear that banks cannot escape responsibility by blaming out-

sourced agencies. Even when recovery operations are assigned to third parties, lenders remain fully accountable for ensuring compliance with regulatory standards. Banks have also been directed to ensure recovery agents receive proper training. Additionally, lenders must review their incentive structures to ensure they do not encourage aggressive or unethical recovery practices. Another major part of the new framework is privacy. Recovery agents should get only the information they actually need to recover the dues. Banks have been directed to put safeguards in place to prevent misuse of borrowers' personal information.

The RBI has laid down rules for lenders that use technology to remotely restrict a financed smartphone, tablet or laptop. First, the loan must have been specifically taken to finance that device. A lender cannot take a normal personal loan and use it as a reason to remotely disable your existing phone. There is also a waiting period. A device cannot be remotely restricted as soon as an EMI is missed. Restrictions can begin only after the loan has remained overdue for at least 30 days. A complete device restriction can be imposed only after the account has remained overdue for 60 days. Even then, the phone cannot simply become a useless piece of hardware. Incoming calls, SMS, emergency communication and functions needed for work and employment must continue to remain available. Lenders also cannot use the technology to access unrelated personal information such as contacts, photographs, videos, call logs, SMS messages or location history.

How CBI exposed NEET-UG 2026 paper leak plot

For easier questions, the experts relied on their memory. After going back to their hotel rooms, they wrote down the questions. Mandhare, in particular, marked matching paragraphs in NCERT textbooks, using her knowledge of the material. Havaladar also wrote down Physics questions after each day. CCTV footage from that period was missing because backups were only kept for 20 to 25 days.

The confidential work ended on April 7, but the case was not registered until May 12. After leaving the NTA, the experts reportedly passed the material to a network of private coaching sessions that tried to avoid leaving digital traces.

In late April, Kulkarni and Mandhare held unauthorised “special revision sessions” or coaching classes at their homes in Pune. Small groups of eight to fifteen students, brought by intermediaries, received the exact questions, all four answer choices, and the correct answers. Students were told to copy everything by hand into their notebooks or textbooks.

During searches, investigators found handwritten notes that matched questions from the actual May 3 exam. Havaladar is accused of dictating Physics questions to a Pune-based coaching teacher, Tejas Shah, who wrote them down and shared the material further. Investigators discovered that Havaladar saved Shah's number as “God.” The handwritten notes did not stay within these sessions. Intermediaries, including Manisha Sanjay Waghmare, collected the notebooks, took photos of the notes, and made them into PDFs. The questions then passed through a chain of intermediaries across Maharashtra, Haryana, and Rajasthan. From operators in Pune, the material was sent to Nashik, and from there it was shared on Telegram with contacts in Gurugram and other locations. Forensic checks of seized phones found PDF files, WhatsApp groups named “NEET 2026,” photos of questions, and call records showing how people communicated.

In some cases, payments of several lakhs of rupees were made, and original educational certificates and signed blank cheques were sometimes taken as security. Against 13 people in a special court in Delhi, saying that no government officials or permanent NTA staff were involved.

The three subject experts, along with coaching operators, brokers, and facilitators, have been charged under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita for criminal conspiracy, cheating, and criminal breach of trust, as well as under the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024. The agency has listed 360 witnesses, 422 documents, and 43 material objects to support its case.

All the accused remain in judicial custody. The May 3 NEET-UG exam, taken by more than 22 lakh candidates, was cancelled after an email alert and leaked “guess papers” revealed a large overlap with the official questions. A retest was ordered. The chargesheet describes the case as a conspiracy that began with recruiting candidates as early as late 2025 and ended with the organised leaking and selling of confidential exam material. Investigators are still following the money trail and searching for remaining digital evidence to determine the full size of the network.

Delhi power subsidy fails to reach the needy

According to CAG report, more than 50,000 consumers had continuously zero consumption for more than 12 months and were provided a subsidy of Rs 17.81 crore, more than 90,000 thousand consumers received a subsidy of Rs 11.88 crore for continuously zero consumption for 6 to 11 months and more than 1 lakh 70 thousand consumers had continuous zero consumption for periods between 3 and 5 months and received subsidy of Rs 12.57 crore. Subsidies constituted nearly 10 per cent of GNCTD's total revenue expenditure.

Power subsidy alone accounted for 66.96 to 70.39 per cent of the total subsidy during 2019-20 to 2022-23, emphasising the need to assess the process of providing electricity subsidy to consumers and its effectiveness. Tariffs have not been increased after 2014-15 and so the present tariff has not reflected the actual cost of power procurement and distribution. This mismatch between cost and recovery led to continuous accumulation of unrecovered expenses, which have been trued-up as “Regulatory Assets” year after year appearing in the balance sheet of the DISCOMs as an asset. It represents costs incurred by the DISCOMs that are recoverable from customers' in the future through regulated rates or tariffs. The Regulatory Assets of Delhi DISCOMs, which stood at Rs 9,063 crore in 2019-20, has arrived at Rs 27,200.37 crore as of 31 March 2021,” it said. Audit analysis of consumer billing data of the three private DISCOMS revealed that the subsidy constituted roughly 50 per cent of the electricity bill for consumers in the 1 to 2 KW SL category, whereas it was able to defray less than 25 per cent of the bill amount for consumers in the 3 KW to 4 KW SL category, which was progressively even less for higher loads.

“For the 3-4KW SL, the Government spent, on average, a subsidy of less than Rs 500 for a gross bill amount of more than Rs 2,100. It was further noticed that as the subsidy outgo up to 200 units was independent of sanctioned load and subsidised 100 per cent of the bill amount, subsidy outgo even for meagre consumption at high sanctioned loads could be astronomical. For example, a consumption of 50 KWh per month at 1 KW SL would attract a subsidy of approximately Rs 200 whereas the same energy consumption at SL of 5 KW, 10 KW and 20 KW would result in a subsidy outgo of approximately Rs 500, Rs 1,500 and Rs 5,000 respectively,” the CAG said.

In 2019-20, an amount of Rs 2,405.59 crore was given as power subsidy which subsequently increased to Rs 3,161 crore in 2022-23, the report said. Subsidies under different schemes constituted nearly 10 per cent of Delhi Government's revenue expenditure. Power subsidy alone accounted for 66.96 to 70.39 per cent of the total subsidy during 2019-20 to 2022-23, emphasising the need to assess the process of providing electricity subsidy to consumers

and its effectiveness, the report said.

PM-Badal meet fuels reunion buzz

The nearly two-and-a-half-decade-old alliance between the BJP and the Shiromani Akali Dal collapsed in 2020 amid the controversy over the three contentious farm laws. At the time, the Akali Dal announced its decision to withdraw from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Since then, both parties contested the 2022 Punjab Assembly elections and the 2024 Lok Sabha elections independently. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP failed to win any seats in the state, while the Akali Dal managed to secure only one. Despite the split, periodic meetings between senior leaders of the two parties have kept speculation alive about a possible revival of the alliance. Friday's meeting is also being closely watched for any political signals regarding the future relationship between the BJP and the Shiromani Akali Dal. Sources said the Akali Dal, the State BJP unit, and the RSS are all in favour of reviving the alliance. Leaders who have joined the BJP from the Congress also favour the restoration of the alliance, and the final call rests with the BJP's central leadership, sources added. Interestingly, Home Minister Amit Shah during his visit to Moga in March this year had categorically ruled out alliance with Akali Dal.

Analysts believe that both parties will benefit from the alliance as the BJP has a presence in the state's urban areas, while the Akali Dal is influential in rural Punjab.

During a recent visit to Punjab, BJP president Nitin Nabin had stated that a decision regarding the alliance would be taken at an appropriate time. Sources said the BJP wants the renewal of the alliance on equal footing now. Previously, the BJP played the role of junior partner in the alliance, and the Akali Dal always had the upper hand. However, according to Akali leaders, details such as seat-sharing can be discussed later and the immediate priority is to improve the situation in Punjab. They believe the security situation in border-state Punjab is precarious and could pose a challenge to national security, sources said.

For months, BJP leaders have maintained that the party would contest the 2027 Assembly elections independently. BJP leaders had repeatedly asserted that the party was preparing to fight the elections on its own in Punjab.

However, Sukhbir Singh Badal's meeting with Prime Minister Modi has once again fueled speculation that the two former allies could explore the possibility of reviving their alliance before the 2027 Punjab Assembly elections.

80th Independence Day to feature Vande

The invitation cards also include an image of Seva Teerth (housing the Prime Minister's Office) and a list of fundamental duties. The invitation cards last year carried the watermark of Jammu and Kashmir's Chenab Bridge, depicting the rise of ‘Naya Bharat.’

The entire event and Red Fort venue, this year, are themed around “Vande Mataram” to mark the 150th anniversary of the national song. Seating blocks are named after major Indian Rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, and Kaveri, using new folding hydraulic chairs.

Incidentally, the 77th Republic Day celebrations were organised around the theme of Vande Mataram, marking 150 years of the song. The tableaux of the ministries and the States were based on the same theme. The Indian Army marked the Vande Mataram milestone by organising band performances in 18 locations across the country. The places where military bands performed included Naihati in West Bengal, where Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, who composed Vande Mataram in the 1870s, was born.

Meta acknowledges gaps in algorithms during talks with Indian Govt

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

Meta admitted to problems with its algorithms during a technical meeting with India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). Sources say the discussions focused on how Meta's systems decide what users see, how content is moderated, and whether these measures protect users and comply with local laws.

This admission comes as the Government increases discussions with Meta about regulation and compliance. Talks began after a Facebook post by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was briefly restricted, but have since grown into a wider review of Meta's main operations in India. The issue started with a video post by the Prime

Minister on July 23, which was blocked for a short time due to concerns about exam paper leaks. Meta said the block was an "inadvertent error" by its AI filters, but MeitY was not satisfied with this explanation and called Meta's global leaders for further talks.

Joel Kaplan, Meta's Chief Global Affairs Officer, led a team to meet with IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and Secretary S Krishnan.

Kaplan apologised on behalf of the company, called the removal an operational mistake, and promised stronger internal checks. Reports say Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg also expressed regret about these issues.

The meetings lasted several days and included a technical session on how Meta's algorithms and systems manage content delivery, recommendations, and



moderation.

During the talks, Meta admitted there are gaps in its algorithms. Officials looked at how content is

delivered, how moderation works, and whether recommendations are fair. The Government also asked about child sexual abuse

material (CSAM or CSEAM), the spread of deepfakes and fake content, protections for verified and well-known accounts, and possible algorithm bias.

Meta executives reportedly admitted failures in handling CSAM and deepfakes, and said that spending a lot of money to promote certain types of content sometimes caused problems.

One main issue is Meta's claim to protection as an intermediary under Section 79 of India's Information Technology Act. These "safe harbour" rules usually protect platforms from being held responsible for user content if they act as neutral hosts and follow certain rules.

Indian officials argue that when algorithms actively select, recommend, and promote content, especially paid material, the plat-

form is not just a passive host.

This challenges Meta's usual defence and could mean the company will be held more responsible for harmful content.

The Government has made it clear that platforms in India must fully follow Indian laws and the constitution, no matter what standards they use in other countries.

Meta was told to list all problem areas and provide a detailed plan to fix them. Officials say they want ongoing improvements, not just quick fixes. Sources say Meta's global technical team will likely stay in India for more talks.

More meetings, possibly led by the IT Secretary, are expected soon as both sides work to solve the remaining issues.

Both parties have agreed to keep working together until all concerns are addressed.

MeitY has repeated the need for quick action. For Meta, this shows that India's regulatory stance is firm: market access depends on clear local compliance, strong safety systems, and transparency about how platforms shape public discussion.

This is not an isolated case. It is part of a global trend where governments want more control over the technical systems of social media giants. Whether Meta's admissions and promised improvements lead to real changes in content safety, fairness, and accountability will be closely watched in the coming weeks.

The technical meetings continue, and the algorithms behind one of the world's largest digital platforms remain under close review.

Rebel TMC MLAs meet Adhikari on SIR, loudspeaker in mosques

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

A section of the breakaway faction of TMC MLAs on Friday met Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari with a host of demands including the complexities arising out of the deletion of 27 lakh names during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) and the Government order against using loudspeakers beyond a certain decibel in places of worship.

The representatives included Opposition Leader Ritabrata Banerjee, senior legislator Firhad Hakim, Chief Whip Akhruzzaman, MLAs Arup Roy, Sandeepan Saha, Javed Khan, Golam Rabbani, Sabina Yasmin and others.

Emerging from the meeting the Opposition Leader said that they Chief Minister was told about the difficulties being faced by the people whose names had been deleted during SIR as the hearing was being conducted at a centralized location.

"We requested the Chief Minister to set up tribunals in every district, so that the people do not have to come all the way to Kolkata from far off places," Banerjee said adding how people often have to come from



places as far as Cooch Behar in North Bengal.

"SIR related deletion of names continues to be a big problem particularly for the minority people whose names have been deleted in great numbers... so we brought this to the notice of the Chief Minister and he heard it patiently... there is a need for decentralized hearing and early settlement of the issue," Chief Whip Akhruzzaman said.

The meeting took place at State secretariat Nabanna.

He said that out of the 27 lakh deleted names about 10 lakh applications have been received "remaining 20 lakhs are completely in the dark and very anxious

about their future of... if something is not done to address their problems then there will be larger agitations... we will have to move the High Court."

According to a recent estimation the sloth pace in which hearings are taking place it may take 20 years to get the entire dispute settled, one of the MLAs said.

The MLAs also raised the issue of recent State Government order to remove loudspeakers beyond a certain decibel from the religious places. "The people are confused ... so we want a solution to this issue so that wrong message does not go to them," Akhruzzaman said.

Pro-Mamata TMC slams NCPI MPs as they meet Modi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The pro-Mamata Banerjee faction of the Trinamool Congress hit out at the Nationalist Citizens Party of India MPs who on Friday joined Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence in a breakfast meeting and discussed outstanding issues concerning Bengal and eastern India once again calling them "weather birds" who had no sense of gratitude for the person or the party that made them members of parliament.

Twenty TMC MPs had left the party and joined the new NCPI days after the Bengal outfit lost Assembly elections on June 4 letting the BJP to come to power in the State.

"They are today meeting the Prime Minister and lavishly showering praises on him... there is no problem with that but they should not have done things the way they did this is nothing but a weather bird... they should have some amount of gratitude for the TMC and Mamata Banerjee but for whose name they would not have won the 2024 elections in the first place," pro-Mamata TMC MP Sougato Roy said.

He was referring to the gratitude expressed by the NCPI MP Kakoli Ghoshdastidar who showered lavish praises on the Prime Minister. Earlier Ghoshdastidar said how the



NCPI MPs were "overwhelmed by his gesture" towards them and expressed confidence that in his leadership they will "definitely be able to develop eastern India" the way they wanted to.

Ghoshdastidar said, "we were overwhelmed by his gesture... that he thinks so deeply about the issues of eastern India... he told us that we were more prosperous during when Kolkata was the Capital of India... he told us how eastern India still remains the main producer of agricultural products and mineral and how notwithstanding that the region continued to lag behind... this has to be changed and he promised us all help to change this."

Another senior MP Sudip Bandopadhyay said, "Prime Minister wants to focus on the development of Kolkata, Bhubaneshwar and Guwahati so as to bring about an all-round development of the eastern region... for

which he asked us to propose our views and plans and promised all help."

Actor-turned-MP Shatabdi Roy too was all praise for the Prime Minister saying, "he was so warm and he interacted with every one of us discussing the issues ... he discussed how they were planning and working towards the development of their respective constituencies."

In a new development the three Muslim MPs from Murshidabad who had been avoiding the NDA meeting on Friday were present at the Prime Minister's residence. "We had to be present in the meeting because we have to raise the issues of the minorities in the district of Murshidabad... we represent the voters that voted for us... and here we are meeting the Prime Minister who is the leader of the entire country... we have all the reasons to be present in the meeting," said Abu Taher the MP from Murshidabad.

Nation Focus



Heavy rain in Rajasthan; wet spell to continue till August 10

Several parts of Rajasthan, including the State capital, received heavy rainfall on Friday, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warning of heavy to very heavy showers in the coming days. The rain, it said, comes as the southwest monsoon became active again. According to the IMD's Jaipur centre, Alwar recorded 19.4 mm rainfall during the day, while Jaipur and Dausa received 4 mm each, and Sangaria 3.5 mm.

Light to moderate rainfall was reported from several other places, including Churu, Pilani, and Dungarpur. Jaipur witnessed intermittent rainfall since late Thursday night, with cloudy skies persisting throughout Friday and showers occurring at several places in the city.

Rain led to the day temperature dropping by more than two degrees Celsius. The weather department said there is a strong likelihood of continued intense rainfall activity across the state over the next few days. Explaining the rain activity, a Met spokesperson said an upper air cyclonic circulation persists over the southwestern parts of Uttar Pradesh and adjoining areas. (PTI)



India rejects criticism of FCRA bill by US lawmakers

India on Friday rejected criticism by several US lawmakers over proposed changes to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), describing the legislative matter as an internal affair.

A number of lawmakers from the Democratic and Republican parties, including Senator James Risch, who heads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, voiced concerns over the planned changes to the FCRA, saying they could adversely impact Christian organisations and other civil society groups. External affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the proposed changes to the FCRA are an internal legislative issue of India.

"We have seen the comments (critical of the proposed changes). Legislative matters concerning India are our internal affairs, on which decisions are taken by the Parliament of our country," Jaiswal said in his bi-weekly media briefing. (PTI)

JPSC exam row: Students to continue agitation despite talks with Jharkhand Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ranchi

Student protesters on Friday said they would continue their agitation over alleged irregularities in Jharkhand recruitment exams despite holding talks with the state Government, saying they would not stop the stir till all their demands, including cancellation of the 14th JPSC exam, are met.

They also said they would march to the state assembly on August 10 if their demands were not met by Sunday.

The first round of talks between the Government and a 10-member delegation of the JPSC/JSSC Reforms Manch was held here on Friday evening.

"The meeting with the Jharkhand Government was held in a positive atmosphere. It assured us that our demands would be considered. However, we have decided to continue our protest till all our demands, including cancellation of the 14th JPSC examination, are met," a leader of the JPSC/JSSC Reforms Manch told reporters after the meeting.

State Higher and Technical Education Minister Sudhiya Kumar said the Government was sensitive to the students' concerns. "We met the delegation of student protesters. The Government is sensitive to their demands and is ready to consider them sympathetically. The outcome will be visible soon," Kumar told



All India Student's Association (AISA) members raise slogans during a protest against the alleged irregularities of examinations conducted by Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) and Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC) in Ranchi on Friday

PTI

reporters. Minister Dipika Pandey Singh said the panel has apprised Chief Minister Hemant Soren of the students' demands.

"The CM is concerned about students and an outcome will come soon," she said. Meanwhile, another group of protesters led by Devendra Mahto, who has been on a hunger strike for the past six days, claimed that it had received an invitation from the Government for talks.

The Mahto-led group said it had submitted the names of an eight-member delegation to the Government for discussions. The protesters have been demanding cancellation of the 14th JPSC exam and an independent probe into the alleged irregularities

either by the CBI or by a panel of retired high court judges from outside the state.

The protest over alleged irregularities in the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) recruitment examinations entered its 14th day on Friday, with six protesters continuing their hunger strike.

Earlier in the day, the JPSC/JSSC Reforms Manch submitted a fresh 10-member panel to the Government after it objected to the earlier 11-member delegation, which included an advocate and two technical experts.

Members of the new delegation are student leaders Ravindra Paswan, Piyush Kumar, Rajesh Prasad, Neetu Kujur, Ankit Raj, Kartik Soren, Shalu Kumari, among others.

Cross-border IED conspiracy on train: NIA chargesheets 2

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday filed a chargesheet against two persons accused in a cross-border terror conspiracy involving the alleged smuggling of an IED, firearms, and heroin across the India-Pakistan border to, among other targets, attack a passenger train.

The chargesheet, filed before the NIA special court in Mohali, names Shubham Kumar, who has been arrested, and Jasvir Chaudhary, who remains absconding, an official statement said.

The case was registered in February 2026 by the State Special Operations Cell (SSOC), Amritsar, following the arrest of Kumar.

He was found in possession of a live Improvised Explosive Device, or IED, packed in a metallic case, a remote-control device, a foreign-



made .30 bore pistol with a magazine, 20 live cartridges, a mobile phone, and heroin.

The NIA took over the investigation in March 2026 and exposed a conspiracy involving a Pakistan-based handler and his associates in India to procure arms, explosives, and narcotics through cross-border channels.

Investigators revealed that Kumar was assigned the planting of a timer-activated IED on a passenger train, the probe agency said.

The broader conspiracy, according to the agency, envisaged attacks at multiple locations, including Punjab and Delhi.

Uttarakhand Cabinet clears Ganga Expressway extension to Haridwar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Dehradun

The Uttarakhand Cabinet on Friday approved a proposal to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Uttar Pradesh Government for extending the Ganga Expressway from Meerut to Haridwar.

Briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, Director General of Information and Additional Secretary to the Chief Minister Banshidhar Tiwari said the two states would work on the project's framework and implementation after the MoU is signed.

He said the project would strengthen connectivity between the two states and give a boost to religious tourism, industrial investment, trade and employment.

The 594-km Ganga



Expressway, currently under construction between Meerut and Prayagraj, is among Uttar Pradesh's flagship infrastructure projects. Once completed, it is expected to significantly reduce travel time between western and eastern Uttar Pradesh while improving freight movement and logistics.

According to the Uttarakhand government, extending the expressway to Haridwar will provide the state with direct connectivity to the country's expressway network.

The Government said the project would improve connectivity for pilgrims visiting Haridwar and those travelling on the Char Dham Yatra, besides creating fresh opportunities for industrial investment, trade and employment.

In another decision, the Cabinet approved a proposal to transfer around 30 hectares of land, out of the 73 hectares of forest land available in Haldwani's Lamachaur area, for the construction of the Uttarakhand High Court complex.

Punjab: Govt employees, pensioners hold massive protest in support of their demands

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

Scores of Government employees and pensioners on Friday held a massive protest at Sector 39, warning the AAP Government of a Statewide strike on August 27 if their long-pending demands, including release of pending dearness allowance are not met.

Police had erected barricades to prevent protesters from moving towards the Punjab Vidhan Sabha.

Chandigarh Police used a water cannon to disperse protesting employees after they tried to head towards the Punjab Assembly.

The protest was held under the banner of Sanjha Mulazam and Pensioners Front and Sanjha Mulazam Manch Punjab with over several employees' organisations taking part from several parts of the state.

The protesting employees



have been demanding release of pending 18 per cent DA, implementation of Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and regularization of contractual employees.

Protesting employees said despite repeated assurance, the state Government failed to address their demands.

They announced that employees across Punjab would proceed on mass leave and observe a complete strike on August 27, leading to the closure of Government offices from tehsil complexes to the Punjab Civil Secretariat, if the

Government fails to address their demands.

Addressing a gathering, union leader Sukhchain Singh Khehra said employees and pensioners would support only that political party in coming state assembly elections which presents a blueprint for resolving their long-pending demands.

Union leaders alleged that the Government had failed to release 18 per cent dearness allowance (DA) instalments and arrears despite directions from the Punjab and Haryana High Court.



States Focus



VP RADHAKRISHNAN ON 2-DAY ANDAMAN VISIT FROM AUGUST 8

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan will be on a two-day visit to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands from August 8, an official statement said on Friday.

On day one of his two-day tour, he will visit the Cellular Jail National Memorial at Sri Vijay Puram, where he will pay tributes at the Martyrs' Column, offer respects at the Swatantrata Jyoti and visit Veer Savarkar's Cell, the statement said.

On August 9, the vice president will participate in the 'Har Ghar Tiranga Abhiyaan' by hoisting the national flag at Flag Point in Sri Vijay Puram. (PNS)



HARYANA WORKING TO PROTECT ARAVALLIS: BHUPENDER YADAV

Haryana is actively working on the Centre's recommendations to protect the Aravallis and prevent air pollution, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said on Friday. The minister also pointed out that the state Government was making efforts to transform Gurugram into not just a millennium city but also a green city.

Yadav made these comments during his address at an event to mark Haryana's 77th Van Mahotsav, organised in Manesar. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini and State Minister for Environment and Forests Rao Narbir Singh were also at the event. The Union Environment minister highlighted that he had reviewed the air quality situation in Haryana a few days ago, and was happy to note that the state Government took cognisance of his recommendations and carried them forward. (PNS)

Punjab DNT delegation seeks certificates, welfare support from Union Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A delegation of leaders from Punjab's De-notified Tribes (DNT), led by Rajya Sabha MP Satnam Singh Sandhu, met Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Dr Virendra Kumar at the Dr Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi, to highlight long-pending issues concerning the identity, rights and socio-economic development of DNT communities in the State.

The delegation submitted a memorandum seeking the issuance of DNT certificates to eligible communities, stating that the absence of formal identity documents has prevented many families from accessing Government welfare schemes. Representatives of communities including Bazigar, Sansi, Bawaria, Nat, Od, Marasi, Rai Sikh and Sikligar Sikh urged the Centre to ensure recogni-



Rajya Sabha MP Satnam Singh Sandhu



Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Dr Virendra Kumar

tion, educational opportunities, scholarships, skill development, employment and self-employment for DNT families.

The meeting also focused on expanding access to the

Centre's Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED), including coaching for competitive examinations, healthcare, housing and livelihood support. Community repre-

sentatives stressed the need to connect DNT youth with opportunities for UPSC, State Civil Services, SSC, Railway, Banking, IIT-JEE and NEET preparation.

Union Minister Dr Virendra Kumar assured the delegation that the Ministry would make positive efforts to address the concerns of Punjab's DNT communities and ensure that eligible families receive the benefits of Central welfare schemes.

Speaking after the meeting, MP Satnam Singh Sandhu said, "Over the last 12 years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, social justice has gone beyond welfare to include identity, participation and dignity.

Punjab's DNT communities deserve equal rights, opportunities and access to education, employment and Government schemes so they can become equal partners in the journey towards a Viksit Bharat."

President, PM back handloom sector, push e-commerce to expand global reach

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The country's handloom sector offers significant employment opportunities, and the reach of these products in global markets can be expanded through e-commerce platforms, President Droupadi Murmu said on Friday.

Speaking at the 12th National Handloom Day celebrations here, she said about 35 lakh people are engaged in the sector and out of that over 25 lakh are women. She also exuded confidence that the sector will become a strong foundation for the country's inclusive development.

The reach of India's handloom products to global markets can be further strengthened through e-commerce platforms, the President



President Droupadi Murmu along with Minister of Textiles Giriraj Singh and others during the 12th National Handloom Day celebrations at Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre in New Delhi on Friday

said. She also conferred the prestigious Sant Kabir Handloom Awards and National Handloom Awards 2025 at the Rashtrapati

Bhavan Cultural Centre. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his Government will keep supporting the handloom sector,

which he termed an "important pillar of rural empowerment, women-led development and fulfilling the dream of an Atmanirbhar Bharat".

Conveying greetings on the National Handloom Day, PM Modi said India celebrates its rich and vibrant handloom heritage and also salutes the skill, creativity and dedication of the country's weavers and artisans. He said they have preserved and enriched the traditions for generations.

"Our Government will keep supporting the handloom sector, which is an important pillar of rural empowerment, women-led development and fulfilling the dream of an Atmanirbhar Bharat," he said in a post on social media.

The prime minister also appealed to people to share their

favourite handloom products and GRWM (Great Ready With Me) videos using the hashtag "#NationalHandloomDay", and said it will encourage those associated with the sector.

The National Handloom Day is celebrated annually on August 7. It commemorates the launch of the Swadeshi Movement in 1905, which promoted indigenous goods and encouraged self-reliance.

On Thursday night, through an Instagram video, PM Modi appealed to everyone to buy handloom and make videos of handloom products for attracting people across the globe towards such materials. He also said that the celebration of the Handloom Day means a helping hand to the weavers and small traders.

Congress issues whip for MPs to ensure presence in Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Congress on Friday issued a whip to its MPs in the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha, asking them to be present in their respective Houses on August 10, 11 and 12 as "very important" issues will be taken up for discussion. The Congress has also conveyed to all INDIA bloc allies to ensure that their MPs remain present on the three days, sources said.

The issuance of the whip comes amid reports that the contentious Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, will be taken up for discussion and passage in Parliament next week.

There is also talk of the Constitution Amendment Bill involving delimitation being considered by the Government. In his three-line whip, chief whip of the Congress in the Rajya Sabha Jairam Ramesh said, "Very



important issues will be taken up for discussion in the Rajya Sabha on Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday ie 10th, 11th and 12th August, 2026."

"All Members of Congress Party in the Rajya Sabha are requested to kindly remain present in the House from 11:00 am onwards till the adjournment of the House on Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday ie 10th, 11th & 12th August, 2026 without fail and support the party stand. This may be treated as most important," Ramesh said. An identical whip was issued in

the Lok Sabha by the Congress' chief whip K Suresh to the party members.

While mentioning the tentative Government business for the next week, Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Arjun Ram Meghwal made no mention of the FCRA Bill and the Constitution amendment bill to implement women's reservation and delimitation. The FCRA Bill requires a simple majority, but the Constitution amendment bill requires a two-thirds majority.

Opposition can't dictate who responds: Rijiju on Shah demand amid NEET row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Amid a demand from the Congress and other parties that Home Minister Amit Shah should answer questions on the recent police action on protesting students here, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Friday asserted in the Lok Sabha that the opposition cannot dictate which minister will come to the House and respond.

As the House proceedings were disrupted again, Rijiju also said that Shah comes to Parliament every day and stays till late night. Shah is a man whose name sends shivers down the spine of extremists and terrorists, he said amid thumping of desks by members of the treasury benches.

"The day discussion begins here (in Lok Sabha) and when Amit Shah responds, you (opposition) won't be able to hear (digest)," Rijiju told the protesting members.

According to the procedure, the minister who has listed business has to come to the House. "You cannot dictate which minister will come to the House and who will respond. That is decided by the Government and the Chair," the parliamentary affairs minister said.



Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju speaking in the Rajya Sabha during the Monsoon session of Parliament in New Delhi on Friday

The opposition has been demanding a response from Shah on the police crackdown on students, who were protesting against the NEET paper leak in the national capital last month.

As a result of the protests on this issue and other matters, the Monsoon session, which commenced on July 20, has witnessed continuous disruptions. Rijiju also told the opposition members to stop disrupting the proceedings.

Chairman CP Radhakrishnan had

on Thursday asked Rijiju to "echo the sentiments" of the opposition to the home minister as the opposition members continued with their demand for a response from Shah.

Amid the din on Friday, the House was adjourned to meet on Monday. During the Zero Hour, which went on for nearly 16 minutes, the House passed the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MSME) (Amendment) Bill, 2026 without debate. Besides, papers were listed as well as reports of various parlia-

mentary committees were tabled. Speaking to reporters in the Parliament House complex, Rijiju said Parliament continues to function despite repeated disruptions by the opposition.

"We have transacted business and passed the MSME Bill in the Lok Sabha. Business is continuing. Discussions have been fewer because the Congress and opposition parties disrupted proceedings by raising slogans.

"But business has been transacted and all NDA members in the Rajya Sabha participated in the debate and presented their views. There should be no confusion that the House has not functioned," he said.

Rijiju added that the House has functioned and bills have been passed. Only the discussions have been fewer because of the disruptions," he told reporters.

The minister clarified that there is no question of a special session while Parliament is already in session. "There is no proposal for a special session. The Monsoon session is currently underway. How can we talk about a special session while the current session is still in progress?" he said.

Jairam Ramesh hits back at Sitharaman on taxation bill

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Friday hit back at Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman after she accused him of spreading "canards" over the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, and said Government assurances or tweets are no substitute for statutory safeguards.

In a long post on X, Ramesh said the finance minister's response to his "so-called canards" hinges on five "dubious claims".

He said the claim that Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) applies only to merchants and not to customers is misleading.

"MDR is charged to merchants but it is inevitable that they pass transaction costs on to consumers through higher prices or differential pricing — just as they do with credit and



debit card payments. Moreover, 'merchants' include medium and small businesses, kirana stores, and even street vendors, the very backbone of UPI adoption," the Congress general secretary in-charge communications.

On the claim that it will support banks and fintechs to invest more in infrastructure, innovation, and security, Ramesh said UPI was built as a public digital good, and the Government has a responsibility to protect it.

CBI busts cross-border tech-support and crypto extortion racket

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

During an overnight operation between August 5 and 6, 2026, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) busted an international group running fake call centres and offices in Punjab and Delhi. This group targeted Americans with tech-support scams and cryptocurrency extortion. Four people were arrested, including the suspected leader Sourabh Rana and his associates Indermohan Singh, Harneet Singh, and Jappandeep Singh.

CBI teams searched 10 places, including a fake call centre in Mohali linked to the main suspect. They found over 20 mobile phones, 15 laptops and tablets, several hard drives, pen drives, memory cards, a lot of cash, incriminating documents, and cryptocurrency wallets. The agency said the group was highly organised and sent money out of the United States using several crypto



wallets before laundering it with contacts in Delhi.

The group used digital tricks and psychological pressure. They sent pop-up alerts to victims' computers with fake Microsoft toll-free numbers. When people called, they reached the group's fake centres. The operators pretended to be from Microsoft, banks, or law enforcement. They told victims their computers were at risk and needed urgent repair, then took payments

for these fake services.

Sometimes, the scammers made even more serious false claims, such as accusing victims of having child pornography on their computers. Victims were told that illegal material had been planted or that their personal and banking data was at risk. Under this pressure, they were forced to pay ransom in cryptocurrency, often using Bitcoin ATMs. The money was quickly moved through several wallets to hide the

trail and send it out of the United States.

Some cases show how much victims lost. In 2022, a woman in Florida was told her personal and financial information had been stolen and that illegal material was on her computer. She sent about USD 440,000 through a Bitcoin ATM, and the money went to wallets linked to the suspects. In 2023, a New Jersey resident paid about USD 130,000 after being told her banking details were at risk.

The CBI has found more victims in the United States and is still tracking everyone involved.

This operation shows that Indian cyber-fraud networks have changed and now focus on tricking people in Western countries from a distance. Fake Microsoft pop-ups take advantage of people's trust in well-known brands, and threats about child pornography create fear and urgency. Using cryptocurrency and ATM deposits makes it harder to track and recover the money. Laundering money through contacts in Delhi also helps hide where the crime started.

Investigators are now looking at digital evidence from the seized devices, such as scripts, victim lists, wallet addresses, and communication records, to learn more about how the network worked and who else was involved. Modern cybercrime crosses borders: the technical setup and call centres were in India, most

victims were in the United States, and the stolen money moved quickly between countries.

While arresting Rana and his three associates is a big step, the CBI says the investigation is still ongoing. Finding the crypto wallets and tracking how the money was laundered will help determine the total amount stolen and identify anyone else involved.

For Americans, this case is a strong warning that pop-ups, surprise support calls, and demands for cryptocurrency, especially with threats of criminal charges, are clear signs of organised fraud. The raids in Punjab and Delhi show how far these groups can reach and that Indian investigators can target their main operations. As digital evidence is reviewed and Indian agencies work with US authorities, the case should reveal more about how tech-support and crypto-extortion scams have grown in recent years.

Assam floods: Toll rises to 97 and 1.68 lakh affected

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

The flood situation in Assam remained critical as the toll rose to 97 with two more fatalities and over 1.68 lakh people across 15 districts were still affected by the deluge, officials said on Friday. The railway connectivity via Sivasagar district, which was disrupted for nearly a fortnight due to damage to the tracks by floodwaters, has been restored, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) said.

The two deaths were reported from Golaghat and Udalguri districts, taking the toll in this year's flood to 97 so far, the officials said.

Golaghat, Sivasagar, Udalguri, Kamrup Metropolitan, Nagaon, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur, Hojai, Lakhimpur, Biswanath, Jorhat, Charaideo, Karbi Anglong and Dhemaji districts were affected by the deluge.

More than 1.68 lakh people



Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visiting flood affected areas of Upper Assam on Friday

PIONEER PHOTO

were still reeling under floodwaters, with Golaghat being the worst-affected district with around 54,000 people hit, followed by Sivasagar (49,000) and Jorhat (27,000), the officials said.

The number of affected people has increased from around 1.6 lakh across 14 districts on Wednesday.

Altogether 133 relief camps and relief distribution centres are currently operational in six districts, giving shelter and assistance to around

45,000 displaced people. A crop area of 14,382.26 hectares remained submerged.

Floodwaters have also damaged embankments, roads, bridges and other public infrastructure in several districts.

With the restoration of the railway tracks, train services in parts of the state were made operational in a limited manner since Thursday afternoon. "Glad to share that the flood-affected railway section between Selenghat-Amguri-

Simaluguri-Sivasagar Town has been restored and made operational at 4 pm today. With this, direct train services between Guwahati and Dibrugarh via Lumding and Sivasagar can now resume," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in a social media post on Thursday.

He thanked Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and the NFR authorities for restoring the vital rail link between Upper Assam and the rest of the country.

An NFR statement said its General Manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava visited the affected sections and carried out a detailed inspection of the tracks, bridges and other infrastructure.

During the inspection, it was observed that many locals, including children, along with their belongings and livestock, were taking shelter on or near the railway tracks due to the flood-related situation. "Considering the humanitar-

ian concerns and prioritising public safety, it has been decided to initially operate only diesel locomotive-hauled trains on the restored sections. This precautionary measure has been taken to minimise the risk of electrocution and ensure the safety of flood-affected people until conditions become normal," it said.

Several trains, such as Nagaland Express, Guwahati-Ledo-Guwahati Intercity Express, Lumding-Tinsukia-Lumding DEMU and Tinsukia-Jorhat Town Passenger, will run via Moranhat. The long-distance trains will continue to operate on the diverted route via North Lakhimpur-Rangapara-North Rangiya for the time being.

In addition, special trains are also being operated regularly throughout the disruption period to provide alternative rail connectivity for passengers travelling to and from Upper Assam, the NFR said.

NHRC notice to MP Govt over kids crossing check dam to reach school

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued a notice to the Madhya Pradesh Government over reports that schoolchildren in Vidisha district are risking their lives by hopping across the pillars of a check dam to cross the Betwa River and reach school.

Taking suo motu cognisance of media reports, the Commission sought a detailed report from the Madhya Pradesh Chief Secretary within two weeks, observing that if the allegations are true, they raise serious concerns about the violation of children's human rights.

According to the NHRC, students are taking the dangerous route because it reduces the distance to school from 13 km by road to about 1.5 km. A video



showing children jumping across exposed check dam pillars has reportedly gone viral on social media.

The Commission noted that Article 21A of the Constitution guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years, while the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 makes education a legal right for every child in that age group. It also cited the Supreme Court's ruling in the Avinash Mehrotra vs Union of India (2009) case,

which held that the right to education includes access to safe school infrastructure.

The NHRC observed that the absence of safe transport or access to school amounts to a denial of children's right to education with dignity.

According to media reports, villagers said they are unable to accompany their children to school because they have to work in the fields, leaving families with the choice of either sending children through the hazardous route or discontinuing their education.

Railways runs first fuel train to Kashmir Valley via USBRL

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Indian Railways on Friday completed its first-ever trial run of a fuel-laden freight train carrying BTPN bogie petrol/diesel tankers into the Kashmir Valley via the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) route.

For decades, the Kashmir Valley has depended heavily on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway (NH-44) for essential supplies, including fuel.

After the launch of train services to the Kashmir Valley, fuel trains were held back due to safety concerns, particularly the route's long tunnels and fire risks. After extensive safety assessments, the first trial has now been completed successfully.

The rail-based supply of petrol and diesel is expected to deliver faster, safer and more reliable fuel transportation, and cut logistics costs. Indian Railways has been transporting fresh fruit, particularly apples, cherries

and other horticultural produce, to markets outside Kashmir via dedicated parcel and cargo trains, helping growers avoid losses during highway closures.

In recent months, the Kashmir valley has also witnessed the arrival of cement-laden freight trains, Food Corporation of India food-grain rakes, fertiliser consignments, automobile deliveries (including the first Maruti Suzuki vehicles by rail), and even Indian Army winter supplies.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah inspected damaged stretches of the National Highway and assessed repair works following landslides and road damage caused by last week's heavy rainfall.

Highlighting the twin challenges of the ongoing Amarnath Yatra and Kashmir's peak fruit season, Abdullah said the administration was ensuring smooth movement of essential supplies and horticultural produce. "Fruit-laden trucks are being given prior-



ity so that growers do not suffer losses. Petroleum tankers from Jammu are also being prioritised to ensure there is no shortage of essential commodities," he said.

Addressing reporters in Ramban, the Chief Minister said uninterrupted restoration of NH-44 remains the Government's priority as it is the Valley's only all-weather road link.

"There is no alternative to this highway. I travelled via the Rajouri-Poonch route through Peer Ki Gali and

Buffliaz two days ago. The condition of that stretch is far worse than this," Abdullah said, indicating that the Mughal Road cannot currently serve as a dependable substitute.

He said the damage on NH-44 was confined to a few vulnerable stretches and that the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), traffic police and the district administration were working round the clock to restore normal traffic whenever weather-related disruptions occur.

Hydrogen train expansion depends on resource availability, operational needs, says Vaishnaw

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The hydrogen-powered train was launched on the Jind-Sonipat route on a pilot basis, and its expansion to other routes will depend on availability of resources, operational feasibility, and other requirements, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw informed the Rajya Sabha on Friday.

MPs from several parties raised questions regarding the new technology, including the total expenditure incurred on its development, details of hydrogen train projects approved and proposed across the country, the availability and cost of green hydrogen for such projects, and the domestic manufacturing capacity being developed for green hydrogen fuel.

Vaishnaw, in a written reply, informed the House that from the launch of the hydrogen-powered train on July 17, 2026, till August 3, it



covered 2,492 km in commercial service on the 89-km Jind-Sonipat section.

"The hydrogen train has been developed by Indian Railways on pilot basis to demonstrate the use of hydrogen powered train technology in Railways," Vaishnaw said.

A dedicated hydrogen plant has been set up at Jind for providing hydrogen in this trainset. The hydrogen storage facility has been set up in accordance with the guidelines of the Petroleum and Explosives Safety

Organization (PESO), ensuring adherence to prescribed safety standards and protocols, he said.

Highlighting the environmental benefits, the railway minister said the hydrogen trainset ensures zero carbon dioxide emission, with water vapour being the only by-products.

"The trainset works on fuel cell technology that does not have any moving part and conventional engine for traction power generation, therefore the operation is much quieter

thereby reducing noise pollution. This project establishes Indian Railways in hydrogen technology," he added.

Speaking about the cost incurred, he said the pilot project has been developed at a total cost of Rs 141 crore. "As the hydrogen trainset and its infrastructure have been developed on a pilot basis, direct comparison of the cost of hydrogen-fuelled trains with established traction systems at this stage would not present a fair cost comparison."

He also outlined some of the train's key features, including its indigenous design and development, its status as the world's longest (with 10 coaches) and most powerful (2,400 kW) hydrogen trainset on a broad-gauge platform, and the fact that it comprises two 1,200-kW Driving Power Cars (DPCs), together generating 2,400 kW, along with eight passenger coaches.

BJP demands clarification from Congress on ministerial berths auctioning in Karnataka Cabinet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The BJP on Friday demanded a clarification from Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party leader Rahul Gandhi over alleged "auctioning" of the ministerial berths in the recently expanded state Cabinet in Karnataka.

This came after Karnataka BJP leader Chalavadi Narayanaswamy on Wednesday cited a purported audio conversation between two Congress leaders of the state and alleged that Cabinet positions in the state had been secured through monetary influence.

Narayanaswamy claimed that the purported audio recording indicated that "honest" legislators who did not have money were overlooked for ministerial posts, and raised questions on the re-induction of B Nagendra, who has been chargesheeted in the ₹89-crore Valmiki Tribes Development Corporation scam in Karnataka, into the state cabinet.



The BJP leader also warned of protest if Nagendra continued to hold the post.

Targeting the Congress over the purported audio recording, BJP MP Anurag Thakur said, "In the Congress, one's stature and position are determined by the chadhawa (financial offerings) made to the party high command. I am not the one saying this. These serious allegations have emerged from the conversation between the Congress leaders."

According to the purported audio tape of the conversation, 80 per cent of the ministers secured their posts

in the Karnataka Cabinet by making such offerings, the former Union minister added.

"The question is why a person, who is an accused in the Valmiki Tribes Development Corporation scam and is still facing an ED case, has been inducted into the cabinet? Did the person, who embezzled funds meant for Dalits, secure a spot in the new Cabinet based on a payoff?" Thakur asked.

"These are serious allegations. Kharge, Gandhi and K C Venugopal will have to respond to these allegations," the BJP leader told reporters here.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday endorsed Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's remarks that Generation Z's grievances are genuine and that protesting does not make them anti-national.

Referring to Mohan Bhagwat's remark, the chief minister said it was encouraging that a distinction was made between opposing the Government and acting against the country.

"The good thing is that Mohan Bhagwat ji has acknowledged this distinction. Opposing the Government is not the same as opposing the country. In fact, opposing the Government is often beneficial for the nation because it helps correct mistakes wherever they occur," he said.

On Thursday while addressing a gathering of around 2,000 Gen Z and Gen Alpha members at India's International Movement to Unite Nations (IIMUN) 15th



anniversary event in Mumbai, Bhagwat said, "If Gen Z members are agitating, they are not anti-national; they are our people. It is our next generation. You need a dialogue and rapport with them."

Abdullah urged authorities to stop action against students who participated in the agitation over alleged irregularities in the NEET examination and said protesting against the Government should not be equated with opposing the nation.

Abdullah said the agitation helped ensure accountability, expressing hope that it would lead to improvements in the conduct of future examinations.

Expressing concern over reports of action against the protesters, Abdullah said students were allegedly being manhandled, booked in criminal cases and harassed on social media.

In some instances, police reportedly summoned their relatives. "I believe this entire course of action should stop," he said.

Senior first officers must join AI Express to become commanders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi/Mumbai

Air India pilots who are eligible and want to become commanders on narrow- and wide-body planes will be compulsorily required to shift to Air India Express, with the Tata Group-owned loss-making airline putting in place a new framework based on a common seniority pool, according to sources. Under the framework, Senior First Officers (FOs) shifting to Air India Express for narrow-body Boeing 737 planes will be given a one-time bonus of ₹10 lakh and the existing commanders of these aircraft at Air India Express will be paid ₹21 lakh over three years, the sources said.

Upon getting the commandship, the sources said such pilots will be required to be at the operating base chosen by Air India Express for at least two years, which can be extended by up to six months. Once that period is complete, they would be allowed to choose their operating base depending on eligibility.



There was no official comment from Air India on the new framework.

Two senior pilots, who are with Air India Group, told PTI that the new framework has been mooted amid intense competition among airlines for hiring senior pilots, attrition and also lesser flying hours at present.

Air India has more than 3,500 pilots while Air India Express has over 2,000 pilots. Together, they have a fleet of around 300 aircraft. Air India does not have any Boeing 737 aircraft in its fleet.

Details about the number of senior first officers, as well as the count of narrow-body and wide-body pilots at Air India, could not be immediately ascertained.

Ladakh LG reviews landslide mitigation preparedness, orders safety audit on highway

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Leh/Jammu

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has directed the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and the Public Works Department (PWD) to conduct detailed safety audits of vulnerable road stretches in Ladakh and take immediate preventive measures to mitigate landslides and rockfalls following recent incidents that damaged property and disrupted traffic.

The directions were issued during a high-level meeting chaired by the lieutenant

governor on Thursday to review preparedness and mitigation measures in the wake of recent landslides, rockfalls and flash floods in the Union Territory, officials said.

Saxena appreciated the relief operations carried out by the Army and BRO during recent flash floods and landslides and lauded the prompt road-clearance efforts.

He, however, stressed the need for proactive measures at vulnerable locations to prevent recurrence of such incidents and ensure uninterrupted road connectivity.

The lieutenant governor

directed the agencies concerned to undertake a comprehensive safety audit of around 15 identified high-risk locations on the Leh-Kargil National Highway and four to five vulnerable stretches on the Khardung La axis of the Leh-Nubra road.

He asked officials to assess unstable slopes and remove loose and potentially hazardous rocks before they pose a threat to commuters.

Emphasising a shift from reactive response to proactive risk management, Saxena said the focus should be on engineering and technology-based mitigation to



ensure safer roads, uninterrupted connectivity and greater resilience against

natural hazards.

"The recent flash floods, landslides and rockfalls have

once again underlined the need to strengthen our preparedness and move beyond reactive response to proactive prevention," he said.

The LG directed the concerned agencies to identify vulnerable locations, undertake detailed safety audits and use the best available technologies for slope stabilisation and rockfall protection.

"Our priority is to ensure the safety of people, protect critical infrastructure and maintain uninterrupted connectivity across Ladakh," he said.

During the meeting, BRO

officials made detailed presentations on the causes of slope failures, citing changing rainfall patterns, geological factors, slope gradient alterations, weathering, developmental activities, vibrations and water pressure as key contributors.

They also briefed the lieutenant governor on various mitigation technologies, including retaining and breast walls, flexible ring nests, soil nailing, rock bolting, anchoring, shored-wall retaining structures, rockfall embankments, rock sheds, high-energy absorption barrier systems, smart

rockfall detection systems and the use of geosynthetics such as geogrids, geotextiles, geomembranes and geocells.

Chief Engineer, Project Vijayak, Brig Rahul Oberoy assured the Lieutenant Governor that safety audits and preventive measures on the Leh-Kargil and Leh-Nubra highways would be taken up on priority.

Saxena also directed the PWD Secretary to carry out similar safety audits and risk mitigation measures on major road stretches under the department's jurisdiction.

Editor's TAKE

Free UPI no longer guaranteed

Parliament has removed the legal prohibition on levying charges, replacing it with the govt's power to impose fees through future notifications

The Lok Sabha has passed the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, by voice vote amid Opposition protests that never became real debate. Buried inside a broader tax bill was one consequential change: an amendment to Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 – the provision legally barring banks and payment firms from charging Indians to use UPI. That wall is gone. In its place sits the government's discretion to notify, whenever it chooses, which payment modes may attract a fee.

To be fair, nothing changes today. No Merchant Discount Rate has been announced, and UPI remains free at the counter. But the distinction that mattered – free by law – has quietly become free by permission. Permission, unlike law, can be withdrawn by notification, not by Parliament. UPI is the spine of India's digital economy: in July alone it carried 23.66 billion transactions worth nearly ₹30 lakh crore, some 85 percent of the country's digital payments. That scale was built on one promise, kept since January 2020: UPI would cost nothing. The Finance Ministry itself called charge rumours baseless and misleading as recently as June 2025. Fourteen months later, it has legislated the very power it once denied wanting. Reports suggest the eventual target is a 0.25–0.4 percent levy on merchant payments above ₹2,000 – just 4 percent of UPI's volume but 67 percent of its value – while small payments and person-to-person transfers stay free. That sounds reasonable, until RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra's own admission: someone always pays. It may not be the same consumer at the till, he said, but the wider economy absorbs it regardless.

A merchant charged 0.4 percent rarely absorbs it quietly – prices creep up, and "free" starts to feel like a technicality. That is why this will not sit well with ordinary users, whatever the fine print says. Nirmala Sitharaman's insistence that MDR applies only to merchants, not customers, is technically accurate and practically beside the point – few consumers distinguish between a fee charged to them and one passed through to them. A bill pushed through without real debate only compounds the problem: a foundational digital-inclusion guarantee diluted in a voice vote.

The fallback case is not baseless, though. Zero-MDR costs the exchequer real money – ₹2,000 crore is budgeted this year alone to subsidise banks for low-value UPI transactions – and payment companies have long argued they cannot keep funding fraud detection and infrastructure on zero revenue. Even the traders' body CAIT has said it would accept a nominal charge on high-value transactions, provided small merchants and ordinary users stay protected. That may be a fair trade-off eventually. But it deserved Parliament's scrutiny, not a voice vote amid din. Digital India's biggest success story was built on trust as much as technology. Spending that trust this quietly is the real risk – to UPI's next hundred crore users, and to the idea that "Digital India" was ever a guarantee rather than a policy revisable by notification.

The missing workforce in India's EV transition

The success of India's green mobility mission will ultimately depend not only on how many electric vehicles it produces, but also on how effectively it equips its workforce to thrive in the new economy



India's EV transition is gathering significant momentum, as is evident from impressive figures showing EV sales, expanding charging infrastructure, ambitious manufacturing targets, and a vision of clean and sustainable mobility solutions. However, beneath this narrative lies a less visible yet critical question: who will power this transition?

While much of the discourse has focused on the environmental and economic benefits that this transition offers, its implications for the workforce that underpins India's mobility ecosystem call for equal attention. This is particularly noteworthy for a country where nearly 80 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce is concentrated in the informal sector. Among them are an estimated 4.29 million roadside mechanics and professional garage owners who provide repair services across the country. As EV technologies become more advanced and demand for EVs increases across the white- and blue-collar segments, particularly among the aspiring middle class, these informal workers risk being left behind unless they are equipped with the skills and empowered to participate in the emerging EV ecosystem. Therefore, it is imperative that the workforce be made future-ready to adapt to changing technologies, which will be critical in enabling a transition that is not only environmentally sustainable but also socially inclusive.

While certain occupations associated with ICE vehicles are expected to decline over time, the EV ecosystem is simultaneously creating demand for a diverse range of new skills and services. Beyond vehicle manufacturing, jobs are emerging across charging infrastructure deployment and maintenance, battery swapping, fleet management, diagnostics and repair, battery recycling, and digital mobility services. Recent estimates suggest that employment in the EV service and repair ecosystem alone could create between 3.7 million and 5.6 million jobs by 2047.

The rapid expansion of e-commerce, app-based mobility services, and electric two- and three-wheelers is creating new avenues for gig workers, delivery personnel, charging operators, local service providers, and small entrepreneurs. The transition therefore presents an opportunity not only to generate employment but also to diversify livelihoods within India's broader mobility ecosystem.



A SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION IS NOT ONLY ABOUT RESKILLING AND UPSKILLING THE EXISTING WORKFORCE BUT ALSO CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE AND RESPONSIBLE EV ECOSYSTEM. PONDERING OVER EMERGING INITIATIVES DEMONSTRATING AN INCLUSIVE TRANSITION MAY OPEN A SPACE FOR A DEEPER REFLECTION AND INNOVATION

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Despite this significant employment potential, the emerging opportunities cannot be accessed equitably without targeted interventions. Unlike conventional ICE vehicles, EVs rely heavily on advanced electronics, battery management systems, software diagnostics, and high-voltage components, necessitating specialised knowledge, software, and equipment.

Evidence suggests that nearly 93 per cent of workers in the service and repair sector lack formal technical training, while a majority continue to rely on skills acquired through informal apprenticeships and on-the-job experience. Limited access to EV-specific training, inadequate infrastructure at vocational institutions, potential income loss while undertaking training, and financial constraints in procuring specialised tools further compound these challenges. As a result, the principal concern is not a shortage of employment opportunities, but the absence of accessible pathways that enable informal workers to participate in the evolving EV ecosystem. Without deliberate and targeted investments in skilling, certification, and workforce transition mechanisms, there is a risk that those who have long sustained India's mobility sector may be excluded from its future.

The transition to electric mobility also presents an opportunity to address long-standing gaps in workforce participation within the automotive sector.

Historically, occupations across vehicle servicing, repair, and transport operations have remained overwhelmingly shaped by patriarchal values, and much more needs to be done in terms of critical thinking and promoting a conducive environment to reverse the exclusion of women. As a matter of fact, the evolving nature of EV technologies has the potential to diversify the workforce, and it is imperative to address structural and socio-economic barriers to facilitate women's participation across the value chain.

Realising this opportunity will require deliberate policy interventions rather than assuming that inclusion will occur organically. Targeted skilling programmes, financial support for women-led enterprises, mentorship networks, and gender-responsive workplace practices can enable greater participation in emerging roles. Several state policies have already begun recognising this need.

For instance, Tamil Nadu's EV policy provides enhanced training incentives for women and other underrepresented groups, signalling a significant shift towards embedding equity within workforce development and the deployment of human capital. Integrating women into the EV ecosystem from its formative stages will not only strengthen labour force participation but also contribute to a more resilient and inclusive mobility transition.

A sustainable transition is not only about reskilling and upskilling the existing workforce but also about creating a more inclusive and responsible EV ecosystem. Reflecting on emerging initiatives demonstrating an inclusive transition may open the way for deeper reflection and innovation. Social enterprises such as eBik have enabled street vendors, waste pickers, and daily wage workers to adopt affordable electric mobility solutions, improving productivity and reducing physical strain. Internationally, Singapore's Progressive Wage Model illustrates how linking skills development with wage progression and career mobility can support workforce transitions.

Together, these examples highlight the value of replication. As India stands at the threshold of significant EV adoption and mainstreaming in the mobility sector, industry, O&M, academia, and think tanks need to deliberate on and demonstrate viable EV transition models that are both environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive.

PIC TALK



'Kanjariyas' gather to collect holy water from the Ganga river during the holy month of 'Shravan', at Har Ki Pauri, in Haridwar, Uttarakhand. PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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CREAMY LAYER RULE SHOULD COVER SC, ST RESERVATIONS

Apropos "Creamy layer principle not applicable to quotas for SCs, STs: Govt's affidavit to SC," The Pioneer, August 7. The Central Government's decision to oppose the application of the creamy layer principle to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) is difficult to justify. Reservations were introduced to address the historic social discrimination and exclusion faced by these communities and to provide equal opportunities. However, allowing economically and socially advanced families within these categories to continue enjoying reservation benefits generation after generation defeats the larger objective of affirmative action. Many families have already achieved financial stability, quality education, and professional success, yet they continue to

access the same benefits intended for the most disadvantaged. Children from poor and marginalised SC/ST families, especially in rural areas, are forced to compete with candidates who enjoy far greater educational and social advantages, limiting opportunities for those who need them most. Applying the creamy layer principle would not abolish reservations or dilute constitutional safeguards. Instead, it would ensure that the benefits reach the weakest and most deserving sections of SC and ST communities. Such a reform would strengthen the credibility and fairness of the reservation system while promoting broader social justice. The Government should reconsider its stand in the interest of equity and inclusive development.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

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

We hired a stranger and called It recruitment



2ND OPINION

Let me tell you something we all know but rarely say out loud. Somewhere, right now, a hiring manager is sitting across from a candidate who looks great on paper. Confident. Well-spoken. Impressive CV. The interview goes well, the team likes them, and an offer letter goes out within the week. Nobody asks too many questions. Nobody digs too deep. There is a position to fill, and this person seems right. Three months later, something doesn't add up.

This is not a rare story. It happens more often than organisations care to admit, and the reason is almost always the same: background verification was skipped, rushed, or treated as a formality rather than a filter. We live in a country where getting a passport requires you to prove who you are, down to your grandmother's



address. A bank will not open an account without seeing your PAN, your Aadhaar, a photograph, a signature, and sometimes requiring a physical visit. A SIM card also requires documentation. The government, financial institutions, and even telecom providers have decided that verification is non-negotiable. They have built entire systems around it.

And yet a company will hand someone a laptop, access to client data, a salary, and the trust of an entire team based on a CV they wrote themselves and two referees they personally selected. That logic seems strange when you lay it out plainly. The counter-arguments are understandable. Hiring is slow enough already. Good can-

didates do not wait. Documentation is sometimes genuinely incomplete. And honestly, when someone is sitting in front of you and they seem perfectly decent, asking for deeper verification can feel almost insulting. But that discomfort is exactly the point. The candidate who is perfectly decent has nothing to hide. They will wait the extra week. They will provide what is needed. The ones who push back hardest against verification are rarely the ones you want to be worried about, and yet somehow they are often the ones who slip through.

Incomplete documentation is not a reason to skip the process. It is a conversation to have before the offer, not a problem to quietly overlook. The cost of getting this wrong is not just financial, though that cost is real enough. It is the team that loses faith in leadership's judgement. The client relationship that gets damaged. The culture that quietly shifts when someone with the wrong values sits inside it long enough. We do not let a stranger into our homes without knowing who they are. We should not let one into our organisations either.

Background verification is not about distrust. It is about responsibility to the people already inside the organisation who deserve to work alongside someone who is exactly who they claim to be. Every hire is an act of faith. But faith, in the context of building teams, works best when it is backed by facts. Verify. Always.

The writer writes about development, social, and gender issues

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RBI keeps repo rate unchanged

The RBI's decision to keep the repo rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent while maintaining a neutral policy stance reflects a balanced approach to sustaining economic growth while controlling inflation. The policy is expected to provide stability to borrowers, businesses and markets. Stable interest rates will encourage investment and consumption while enabling banks to maintain predictable lending conditions.

The RBI has also rightly acknowledged the risks posed by global uncertainties, rising crude oil prices, a hawkish US Federal Reserve, and food inflation, all of which continue to threaten price stability. The upward revision in the GDP growth forecast is encouraging and is a testament to the resilience of the Indian economy.

However, the central bank will need to closely monitor whether higher energy costs feed into core inflation and wage pressures. Any shortfall in the ongoing monsoon could further complicate the inflation outlook. While some may argue that the RBI should have raised interest rates amid external uncertainties, monetary policy must be supported by fiscal measures and structural reforms to ensure sustainable growth. Clear policy guidance will also help businesses and households make informed decisions.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

Restore full statehood to Jammu & Kashmir

It is high time that the Centre fulfilled its commitment to restore full statehood to Jammu & Kashmir. Seven years after the abrogation of Article 370, the region has witnessed notable improvements in security, infrastructure and democratic participation. The successful Assembly elections and the enthusiastic voter turnout clearly reflect the people's faith in democratic institutions. The Centre has repeatedly assured Parliament and the Supreme Court that statehood would be restored at an appropriate time. With the elections completed peacefully and an elected government in place, delaying this promise any further would only weaken public confidence.

Restoring statehood is not about revisiting the Article 370 debate. It is about strengthening federalism, respecting democratic aspirations and empowering an elected government with full legislative and administrative authority. A Union Territory arrangement should remain a temporary measure, not a permanent substitute for statehood.

Honouring this constitutional commitment will reinforce trust, promote political stability, and mark the next important step towards lasting peace and normalcy in Jammu & Kashmir.

VANDANA | CHANDIGARH

Keep UPI payments free

The proposed Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) on UPI transactions risks slowing India's remarkable journey towards digital inclusion. While high-value transactions account for only a small share of the total transaction volume, imposing a fee on merchants could discourage digital payment adoption, particularly among small retailers and neighbourhood businesses. Adding another recurring monthly expense, over and above what many merchants already pay for soundbox subscriptions and other digital payment services, will increase operating costs and reduce the appeal of accepting UPI payments.

UPI's extraordinary success has been built on a zero-friction, low-cost public digital infrastructure that has transformed the way millions of Indians make and receive payments. Rather than shifting system maintenance costs to merchants, the Government should continue supporting operational expenses through public funding while retaining the existing statutory exemption from MDR. This approach will encourage wider digital adoption and strengthen financial inclusion.

Introducing additional charges at this stage risks pushing small businesses back towards cash transactions, undermining years of progress in digital payments, financial formalisation and transparency.

VIJAYKUMAR HK | RAICHUR

The new axis and the battle for the next world order

The growing strategic convergence of China, Russia, Iran and North Korea is bringing a new geopolitical rivalry into sharper focus. Their expanding cooperation across defence, technology, trade and cyberspace is steadily altering the global balance of power and posing the most significant challenge yet to American primacy



BHAVNA SINGH

North Korea that the four nations — China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran - now function as a strategically aligned bloc even without a formal mutual-defence treaty. The findings are seminal, foreshadowing a 'churn' in the emerging world order, where quadrilaterals and minilaterals that seemed unimaginable just a decade ago are gathering momentum and becoming credible power blocs. The 'new axis' is largely ascribed to authoritarianism and cooperation across military, economic, cyber, and technology domains, which is forging a formidable partnership to counter the US. China-Russia ties form the core of this partnership, while Iran and North Korea play supporting roles. Indeed, the opacity of such bloc politics only deepens the intrigue.

What is increasingly evident is that cooperation among the four has intensified after the Ukraine war, a turning point that provoked a coordinated response from outside powers. The alignment, though fractured and far from cohesive, seeks to cushion the blow from Western sanctions through alternative trade networks and technology transfers, largely in response to tariffs imposed by the US on several non-Western countries. Most importantly, the book stands as a testament to the fact that US policymakers are not deceiving themselves and are fully aware of the looming threat that a renewed Sino-Russian entente could pose, calling it a dangerous threat environment for Washington.

Since BRICS entered mainstream geopolitical discourse, policymakers have speculated about new power groupings. Among them is the proposed 'QUADRO'—an informal alliance of the US, Russia, China, and India. While such a coalition appears unlikely, it also challenges the notion of America's inevitable decline. Despite its relatively short history, the US has remained the world's dominant power since the Second World War and is unlikely to allow any emerging bloc to overturn the existing global balance of power. Rather than falling into the Thucydides Trap, a 'prolonged struggle for assertion' between the ruling hegemon and the emerging bloc appears more likely. While some elements of this transition are already visible, others are being pursued with mounting vigour. These pertain to cyber operations, digital surveillance, semiconductor supply chains, artificial intelligence (AI), and dual-use technologies. The US will look to counter this axis head-on by confronting security challenges and reinventing the wheel of domestic nationalism.

Two playbooks, one retreat

More revealing, however, is the contrast in strategic conduct. While US policymakers have been outspoken about their strategy and intent, China has consistently pursued a more restrained and covert approach. US policymakers have, at times, overreached on America's ability to shape global politics through military interventions and expansive security commitments; China, on the other hand, in keeping with Sun Tzu's traditional doctrine, has sought to win wars without even fighting them.

This has meant that while the US has fallen prey to strategic overreach and suffered setbacks in Afghanistan and Iraq, China has enjoyed the spoils of shooting from Russia's shoulder. Over time, China has been able to garner resources and trust from its neighbours and allies while supporting conflicts in Ukraine, Iran, and the South China Sea and - wherever it has chosen to intervene through supply of weapons (often to both sides of the conflict) — before selectively applying international norms.

Thus, while the US is criticised for advocating a rules-based order while simultaneously flouting it with its carrot-and-stick approach to neighbours under Pax Americana, China and Russia are likewise criticised for invoking sovereignty and non-interference while violating these very principles when it suits their strategic interests. Equally, the hypocrisy of an ascendant Chinese order can no longer be hidden behind the

United States (US) strategic circles have been awash in a new lexicon after Bradley L Bowman, Elaine K Dezenski, and Rear Admiral (Retd) Mark Montgomery of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies argued in Axis of Aggressors: Countering the Cooperation of China, Russia, Iran, and



rhetoric of a 'peaceful rise'. The emerging Sino-centric order, though outwardly benign and largely propagated through economic statecraft — simultaneously empowering and entrapping states through economic dependence — is engineered upon a dangerous chessboard of espionage, mis-information, and military balancing.

China has covertly abetted war and, most importantly, won it, without the international system even recognising the discrepancies it has exploited. Take the Ukraine war, which has turned out to be a bloody nose for the Russians: it could have easily culminated in Russia's favour had China not supplied the constant barrage of arms and ammunition to Ukraine. However, for the sake of 'justice', Beijing maintained that it had a concurrent obligation to help Kyiv during the war and came up with a charade of measures to try to end the war through a peace proposal on its own terms.

Whose order wins?

Similarly, China has been at the forefront of regional balancing, as demonstrated at the recent China-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Meeting at the held in Manila, where the two sides expressed concern that 'the rapidly evolving situation in the Middle East and its spillover effects pose a grave threat to the lives and safety of civilians, as well as to regional and global peace, stability, and economic activities including regional trade, investment, energy, and food security'. Manufacturing solidarity over the situation in the Middle East within ASEAN again gives a boost to China's regional aspirations and reveals China's ability to deftly steer an agenda that normally should be restricted to its bilateral economic and cultural engagement. This underscores China's rising influence and the shrinking space for dissent within regional groupings. China has been ASEAN's largest trading partner for 16 consecutive years, and the effects of that dependence are becoming increasingly apparent.

Interestingly, at this meeting, both China and ASEAN called for the complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula — but the ASEAN community almost lost face when, in a rare show of defiance, North Korea lambasted the grouping and called the proposal a 'stupid and foolish wild dream'. Pyongyang reiterated that its status as a nuclear weapons state was 'final and irreversible', thereby posing a challenge to China's power assertion and dashing its hopes of regional balancing. However, this exposes the deeper hypocrisy when it comes to recognising nuclear-armed states and the politics of nuclear brinkmanship. Though China has unilaterally given up testing nuclear weapons and promised not to resort to any armed assault or race, the exclusivity of the nuclear club itself raises questions of privilege and denial. By raising this issue at the ASEAN Regional Forum, China also seeks to expand and assert its concerns. Doing so enables China to maximise its geographical reach across this part of the globe, especially where US influence seems restrained at the moment.

Undoubtedly, all major powers in the international system tend to display selective adherence to international rules, though the scope and methods of their actions differ. But when the clash between two distinctive orders lays bare the inner tenets of those systems, it is far easier to see through the hypocrisy of the aspiring hegemon than that of the current flagbearer. Today, as liberal democracies clash with a still-forming authoritarian order, the real question is on what terms the authoritarians will hold the mantle. Can they wield it more effectively than the order that is receding and for how long? Will they be able to rewrite the rules of the playbook any better than the receding states and empires.

The writer is a Visiting Fellow at the Chintan Research Foundation

Immigration crisis: The open sky and the Guarded Gate



ACHARYA PRASHANT

The human being did not evolve to stay fixed to one patch of soil. Movement is prakriti; it is natural, older than any border ever drawn on a map. You will watch a migratory bird cross a continent and feel something lift in you, but let the same instinct arrive on two legs, with a bag over its shoulder, and the feeling curdles into suspicion, even derision. Why not ban the birds too? They come because that is how prakriti moves, and you are not meant to remain confined to the village you were born in.

Late in July, some sixty thousand people threw themselves at the fence between Morocco and the small

Spanish enclave of Ceuta, and more than seventy died in the crossing. Within days, nearly all had walked back into Morocco of their own accord. It was not an invasion by any standard.

Everyone reading this is a migrant. Wave after wave of movement and mingling over thousands of years gave the Indian subcontinent its present shape. Nature wants you to move, and it is society, not nature, that places on you the burden of staying loyal to your little ancestral farmland. But inside that one word, migration, two very different things are hiding.

A movement can rise from the natural centre, and a movement can rise from the centre of delusion, and the same person carries both. The ego can block the right movement and can also cause the wrong one. The problem is never the moving or the staying in itself; the problem is who is doing it.

Go in the hope of bread and butter, and that is fine; you will find bread. Go instead in the hope of fulfilment, believing that the missing thing in you is waiting on the other side of a border, and you will return empty-handed. No place, no object of the ego can complete you. This is not the traffic of invaders; it is bread, earned far from home and carried back.

It is raining hard, and a small puppy that has lost its mother is scratching at your door, crying to be let in out of the water. And there is another: the burglar, working the same door in the same rain, who is there out of desire. The first deserves sanctuary, so open the door. Shut it against the second.

One says that if you let the puppy in you must let the thief in too. The other says that since the thief exists you should bar the puppy as well. A country is not obliged to admit plunderers, but it should not be permitted to turn away the drowning either. Imperfect filtering is far better than either blanket, because a blanket is only a refusal to look.

Who decides whether an arrival is a puppy or a thief, and why is deciding so difficult? The difficulty is not out there at the border; it is inside you. You cannot tell the puppy from the thief in the world because you have never learned to tell them apart in yourself. In your own inner life, the thief constantly poses as the puppy. This is why an immigration policy is never just a policy but a confession of what the person who made it is like inside.

But seeing the difference is only half the work. The filter will only ever be as honest as the person holding it. What turns clear sight into clean action is intent. The puppy you let in out of the rain can grow into the greyhound that one day saves your life. But be very slow to call the puppy a thief, because the day you shut that door you also shut out everything the puppy would have brought.

What follows is rarely a quarrel about numbers or crime; it is about culture. A living culture does not fear the guest. Only conditioning defended as identity fears the guest.

If you move to a country for good, not for a month but for the rest of your life, learn its language. If the host says the theme is jungle, you do not arrive in a three-piece suit insisting you are not an animal; you either enter into the evening or decline the invitation.

There is a matching discipline the host owes the guest. If you tell me to change my name, or my religion, or to cover my head to your taste, you have crossed from the practical into the domineering. Learn the language, and that is fair; give up your name and your faith under duress, and that is not.

I have never liked the words integration and assimilation; both carry a faint smell of conversion. What the situation actually asks for is the day-by-day judgement to tell the practical from the imperious, on both sides of the door: discretion.

Underneath the whole argument of free movement sits an assertion that a human being has a right to move to whichever country he pleases. But there is no such general right. The law of nations keeps one narrow shelter open, for the persecuted and the drowning, and that shelter must stand. Beyond that shelter, everybody has the opportunity.

If you truly want migration to be a right, you must dissolve the order of nations itself, rub every boundary off the map. But then there can be no nationalism or patriotism, no line anywhere that is yours to defend. Before you erase the boundaries from the map, have you erased them from your heart?

The ego lives and breeds only in boundaries. The moment you say this is my family, these few are mine and the rest are not, you have drawn a border and posted a guard on it. The fences at Ceuta are the fences in the human heart. As long as the interior stays divided, the exterior will keep matching it, fence for fence.

This discretion has an older name in this land: viveka, the discrimination between the real and the unreal. Discretion is a direction to keep walking in, never a destination you reach and can then forget. The gate you keep guarding against the stranger is, when everything else is stripped away, your own. Whether it opens is not, in the end, a question of policy but of who you take yourself to be.



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

Punjab Congress and the politics of parallel power



MONIKA MALIK

Singh and Giani Zail Singh to Rajinder Kaur Bhattal and Capt Amarinder Singh; from Capt Amarinder and Partap Singh Bajwa to Capt Amarinder and Navjot Singh Sidhu; from Sidhu and Charanjit Singh Channi to today's visible fault lines between Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring and former Chief Minister Channi — the names have changed, but the pattern has remained strikingly familiar.

Every generation has inherited its own "versus". For nearly five decades, almost every major leadership transition in the Punjab Congress has been accompanied by a parallel power struggle. These rivalries were rarely just battles of ambition. Almost every "versus" revolved around three questions — Who controlled the organisation? Who controlled the government? And who would eventually lead the party into the next election? Whenever these questions remained unsettled, factionalism flourished.

Punjab Congress has repeatedly followed a curious political cycle: every leader who rises by challenging the establishment eventually finds

Politics is often described as a battle between parties. Punjab Congress tells a different story. Its fiercest battles have often been fought within its own ranks.

From Darbara Singh and Giani Zail Singh to Rajinder Kaur Bhattal and Capt Amarinder Singh; from Capt Amarinder and Partap Singh Bajwa to Capt Amarinder and Navjot Singh Sidhu; from Sidhu and Charanjit Singh Channi to today's visible fault lines between Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring and former Chief Minister Channi — the names have changed, but the pattern has remained strikingly familiar.

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Punjab Congress has repeatedly followed a curious political cycle: every leader who rises by challenging the establishment eventually finds

himself challenged by another ambitious successor. Capt Amarinder's journey perhaps illustrates this better than anyone else's. After the Congress lost the 2012 Assembly election, the high command appointed Partap Singh Bajwa as state unit president. The decision was organisational. Its consequences were political. For nearly three years, Bajwa headed the organisation while Capt Amarinder remained the Congress's principal face on the ground. Rather than resolving the leadership question, Delhi chose to balance competing claims to authority — a formula that would repeatedly define its approach to Punjab.

The experiment yielded limited organisational stability. Recognising the need for a single face ahead of the 2017 Assembly election, the high command restored Capt Amarinder as the Punjab Congress president in late 2015. The decision paid immediate dividends. Under his leadership, the Congress returned to power in 2017 with 77 seats and nearly 38.5 percent of the vote — one of its strongest electoral performances in decades.

Yet the victory also reinforced a recurring paradox. In Punjab Congress, decisive electoral mandates have rarely guaranteed lasting organisational stability. Almost as soon as Capt Amarinder consolidated his authority, another rival centre of influence began to emerge. The Capt Amarinder-Navjot Sidhu confrontation was not merely another personality clash; it exposed the limitations of the Congress high command's



long-standing strategy of accommodating competing leaders instead of settling the leadership question. Eventually, Sidhu was appointed Punjab Congress president despite Capt Amarinder's reservations. The decision was projected as a political compromise. In reality, it formalised two competing centres of authority within the same party.

The consequences were swift. Capt Amarinder resigned as Chief Minister in September 2021, bringing to an end one of the most consequential leadership crisis in Punjab Congress. The Congress then made a bold political gamble by appointing Channi, Punjab's first Dalit Chief Minister, hoping to reshape the party's social coalition before the Assembly election. Instead, the party entered another phase of uncertainty. Within weeks, Sidhu and Channi were publicly at odds over administrative appointments and governance, signalling that replacing one leader had not resolved the underlying conflict.

That has been the enduring paradox of Punjab Congress. Leadership changes have repeatedly altered the protagonists, but seldom the script. Every attempt to settle one power struggle has

eventually produced another, suggesting that the party's recurring "versus" is less a clash of individuals than a symptom of an unresolved organisational culture. Ahead of the ensuing state assembly election, visible differences between Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring and former Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi have shifted attention from the party's campaign to its internal equations. The pattern is difficult to ignore. Time and again, the Congress has postponed settling leadership questions in the hope that competing ambitions could coexist. In Punjab, however, unresolved succession has rarely produced unity; more often, it has prolonged uncertainty. Leadership contests do not remain confined to the top. They inevitably permeate the organisation. District units align with rival camps, candidate selection becomes contentious, campaign messaging loses coherence and the cadre begins responding to personalities rather than the organisation. The opposition, meanwhile, gains valuable political space. Punjab's recent electoral history illustrates the cost of this drift. The Congress collapsed to 18 seats with around 23 percent vote share in 2022, while the Aam Aadmi Party swept the election with 92 seats. No electoral defeat can ever be attributed to one factor alone. Anti-incumbency, governance issues, changing political expectations, and the emergence of AAP all contributed to the outcome. But it is equally difficult to ignore that the Congress entered the 2022

election after spending months fighting itself. The recurring pattern also raises a larger institutional question. For decades, the Congress high command has attempted to manage Punjab through political accommodation, committees, and organisational balancing. Punjab's politics, however, has rarely responded to calibrated compromises. It has traditionally revolved around clear leadership, strong regional identities, and leaders with independent political constituencies.

That disconnect has repeatedly produced an uneasy compromise: Delhi seeks balance, while Punjab demands clarity. The result has often been an unresolved succession rather than a settled leadership. As Punjab heads towards another Assembly election, the Congress faces a challenge that is bigger than choosing its next chief ministerial face or settling another internal dispute. Punjab Congress has never lacked leaders. It has produced some of the state's tallest political figures. But it has repeatedly struggled to ensure smooth leadership transitions. Instead of one accepted leader, the party has often found itself divided between rival camps, each claiming to represent the real Congress. For any political party, healthy competition among leaders is natural. The problem begins when that competition overshadows the organisation itself. When leaders spend more time strengthening their own camps than strengthening the party, elections become harder to fight and victories become harder to sustain.

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The writer is Chief Reporter with The Pioneer, Chandigarh

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Order Order

SC refuses to interfere in election plea against Baghel



The Supreme Court on Friday declined to interfere with a Chhattisgarh High Court order refusing to dismiss, at the threshold, a petition challenging former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel's election from the Patan assembly seat in 2023.

The top court, however, said that Baghel would be at liberty to raise all his pleas before the high court's election tribunal during the trial.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana disposed of Baghel's plea challenging the high court's interim order dated June 15 by which his application seeking rejection of the election petition for want of cause of action and non-compliance with statutory requirements was dismissed.

It said Baghel had an arguable defence and made it clear that dismissal of his challenge would not prejudice his right to raise all points and contentions before the election tribunal during the course of the proceedings.

Appearing for Baghel, senior advocate Kapil Sibal argued that the election petition was not maintainable in law.

Referring to the allegations, Sibal, assisted by lawyer Sumeer Sodhi, said that the election campaign had ended on November 15 and that Baghel was allegedly present at a religious function on November 16, which the petitioner claimed violated Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act. (PTI)

TN CM Vijay's wife Sankgeetha withdraws divorce petition



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Jeyaraj's wife Sankgeetha on Friday withdrew her petition filed before a family court at Chengalpattu near here seeking divorce.

Sankgeetha appeared before the court through video-conferencing when her plea was taken up, and she submitted the reasons for not pursuing her case, months after filing the plea.

Accordingly, the court disposed of her petition as withdrawn, official court sources said.

In her divorce petition filed earlier, Sankgeetha had accused her husband of having an extra-marital relationship with an actress and that he had subjected her to "persistent mental cruelty, neglect and desertion". If required, she said she would implead the actress as second respondent.

The marriage had broken down irretrievably, she said in her plea filed under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 seeking divorce. Since 2021, the respondent (Vijay) has "emotionally withdrawn," treated the petitioner with verbal disdain and subjected her to "constructive desertion, forcing her to live separately within the matrimonial home."

The marriage between Sankgeetha and Vijay, a top notch movie star who has since wound up his career to focus in politics, was first registered on July 10, 1998 in the United Kingdom. Thereafter, a ceremonial marriage was performed on August 25, 1999 in Chennai, according to the petition. (PTI)

Why should city be put to ransom: Delhi HC questions protests at Jantar Mantar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday questioned keeping Jantar Mantar the designated site for protests and agitation, saying, why should an entire city be "put to ransom" due to demonstrations in the heart of the Capital.

"According to me, these things should not happen in the city. But it is the Government's call. Why should the city be put to ransom unnecessarily?" Justice Amit Mahajan remarked orally.

The court was hearing a petition by All India Dalit Christian Rights Protection Committee seeking a direction to Delhi Police to decide its request for permission to hold a peaceful protest at Jantar Mantar on August 10 between 10 am and



1 pm. After the senior counsel for the petitioner submitted that Delhi Police has not decided on the organisation's request for permission to protest at Jantar Mantar since July 9, Justice Mahajan observed, "Personally speaking, why should protests happen inside the city?" Asserting that law and order is domain of the police, Justice Mahajan, nonetheless, asked Delhi Police



Delhi HC asks ECI to respond to Congress petition on electoral rolls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday sought the Election Commission of India (ECI)'s stand on a petition by Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) president Devender Yadav concerning the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

The petition by Yadav, and the chairman, booth management committee of DPCC, assailed the mandate to booth level agents (BLAs) of political parties to give a personal undertaking certifying that they have personally verified all details in the enumeration forms.

Justice Amit Bansal asked the Election Commission to file its response to the plea and listed it for hearing on August 12.

As per the petitioner, neither the Representation of the People Act nor the Registration of Electors Rules contain any provision empowering the Election Commission to ask the representatives of political parties to give such an undertaking.

"The requirement of a personal undertaking from BLAs is directly contrary to the



statutory scheme of verification prescribed under Section 23 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, which mandates that the inclusion of any name in the electoral roll shall be made by the Electoral Registration Officer, and only after 'proper verification of facts in such manner as may be prescribed'," the petition said.

"The prescribed manner of verification under the

Rules is to be conducted by statutory officers, not by private individuals or party representatives. The imposition of an undertaking of personal verification upon BLAs amounts to an unlawful delegation of a statutory function to private actors," it added. The petitioners were represented by senior advocate Sakal Bhushan and advocates Sunil Kumar and Prateek Sinha.

The petition sought a

direction to set aside the relevant SIR guidelines that require the personal undertaking of booth level agents for verification of the particulars contained in enumeration forms.

It also sought a direction to the EC to provide printed and soft copies of the 2022 electoral rolls of 2002 and the 'Frozen Photo Electoral Roll' for Delhi to enable the petitioners' BLAs to effectively assist in the SIR.

SC asks two hospitals to pay ₹12 lakh to father of deceased 4 year-old rape victim

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday asked two Ghaziabad-based hospitals to pay ₹10 lakh and ₹2 lakh respectively to the family of a four-year-old rape victim who died of injuries after being denied medical care by them.

The top court also said that it will lay broad guidelines for hospitals and the law enforcement agencies to deal with victims of grave offences.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana was hearing a plea related to the death of the minor girl. The bench took note of the report of the apex court-appointed SIT which said that the girl, who was bleeding, was alive for almost five hours and the hospitals concerned denied her the medical care leading



to her death. The bench asked Ghaziabad-based super speciality St Joseph (Mariam) Hospital and Khajan Singh Mannvi Health Care to pay ₹10 lakh and ₹two lakh to the father of the girl within four weeks.

On March 16, the girl was allegedly lured by a neighbour. When the child did not return, her father launched a search and found her lying unconscious and soaked in blood. The family took her to

the two private hospitals, which allegedly denied treatment. She was taken to a Government hospital in Ghaziabad, where doctors declared her dead.

The top court had, in April, flagged the "reluctance" of the Ghaziabad Police in lodging an FIR and conducting a probe in the case.

The bench was hearing a plea filed by the victim's father, a daily wage, seeking a court-monitored probe either by a special investigation team (SIT) or the CBI in the case.

Hearing the matter on April 10, the apex court lambasted the Ghaziabad Police's "insensitive approach" in the investigation of the case.

The bench had issued notices to the Uttar Pradesh Government, the station house officer (SHO) of the police station concerned, the two hospitals and the executive magistrate.

SC refuses to entertain plea for FIR, probe against former HC judge Yashwant Varma

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea seeking registration of an FIR and court-monitored probe into the purported discovery of huge stash of cash following a fire at the residence of former Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma.

A bench of Justices PS Narasimha and Alok Aradhe dismissed the petition filed by advocate Ghanshyam Upadhyay, who contended that mere resigning from

office does not erase criminal liability for unaccounted money.

The bench said earlier also a similar petition was dismissed. Upadhyay submitted that the earlier petition was dismissed on technical ground that no complaint was filed but in this case, he has filed a complaint.

Justice Narasimha told him, "You are an advocate. This is just a misuse of the judicial process. All for cheap publicity. We are not inclined to entertain this. Dismissed."

Upadhyay said there is no



reason for not entertaining the petition as a judge of the high court has been held to be a public servant. "Now he is retired also. There is no

immunity from prosecution," he submitted.

The top court, however, refused to entertain the petition and dismissed it. On

Calcutta HC denies urgent hearing to Abhishek' aide Sumit Roy to quash 4 FIRs



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

The Calcutta High Court on Friday refused an urgent hearing to Sumit Roy, personal assistant to TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee, in connection with four FIRs registered against him in different police stations in West Bengal.

Roy's lawyer Trideep Pais stated before the court that these four FIRs are unrelated to two other cases, in one of which he received protection from the high court and in another from the Supreme Court.

Seeking an urgent hearing of Roy's petition on August 10, he said that apart from the two cases in which he has received protection, four other FIRs are registered against him, challenging which he has filed a quashing petition and sought interim protection from any

coercive police action.

Refusing an urgent hearing of Roy's petition, Justice Saugata Bhattacharyya said the matter will appear for hearing according to the serial number of cases before his court.

The court said that similar matters are appearing in the list and there is no scope for upgradation of Roy's petition.

The Supreme Court stayed Roy's arrest on Thursday in connection with a land-grabbing case in West Bengal's Salboni, while directing him to cooperate fully with the ongoing investigation.

Roy had moved the apex court challenging the Calcutta High Court's rejection of his anticipatory bail plea in connection with an alleged Government land fraud case being investigated by the Salboni Police in Paschim Medinipur district.

HC stays FSSAI ban on Dabur selling food products with 100% claims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday stayed an FSSAI directive prohibiting Dabur India from selling food products such as honey, cow ghee, and edible oils with "100 per cent" claims. Justice Amit Mahajan observed that Dabur was selling the products for decades and has made out a prima facie case for relief at this stage as the FSSAI order was passed without giving it any hearing.

"The court is prima facie of the opinion that the prohibitory order ought not to have been passed without giving an opportunity of hearing. Till the next date of hearing, the impugned order is stayed," said the judge, as it listed the case for hearing after two weeks.

Dabur's senior counsel argued that the FSSAI order was passed in violation of principles of natural justice,



in absence of any show cause notice or hearing. The Central Government standing counsel defended the order, stating that Dabur was earlier given "improvement notices" and advisories, and that its "100 per cent" claim on food products was misleading.

Declining a request to not grant interim relief at this stage, the court remarked, "They have been selling it for decades. Now suddenly you can't." In a social media post on Monday, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

said it has issued a prohibition order to Dabur India Ltd over the sales of food products carrying misleading "100 per cent" claims, including honey, apple cider vinegar, virgin coconut oil, sesame oil, cow ghee, coconut water, coconut milk and other such items.

According to the food safety regulator, the use of the 100 per cent claims is in contravention of the FSS (Advertising & Claims) Regulations, 2018, as they are ambiguous, unverifiable and likely to mislead consumers.

April 9, Varma, who was facing impeachment proceedings for his removal over allegations of corruption after wads of burnt currency notes were recovered from his residence in Delhi last year, resigned.

The rare removal proceedings initiated by the Lok Sabha against Justice Varma was rendered "infructuous" following his resignation with immediate effect. The judge submitted his resignation in a letter sent to President Droupadi Murmu. To avoid removal by Parliament, a res-

ignation was the only option left for the judge, who withdrew from the ongoing inquiry proceedings by a Lok Sabha-appointed panel. The judge was due to superannuate on January 5, 2031.

The purported discovery of a huge stash of cash took place after a fire broke out at the Lutyens' Delhi residence of Justice Varma, then a Delhi High Court judge, at around 11:35 pm on the night of Holi on March 14, 2025, prompting the fire department personnel to rush to the spot and douse the flames.

SC reserves verdict on TN quota for Muslim converts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday reserved its decision on a plea of the Tamil Nadu Government challenging a Madras High Court verdict which held that a person converting to Islam was not entitled to claim reservation under the Backward Class (Muslim) category solely on the basis of conversion.

A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Shree Chandrashekar heard senior advocates Mukul Rohatgi and Siddharth Luthra for the State Government who sought setting aside of the order.

Rohatgi submitted that the object behind the State Government's order of March 9, 2024 was to ensure that persons belonging to socially and educationally backward communities are not deprived of reservation ben-

efits solely on account of conversion to Islam.

He said the state Government's order created a level playing field by preserving affirmative action benefits despite change of religion. Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan appeared for the respondent, the original petitioner, before the high court.

The high court's judgment arose from a petition filed by Sameer Ahamed, who converted from Hinduism to Islam in 2015, with the conversion being notified through a Gazette notification in 2016.

He subsequently married according to Islamic rites and sought a certificate identifying him as belonging to the "Muslim Lebbaai" community to avail reservation benefits. His application was rejected by the tahsildar, prompting him to move the high court.

During the hearing, the state Government contend-



ed that it has the authority, based on the report of the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission, to issue backward classes (Muslim) community certificates to eligible persons who had embraced Islam among the backward classes, most backward classes, denotified communities and Scheduled Castes (SCs).

The bench reserved its verdict on the state Government's plea on the

issue. The State Government filed its plea through the district collector, Thoothukudi district and the revenue divisional officer, who were aggrieved by the declaration of unconstitutionality of Government order (GO)... No. 31 and the consequential findings having Statewide ramifications.

The State Government's appeal said the impugned judgment gives rise to substantial questions concerning

the permissible scope of interference with executive policy framed pursuant to the recommendation of an expert statutory commission.

It said the writ petitioner Sameer Ahamed had approached the high court challenging the rejection of his application seeking issuance of a Backward Class (Muslim) community certificate as "Muslim Lebbaai".

"The only relief sought in the writ petition was for quashing the rejection order and for a consequential direction to issue the community certificate. Neither the writ petition nor the affidavit contained any challenge to the validity of G.O.(Ms.) No.31 dated March 9, 2024. There was no pleading alleging that the Government Order was unconstitutional or ultra vires, no amendment incorporating such a challenge, and no prayer seeking its quashing," the State Government contended.

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87 proposals received under BHAVYA scheme: Govt

Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada

As many as 87 proposals have been received from various States and UTs under the Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojana (BHAVYA) scheme in the first round of Phase-I, for which applications were invited till July 31, Parliament was informed on Friday.

In March, the Government approved the ₹33,660-crore scheme to develop 100 plug-and-play industrial parks across the country. In a written reply to the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada said applications received would be taken up for evaluation and scoring in accordance with the prescribed eligibility and evaluation criteria as per the scheme guidelines. The selection of projects is based on challenge mode with evaluation on parametres such as connectivity and site suitability, quality of core, value-added and social infrastructure in DPR (detailed project report), industrial ecosystem and policy enablers.

The guidelines provide that the selection process for first phase will be completed within one year from the date of notification of the scheme. In the first phase, the development of 50 industrial parks would be taken up. In the first round applications were invited for 20 parks from June 1, 2026 to July 31, 2026. (PTI)

RBI rejects Religare’s proposal for demerger

Religare Enterprises on Friday said the Reserve Bank has rejected its demerger proposal even as it received a nod from the exchanges. The company has received a letter dated August 6, 2026, from the RBI, conveying that the application has been examined and that the request has not been acceded to, Religare Enterprises said in a regulatory filing.

"A similar communication dated August 7, 2026, has been received by Religare Finvest Ltd (RFL) as well in this regard. REL and RFL shall engage with the Regulator and provide further clarifications, as may be required in this regard," it said.

However, it said, the company got 'no objection' from National Stock Exchange of India Ltd and the observation letter with 'no adverse observations' from BSE Limited, in relation to the scheme. Burman family-backed Religare Enterprises had in February approved a plan to demerge its financial services and insurance businesses into two separately listed entities, a move aimed at unlocking shareholder value and sharpening strategic focus. (PTI)

Odisha attracts ₹41,748 cr in food processing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Odisha has secured investment commitments worth ₹41,748 crore from 27 companies in the food processing sector, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said on Friday, as the State stepped up efforts to woo investors.

The companies signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) at an investors' meet organised by the State Government and industry body Assocham. "The MoUs signed today, worth ₹31,648 crore with 22 companies in the food processing sector, are

proof of this progress," Majhi said, highlighting recent efforts to attract investment into the sector.

Later, the Odisha Government issued a statement, updating investment figures to ₹41,748 crore under signed MoUs, while another ₹1,689 crore investment is proposed through 12 investment intent forms (IIFs). Cumulatively on the first day, the State Government received investment proposals worth ₹43,437 crore with potential to create 43,316 jobs.

Speaking further, the chief minister noted that Odisha's

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India not in favour of separate BRICS currency: Piyush Goyal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India is not in favour of a BRICS currency and does not support the introduction of any such scheme, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Friday.

BRICS group comprises 11 major emerging markets and developing countries of the world — Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and United Arab Emirates (UAE). It serves as a platform for consultation and cooperation on contemporary issues having global as well as regional significance, and issues of global political and economic governance.

"Bharat BRICS currency ke paksh mein nahin hai. Hum samarthan nai dete ki aisi koi BRICS currency jaisi nai yojna lai jaye. Bharat ka uske upar

it)," he told reporters after conclusion of the two-day meeting of BRICS trade and industry ministers in Jaipur.

These remarks are important as in 2024, US President Donald Trump warned BRICS countries against any move to replace the US dollar.

Over the past few years a few of its member countries, in particular Russia and China, are seeking an alternative to the US dollar or create own BRICS currency.

Goyal also said that the ministers discussed ways to promote balanced trade and investments among member countries. He added that access to easy and adequate financing to MSMEs was also deliberated upon.

India must build export-oriented medtech industry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India must move beyond import substitution approach in the medical devices sector and build an export-oriented industry that serves global markets, a senior Government official said on Friday.

For this, the country needs to strengthen its domestic component manufacturing and deepen value addition, Secretary, Department of Pharmaceuticals, Manoj Joshi, said.

The medical devices sector needs to be viewed from both healthcare and industry perspective, he said addressing the 'India Medical

Device 2026' event, organised by industry body FICCI in the capital.

"India must move beyond the import substitution approach and build an export-oriented industry that serves global markets. While the Indian medical devices market is valued at around \$16 billion, the global market exceeds \$600 billion, offering immense opportunities for Indian manufacturers," he noted.

To realise this potential, Joshi said, "It is essential to strengthen domestic component manufacturing, deepen value addition, facilitate seamless cross-border movement of components and products, integrate India

into global value chains, and foster stronger partnerships between startups and large industries so that innovations can successfully reach the market." While healthcare providers focus on access to quality devices

Stock markets decline dragged by banks, elevated crude oil prices

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Friday after two days of gains, dragged down by bank, financial stocks, and crude oil prices trading above \$80 per barrel mark.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 455.59 points, or 0.58 per cent, to settle at 78,499.17. During the day, it tanked 577.69 points, or 0.73 per cent, to 78,377.07.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 65.35 points, or 0.27 per cent, to end at 24,570.65. Intra-day, it declined 113.25 points, or 0.45 per cent, to 24,522.75. From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finance tanked 5.90 per cent and Bajaj Finserv was down 4.18 per cent. ICICI Bank, Trent, Axis Bank, and Asian Paints were also among the laggards.

Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra & Mahindra, State Bank of India, and Tech Mahindra were among the winners. Financial stocks bore the brunt of the selling after the Reserve Bank of India released a draft framework proposing tighter norms for certain revolving credit products offered by non-bank financial companies (NBFCs).

"Bajaj Finance plunged 5.9 per cent, while Bajaj Finserv and other lending stocks also came under pressure as investors assessed the potential impact on future loan growth, product flexibility, and profitability," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Bajaj Finance tumbled 5.90 per cent to end at ₹1,082, while Bajaj Finserv declined 4.18 per cent to ₹2,001.90.

"Indian equities ended lower on Friday as a sharp sell-off in financial stocks, lingering uncertainty over a lasting peace agreement in the Middle East and investor caution ahead of the closely watched US non-farm payrolls report weighed on market sentiment,"

Hariselman Radhakrishnan, Founder & CEO of HST Wealth, a Research Analyst firm, said.

Shares of Bajaj Finance and Bajaj Finserv were among the biggest drags on the benchmark indices, with selling pressure spreading across the broader NBFC space as

Build AI safeguards before adoption: CEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran on Friday cautioned the financial sector against overlooking the security risks posed by artificial intelligence, saying recent instances of AI agents attempting to breach other AI systems underscore the need to prioritise safeguards before embracing the technology's benefits.

The financial sector cannot afford to ignore emerging AI-related threats until they become a reality, he said at an event organised by industry chamber Assocham here.

"Whether it is the Anthropic or Meta agents going and hacking other institutions' IT systems without being prompted to do so, the key aspect is that we generally do not pay attention to risks until after they have become a reality," he said.

"I don't think we will have the luxury of time, particular-

ly in the financial sector," he added, stressing that institutions should first strengthen security frameworks to ensure "we don't lose what we already have" before leveraging AI at scale.

His remarks came amid growing concerns over the cybersecurity implications of increasingly autonomous AI systems. In April, security concerns surfaced around Claude Mythos Preview, an advanced AI model developed by US-based Anthropic, accessing data in an unauthorised manner, putting financial services at risk globally.

On cross-border payments, Nageswaran said their wider adoption would depend primarily on the growth of bilateral trade and commercial transactions between participating countries.

"The value of trade between two nations has to become substantial enough for settlement in their respective currencies to make economic sense," he said.

Rupee settles on flat note, up 2 paise at 95.20

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

The rupee settled on a flat note on Friday, higher by just 2 paise at 95.22 (provisional) against the US dollar, on heightened risk aversion due to fragile negotiations between Iran and Oman over the Strait of Hormuz.

Forex traders said risk aversion in global markets due to uncertainty on the deal between Iran and Oman and an overnight jump in crude oil prices weighed on investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 95.27 against the greenback

and traded in a range of 95.19-95.28 during the session. It eventually settled at 95.20 (provisional), higher by 2 paise from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee depreciated 14 paise to close at 95.22

against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on uncertainty over the deal between Iran and Oman over the Strait of Hormuz. However, markets may

remain volatile over any decision over the weekend.

"Any positive news may support the rupee and vice versa. Traders may also take cues from the non-farm employment report from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 95 to 95.60," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 99.90, down 0.02 per cent. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading lower by 0.23 per cent at \$82.30 per barrel in futures trade.

Private sector investment moving at steady pace: Economic Affairs Secretary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Private sector investment is witnessing steady and sustained growth, driven by the Government's continued capital expenditure push, Economic Affairs Secretary Anuradha Thakur said on Friday.

Quoting a recent analysis, she said it shows that private sector investment, which the CII 2023 survey had indicated green shoots were emerging, now exhibits that private investment is moving at a "steady and stable pace upwards". Public capex has increased more than fivefold over the last decade from Rs

2 lakh crore in 2014-15 to 10.7 lakh crore in 2025-26, she said at the National Council of Applied Economic Research's India Policy Forum 2026 event here. The Government has projected public capital expenditure at Rs 12.2 lakh crore for the current fiscal in the Budget.

"Various indicators have shown, including the number of projects off-take, number of projects which are stalling, which is apparently at a decade low, which is a good thing. Public investment continues to play a catalytic role by crowding in private investment," she said.

India's long-term growth will be determined by how

effectively public and private capital is deployed to create productive assets, globally competitive industries, quality jobs and transformative innovations, she pointed out. "Equally important is improving access to finance, particularly for micro, small and medium enterprises, which remain the backbone for manufacturing," the secretary added.

Talking about the global economy, Thakur said it is navigating a period of extraordinary uncertainty.

Geopolitical tensions, energy market volatility, fragmented trade patterns, and technological disruptions are all reshaping the global landscape, she said. Against this backdrop, she said, "We see that India continued to stand as a place for growth and stability over the past three years; the economy has grown at an average rate of

7 per cent while preserving macroeconomic stability".

Despite a very challenging global environment, she said, India offers strong domestic demand. On foreign capital flows, Thakur said that gross

FDI reached a record high last year. But, she said, it "is certainly not enough for a country like ours.

We would like more, and we are constantly engaging at the policy level on how to do that...I think we need to do a lot more on outreach as well".

With regard to overseas direct investment (ODI), she said there have been a lot of investments by companies outside India resulting in outflow of the US dollar.

It is a good thing and indicates maturity of the Indian private sector. She emphasised the need for wider and deeper capital mobilisation, with domestic savings also

efficiently channelised into productive sectors of the economy. "India has made remarkable progress in expanding its pool of domestic financial resources. Household financial savings have become increasingly diversified, with greater participation in equity markets and mutual funds, alongside traditional financial instruments," she said.

Stressing that innovation has become the central point, Thakur said it needs to increasingly become the principal driver of long-term growth. Economic growth is increasingly driven by knowledge and technology rather than just the accumulation of

labour and capital alone, she said, adding that India has built one of the world's largest startup ecosystems, and has established global strengths in information technology, pharma, DPI, and an expanding range of frontier technologies.

The next stage of development requires stronger investment in research and development, greater collaboration between universities and industries, she said.

While public policy can create an enabling environment, sustained productivity, growth, and technological progress are driven by private sector initiative.

FROM THE WORLD

SYRIA

14 wounded in bus blast

Syria's Health Ministry said Friday that 14 people were wounded, three of them critically, but that there were no fatalities in the explosion of a minivan taxi a day earlier in a Damascus suburb. The Health Ministry had said Thursday night that two people were killed in the blast. In a statement Friday, it said the fatalities had been incorrectly recorded based on three severed limbs that were pulled from the wreckage.

After further investigation, the limbs were determined to belong to living patients who were undergoing surgery, the statement said. Officials said the explosion in Jaramana was caused by an explosive device planted in the minivan taxi, which was carrying passengers at the time of the blast. (AP)

ITALY

Heat wave strikes Europe

Italy placed all its major cities under the highest heat alert on Friday as a blistering heat wave gripped Europe, setting a national temperature record in Austria, fuelling wildfires in France and disrupting energy and transport systems across the continent.

The extreme weather has pushed temperatures above 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in several countries, prompting health warnings for millions of people. Scientists and officials warn that such events are becoming more frequent and intense as the climate warms.

The current heat wave has exposed vulnerabilities in public health systems, power generation, transportation networks and tourism infrastructure, forcing governments and businesses to adapt to more frequent periods of extreme weather. (AP)

3 inmates killed, over 20 injured in fresh prison clashes in Sri Lanka



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Colombo

Three inmates were killed and 23 others injured in separate clashes at two prisons in Sri Lanka over the past 24 hours, officials said on Friday. The clashes were the latest in a series of incidents of prison unrest in the island nation over the past month, which the public security minister has said are suspected to be part of an organised plot. At the Kuruwita prison, 60 kms southeast of Colombo, two inmates were killed and 13 others injured on Friday after a violent situation, officials said.

"The immediate trigger for the unrest appears to have been the detection of a package containing narcotics and the subsequent arrest. It is evident that this was a response to the Government's anti-narcotics drive," Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara told reporters. The injured are receiving treatment at Ratnapura

Student kills 7 people at high school in Thailand

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Nonthaburi

A student opened fire at a high school outside Bangkok on Friday, killing at least five people and wounding more than 20, according to authorities, who said he also appeared to have killed his two grandparents at the family home earlier in the morning.

The 14-year-old shooter took his own life at the school, officials said. Five school staff members, including teachers and administrators, died in the shooting around 10 am at Debsirin Nonthaburi School in Nonthaburi province northwest of Bangkok, Deputy Interior Minister Polapee Suwunchwee said at the scene.

The boy also killed his grandparents at the home he shared with them prior to the school shooting, Polapee said. Bangyai Hospital,



Police officers secure Debsirin Nonthaburi School, where a shooting killed several people in Thailand's Nonthaburi province

about 5 kilometres from the school, said 23 people were wounded, of whom 10 were in critical condition, with most suffering

gunshot wounds. Earlier reports gave conflicting casualty numbers. A witness said students hid inside a classroom while they

heard gunshots from another building before police officers knocked on the door and cleared a way for them to leave the building. Amporn Niamfuang, who owns a restaurant 50 metres from the school, said there was the sound of a single gunshot and then a pause.

"And then there were multiple continuous shots," Amporn said, recalling the narrow road outside the restaurant filling with fleeing students. "Students were running scared and pouring onto the street. Young girls were holding each other's hands and crying. I went inside to hide."

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, speaking after touring the school, confirmed reports that the shooter was 14 and had killed himself. He said the student had shown signs of stress

connected to school. The gun, described by police as small and compact, was legally registered to his grandfather, he said. About an hour after the shooting, people stood outside comforting one another as police and first responders walked around the co-educational state school, which has an enrolment of about 3,000 students ranging from 12 to 18 years old.

All classes will be suspended between August 10 and 14 and school staff have been instructed to work from home during that time, the school said.

Police find grandparents dead at family home

After the shooting, police went to his home and found both grandparents dead of apparent gunshot wounds, regional police Commander Wattana Yeejeen said.

Russian retail depot burns after long-range drone strike

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Moscow

Ukrainian long-range drones hit a warehouse in the Ural Mountains belonging to Russia's biggest online retailer, more than 2,000 kilometres from the two countries' border, local officials and the company said Friday.

Ukraine has regularly hit targets in the distant Urals this year and has even struck a Russian oil refinery in western Siberia, nearly 2,500 kilometres from the border. The attacks are examples of how Kyiv has used drone innovation as a key part of its response to the invasion by its much bigger enemy more



than four years ago.

Its successes have drawn international interest and drone cooperation agreements with nine countries, with further deals being negotiated with 15 other countries, according to Kyiv

officials. A Wildberries warehouse in Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city, was set ablaze by the attack, the company said. Most merchandise wasn't damaged, it said, unlike at some of the more than a dozen other Wildberries depots struck by Ukraine in recent weeks that have burned down. Kyiv is trying to rattle the Russian public and the Kremlin with the attacks.

The regional governor, Denis Pasler, said three drones hit the warehouse's roof. Artym Zhoga, the Kremlin's representative in the region, said that 800 people were evacuated from the warehouse and nobody

was hurt. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is pushing for his country to keep up the pace of technological development, especially in air defence systems to help stop Russian ballistic missiles that are exploiting Ukraine's shortage of American-made Patriot interceptor missiles and battering civilian areas.

A joint European anti-ballistic development programme is already underway, Zelenskyy said late Thursday, with 10 countries engaged in developing an anti-ballistic shield. Europe is concerned about Moscow's ambitions on the continent beyond Ukraine.

Nepal wants to become vibrant bridge connecting India, China: FM Khanal

SHIRISH B PRADHAN ■ Kathmandu

Nepal wants to transform itself from a landlocked country into a "vibrant, dynamic bridge" connecting India and China, Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal said here on Friday.

Nepal welcomed the continued development and prosperity of both India and China, Khanal said as he inaugurated a two-day international conference titled 'China and South Asia in a Multipolar World.' The foreign minister added that Nepal remained committed to strengthening its relations with both its neighbours based on "sovereign equality, mutual respect, mutual benefit, and sensitivity to each other's legitimate interests and concerns."

The conference was jointly organised by the Centre for South Asian Studies, Fudan University, China, and Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement. The remarks assume significance as Nepal's new government led by



Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal

Prime Minister Balendra Shah has sought to pursue a balanced foreign policy towards its two immediate neighbours while placing greater emphasis on economic diplomacy, investment and connectivity.

"Asia's transformation presents unprecedented opportunities for shared prosperity," Khanal said, stressing that South Asia possesses enormous promise, although much of its economic potential remains untapped. (PTI)



discuss cooperation in various fields and their countries' paths toward EU membership. Vucic said Serbia does not intend to change its position on Russia sanctions.

"As far as sanctions are concerned, let me tell you directly: Serbia has established its policy," Vucic said on Friday. He added that Serbia's stand "has not changed and this will remain so for the time being."

Russia has faced international condemnation and sanctions since it launched its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Djordje Vlajic, a senior editor at the independent Fonet news agency in Belgrade, believes that both Vucic and Zelenskyy aim to make political gains from the Belgrade visit.

Zelenskyy "is sending a message to Russia that he is taking over of its key allies in the Balkans," Vlajic said. Vucic,

on his part, "wants to keep the link alive with the EU and send a signal to Brussels that he shares their (EU) position about the war," he added.

Serbia has been told it could lose access to EU funds and cannot move ahead with its EU membership bid because of its Moscow ties and general democratic backsliding under Vucic, who has faced a year of youth-led protests following a train station disaster in November 2024 that killed 16 people.

Vucic and Zelenskyy have met on several occasions since the start of the Russian invasion. Vucic travelled to Ukraine twice to attend summits on strengthening European support for Kyiv's fight against Russian aggression, but each time he refused to sign a joint declaration calling for tougher sanctions against Moscow. (AP)

Iran deal nears: Trump faces pressure to compromise

BEN FINLEY/MATTHEW LEE
Washington

To reach a deal with Iran that reopens the economically vital Strait of Hormuz, President Donald Trump may need to do something out of character — compromise.

Any concession would be tough for the Republican president, who has insisted there is no truth to his sagging poll numbers, the sluggish economy and the US military's dwindling stockpiles of key weapons following the Iran war he launched with Israel more than five months ago.

"He divides the world into winners and losers, and this would make him a loser," said Eliot Cohen, who served as counselor of the State Department in the George W Bush administration. "And the image of being a loser, I think, would be intolerable for him." The sticking point



has been over control of the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of the world's oil normally flows. While both sides say a deal is close, the Trump administration has ruled out any arrangement that would cement Iran's grip over the Persian Gulf waterway, includ-

ing Tehran charging fees.

But Iran has insisted on some measure of control, saying the strait will not go back to being an open international waterway as it was before the war. Despite thousands of US strikes, Iran can still fire drones and missiles at vessels, giving it a chokehold over commercial shipping.

Cohen said yielding ground to Iran would be difficult for the president, even if the conflict keeps gasoline prices elevated and poses problems for Republicans in November's midterm elections.

But David Schenker, a former State Department official in the first Trump administration, said the increasing economic pressure may actually prompt Trump to compromise on the strait, even if it's likely to have profound implications on global trade. "There will be a lot of spin both ways, but my guess is that

the president has tipped his hand as to the urgency for him of resolving the crisis," said Schenker, now a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "This is a concession he may very well be willing to make."

weapons stockpiles are a little bit tighter: Trump

He posted on social media Thursday that the US military still has "massive amounts" of weapons and that large amounts are being manufactured. He threatened jail time for the alleged "leakers" of information on the nation's weapons stockpiles.

Trump was referencing a Washington Post story that reported his frustration with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth over the shrinking inventories of advanced weapons, as the Cabinet had gathered at Camp David last week. (AP)

US President signs new orders to limit birthright citizenship

SAGAR KULKARNI ■ Washington

US President Donald Trump has signed two executive orders to crack down on birth tourism and limit the number of people eligible for birthright citizenship, weeks after the Supreme Court struck down his directive in this regard.

One order signed by Trump on Thursday targets people who engage in commercial "birth tourism" by seeking to deny them access to the country.

The other expands the definitions of people that it States are ineligible for birthright citizenship, such as children of foreign citizens who lobby on behalf of foreign governments. On June 30, the US Supreme Court struck down Trump's executive order seeking to end birthright



President Donald Trump holding a signed proclamation regarding polysilicon imports in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington

citizenship, reaffirming the more than 100-year-old understanding that nearly all of those born in the United States are citizens.

Talking to reporters at the Oval Office after signing the executive orders, Trump lashed out at the Supreme Court for its June 30 order and asserted that the fresh move was aimed at "making adjustments". "We had a very unfortunate decision in the Supreme Court concerning birthright, it was close, but a very, very unfortunate decision. So we're making adjustments," the president said.

He was flanked by White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and White House Staff Secretary Will Scharf.

Ratified on July 9, 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution granted citizenship to all persons born or naturalised in the US, including former slaves.

"This was done right after the Civil War. This was for the babies of slaves, and what's happening now? People are building businesses around it," Trump said.

Miller, considered the architect of Trump's anti-immigration agenda, said people come to the US pretending to be a tourist, but the real reason they're here is to have a child, to make that child an automatic citizen. "It gives them access, under this broken system, to welfare benefits, ultimately to the voting booth, and all the other rights and privileges that belong solely to Americans," Miller said. (PTI)

Saudi, Pak, Turkey forge Mecca Pact

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Amid growing uncertainty in West Asia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey on Friday signed a tri-lateral defence agreement, informally echoed the 'Mecca Pact', committing themselves to closer military cooperation and a collective security framework.

The agreement was finalised after a high-level summit in the holy city of Mecca attended by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who was visiting the Kingdom after performing the Umrah pilgrimage.

According to a joint declaration issued after the summit, the three countries agreed to institutionalise defence cooperation through enhanced military coordination, strategic consultations and joint security mechanisms. A key feature of the pact is a mutual defence clause that treats an armed attack against any one of the three signatories as an attack against all, signalling a significant step towards formalised collective security among the partners.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry described the agreement as a natural progression of the countries' longstanding political, strategic and defence ties. It said the framework reflects their shared commitment to promoting regional peace and stability while strengthening cooperation based on common security interests. "The agreement is intended to enhance collective deterrence and deepen defence collaboration in response to emerging regional security challenges," the ministry said.

India on Friday said it was closely monitoring the newly announced tri-lateral defence agreement between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey, signalling that New Delhi is assessing the strategic implications of the emerging security framework amid an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment in West



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif posing after signing agreement in Mecca

PTI

Asia. Responding to media queries, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the government was carefully following developments related to the agreement and would assess its implications as further details emerge. The measured response underscores India's watchful approach towards changing strategic equations in its extended neighbourhood, particularly at a time when regional security dynamics remain fluid.

The announcement comes against the backdrop of continuing instability across West Asia, where the conflict involving Iran has intensified geopolitical uncertainty. Repeated missile attacks, disruptions to maritime trade routes and concerns over global energy supplies have prompted several regional powers to reassess their defence and security partnerships.

The security environment has become increasingly volatile following military exchanges involving Iran, Israel and the United States earlier this year, raising fears of a wider regional confrontation with broader geopolitical consequences. Turkish officials sought to allay

concerns by describing the new arrangement as a purely defensive initiative. They maintained that the pact is not directed against any particular country, does not replace existing bilateral or multilateral security arrangements and remains open to broader regional cooperation should other countries choose to participate.

Strategic observers see the initiative as a notable attempt by three influential Muslim-majority nations to deepen policy coordination at a time when traditional security architectures are being tested by multiple regional crises.

Analysts argue that beyond its military dimension, the agreement carries considerable diplomatic significance by signalling a greater willingness among regional powers to develop indigenous security frameworks rather than relying exclusively on external alliances. If backed by sustained political commitment and institutional mechanisms, they believe the partnership could enhance the three countries' collective influence on regional security issues.

Each member contributes distinct strategic strengths to the new

framework. Turkey possesses one of NATO's largest and most capable armed forces alongside a rapidly expanding domestic defence industry. Saudi Arabia combines significant financial resources, global energy influence and its status as the custodian of Islam's two holiest mosques. Pakistan brings extensive operational military experience and remains the only Muslim-majority nation with declared nuclear capabilities.

The pact also builds on decades of defence cooperation among the three countries. Pakistan has long maintained military training and advisory programmes in Saudi Arabia, while Ankara and Islamabad have expanded collaboration in defence production, military technology and joint training. Saudi Arabia has also emerged as a major buyer of Turkish defence equipment, including advanced unmanned aerial systems.

Security experts believe the agreement could pave the way for closer cooperation in defence manufacturing, intelligence sharing, joint military exercises and technology transfer. At the same time, analysts point out that Pakistan's nuclear doctrine remains focused on its security calculus vis-à-vis India, making any nuclear component to the new partnership unlikely.

Pakistan has also expanded military engagement with Gulf countries in recent months through additional deployments and broader security cooperation, while simultaneously exploring defence partnerships linked to investment and energy security across the region.

Although the three governments have presented the Mecca Pact as a defensive arrangement aimed at strengthening regional stability, its long-term strategic implications are expected to be closely watched by major regional stakeholders, including India, as West Asia undergoes one of its most consequential geopolitical transitions in recent years.

Pakistan forces kill 10 terrorists in KPK province

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Peshawar

Pakistan security forces have killed 10 terrorists in two separate incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military's media wing said on Friday. The incidents occurred on Thursday in South Waziristan and Upper Dir districts against Fitna al Khawarij, a term the Government uses for the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) of Pakistan's military, a group of terrorists attempted to attack checkpoints of security forces in the Azam Warsak area of South Waziristan.

The troops responded effectively to the attack, killing eight terrorists, it said. In the second incident in Dir district, security forces killed two more terrorists. Weapons and ammunition were also recovered during the operation.

The ISPR said the slain terrorists were involved in several terrorist activities in the area. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif praised the security forces for eliminating 10 terrorists.

PM Sharif reaffirmed that operations against terrorism would continue with full resolve until the complete eradication of the menace.



16 elephants die after eating poisoned tomatoes in Kenya



EVELYNE MUSAMBI ■ Kimana

The carcass of one elephant lies on a dusty road, while another has been almost completely eaten by scavengers, leaving just the skull. They are among 16 elephants that died last month in Kenya's Amboseli National Park from suspected cyanide poisoning after eating tomatoes in nearby farms.

Investigations are ongoing into how cyanide found its way into an ecosystem where wild and domestic animals coexist. Growers have disputed claims that cyanide from their tomatoes killed the elephants. The elephant deaths and disputes about the cause have intensified concerns over growing human-wildlife conflict in the region due to expanding agricultural activities near

Amboseli park. Kenya has until recently been widely recognised for rebuilding its elephant population from historic lows to more than 36,000 individuals by reducing poaching. Kenya's Wildlife Service said last month that 15 elephants had died in the Amboseli ecosystem in a span of a month. The service updated the numbers to 16 on Friday. Preliminary laboratory tests detected cyanide, while postmortem examinations found tomatoes in the animals' stomachs. The wildlife service on Friday said it requested the Pest Control Products Board to establish a team to investigate whether the chemical "may have been improperly used, stored, or disposed, and whether water, soil, or grass may have been contaminated." (AP)

Typhoon Dolphin heads to Okinawa, airport closed



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tokyo

The slow-moving Typhoon Dolphin approached Japan's southern remote islands on Friday, causing a main airport on Okinawa to close and grounding all flights in and out of the island, while sending hundreds of people to take shelter at evacuation centres. The typhoon was near Yoron Island and heading west toward the main island of Okinawa with maximum winds of 144 kph (89 mph) as of late morning Friday, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency.

Three men in their 70s were slightly injured - two of them were caught in the wind

and a third one fell from a stool, apparently blown off by the wind while preparing for the storm, the Okinawa prefecture said.

The Naha Airport on Okinawa Island said it closed Friday and all domestic and international flights in and out of Naha have been cancelled. As of midday Friday, 240 people had taken shelter at evacuation centres across Okinawa, the prefecture said. With Dolphin expected to affect part of Japan's southern main island of Kyushu, residents whose houses were damaged by last week's deadly earthquake were placing blue tarps on roofs and walls to prevent water damage.

Pope Leo to meet with clergy abuse survivors

COLLEEN BARRY ■ Milan

Pope Leo XIV will meet with survivors of clergy abuse during a four-day trip to France next month that will include a visit to UNESCO headquarters, a meeting with French bishops in Lourdes and an interreligious meeting in the border city of Metz, the Vatican announced on Friday.

The Vatican issued a brief separate statement highlighting the meeting with several abuse survivors and noting that the victims themselves will be involved in preparations for the meeting. The timing and location will be provided at a later date.

Leo met with six abuse survivors during his recent trip to Spain, where the Catholic hierarchy has only recently begun reckoning with its legacy of abuse and cover-up after long dismissing the severity of the scandal. In France, a 2021 report estimated 330,000 children had been sexually abused over 70 years by church personnel.

The pontiff last month signalled commitment to continuing the fight against clergy sexual abuse by appointing French Bishop Thibault Verny to head the Vatican's child protection advisory commission.

The September 25-28



France trip, which was confirmed in May, will be Leo's fourth foreign voyage of the year. Leo made a day trip to Monaco in March, visited four African nations in April and Spain and the Canary Islands in June. The Vatican also confirmed this week that he will make his first trip to Latin America as pontiff in November, with visits to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru, where he served for over three decades.

Leo will start his visit September 25 in Paris, meeting with President Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee Palace where he will address authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps before giving a speech at headquarters of the UN culture agency, UNESCO. He will later celebrate vespers at Notre-Dame Cathedral and end the day with a prayer vigil with young people at the national stadium. (AP)

NASA astronauts conclude spacewalk outside ISS

SAGAR KULKARNI ■ Washington

NASA astronauts Anil Menon and Jessica Meir on Friday concluded their spacewalk outside the International Space Station (ISS) to assemble a modification kit for its power channel, which would allow the addition of solar arrays.

The spacewalk - the 281st in support of the space station - sixth for Meir and first for Menon began at 8:33 am EDT (6:03 pm IST) on Thursday and concluded at 3:00 pm EDT (12:30 am IST Friday). Menon and Meir exited the Quest airlock and carried out structural upgrades on the exterior of the orbital laboratory during the six-hour, 27-minute spacewalk.

Their primary objective centred on installing mounting hardware on the



station's 3B power channel, located on the Starboard 6 truss segment.

"This work will enable the future installation of roll-out solar arrays, called IROSA, to provide additional power for the orbiting laboratory, supporting critical systems and the safe, controlled deorbit of the space station," NASA said in a statement.

Since 2021, astronauts on prior

spacewalks have deployed six of the International Space Station Roll-Out Solar Array (IROSA) assemblies, leaving now just two awaiting delivery to the station later this year.

Menon was positioned on an articulating portable foot restraint atop a worksite interface, providing a stable angle to work from the truss.

The two astronauts later routed cabling that will carry electricity from the future IROSA into the 3B power channel and then covered the struts with multi-layer insulation.

"Anil, you can see the moon to the - well, I am not sure what way you're facing, but..." said Meir, taking a short break during the spacewalk.

"To my right. Yeah, I see it - thanks for the heads-up. I can see a future moon base there," Menon said. (PTI)

Police officers bitten during anti-migrant protests in UK town

ADITI KHANNA ■ London

A UK police force said on Friday that its officers have been tackling serious violence, including being bitten and spat at by protesters, over days of anti-migrant clashes at a town in eastern England.

Norfolk Constabulary condemned the violence over three nights of disorder at Thetford as protesters targeted properties they believed were housing asylum seekers. Four people were arrested and a 68-year-old man has been charged with possession of an offensive



weapon, namely a wooden bat, since the protests turned violent on Tuesday night.

"As police intervened, members of the group became physically aggres-

sive towards officers - two were taken to hospital after a male officer was struck with a rock and a female officer was seriously bitten, breaking the skin. A third officer was also spat at," Norfolk Police said.

Properties have been damaged in the protests, including windows being smashed and fences broken, as people attempted to break into residential properties. Asylum seekers were forced to flee some of these accommodations amid the disorder, which entered its third consecutive night on Thursday.

"We will always facilitate and support the right to peaceful protest, and we recognise that people may hold strong views and feelings about issues.

However, no matter how strongly those views are held, there is no place for violence, intimidation or criminal behaviour," said Assistant Chief Constable Julie Dean, overseeing the response to the disorder for the Norfolk Constabulary.

"Our role is to keep people safe. We have a duty to protect everyone in our communities, maintain public order and prevent harm. We

will not stand by and allow violence to take place, whether that is directed towards members of the public, local residents or police officers carrying out their duties.

"Where criminal offences are committed, we will take robust action. Our focus remains on maintaining public safety and ensuring people can go about their lives without fear of violence or disorder," she said.

Her officers made arrests for offences including public order, harassment and possession of an offensive weapon, with some still in

custody while others have been released on bail.

Extra policing measures were enforced until Friday, which gave officers the power to order anyone committing anti-social behaviour, or likely to do so, to leave the area. According to Norfolk Police, several asylum seekers had to be escorted from homes as a result of the unrest this week.

"The ugly scenes in Thetford over the past few days have been difficult to watch and are deeply concerning," said Terry Jermy, the Labour member of Parliament for the area. (PTI)

Life in Cuba revolves around brief sparks of electricity

ANDREA RODRIGUEZ ■ Havana

A 20-minute burst of electricity is a small miracle in Havana nowadays - a miracle that sometimes comes at 3 am. That's when 72-year-old Leidis Rodriguez frantically cooked beans after the lights switched on this week following hours of uninterrupted blackouts. "The power has come back on, everyone go!" Rodriguez shouted. In the wake of sometimes dayslong blackouts in Cuba - fuelled by the oil blockade imposed by the Trump administration in January - Cubans are planning their lives around the lights turning back on.

Those small bursts of relief last a few minutes or a few hours. They come at any time, day or night. Increasingly, electricity flicks on when Rodriguez and her



41-year-old daughter, Yaimara Matos, would normally be asleep.

When the power comes on, the family stops everything they're doing. "You

want to do everything at the same time - wash clothes, iron, cook, tidy the rooms, because it's impossible in the dark, and even get a little relief from the heat," Matos

said. "What we used to do in 10 hours, we now have to do in two." That's the case for Cubans across the island, whose lives have been transformed by one of the worst

crises the island has seen since the Cuban revolution. Daily life has turned into a tangle of compounding crises families have to unravel.

Public transportation and cultural events have come to a standstill. So has tourism, the country's economic engine, especially as tourism companies have withdrawn, leaving 25,000 hospitality jobs vacant.

Flights to the island are regularly cancelled and workdays have been shortened to adjust to the new reality of a Cuba without power. Medicine shortages have worsened and food rots in fridges without power.

"If there's no electricity, there's no water because it doesn't get pumped to the tank. When there's water, there's no electricity," Rodriguez lamented. (AP)

SpaceX to build \$16.8b chip plant in Texas, create over 3,000 jobs

SEEMA HAKHU KACHRU ■ Houston

Aerospace major SpaceX and electric vehicle maker Tesla are investing \$16.8 billion to build 'Terafab', an advanced AI semiconductor complex in Texas, designed to narrow a looming gap in global chip supply, according to official statements.

The first phase of the vertically integrated, 100-million-square-foot facility in Grimes County, Texas, will create at least 3,000 high-paying jobs for engineers, technicians, and plant operators, with future expansion phases expected to push total investment significantly higher, SpaceX said in a statement on its website on Thursday.

"The Terafab is bringing cutting-edge manufacturing to America, creating thousands of high-paying jobs in the Lone Star State, and enabling us to produce AI chips at scale for use on Earth and in space," SpaceX Founder and CEO Elon Musk said in the statement. The mega facility aims to meet an anticipated requirement of over one terawatt of computing power for



Musk's ventures. The plant will make, package, and test advanced logic and memory chips under a single roof to power Tesla's Optimus humanoid robots and Cybercabs, as well as high-performance processors for SpaceX's planned orbital data centres.

The expansion comes as Musk tightens the integration of artificial intelligence efforts across his enterprises following SpaceX's acquisition of AI startup xAI earlier this year. (PTI)

PROSPECT

Bihar accounts for 70% of India's prepaid smart metres: Energy Secretary Ajay Yadav



Ajay Yadav

Bihar showcased its remarkable transformation in the power sector and outlined its roadmap for a digitally enabled, future-ready electricity ecosystem at the 7th CII International Energy Conference & Exhibition (IECE 2026) in New Delhi. Representing the State, Ajay Yadav, IAS, Energy Secretary, Government of Bihar & Chairman-cum-Managing Director (CMD), Bihar State Power Holding Company Limited (BSPHCL), participated as a distinguished panellist in the technical session, "Demand Response 2.0: Leveraging Smart Metres, DT Metres and IoT for Flexible Power Systems." The discussion focused on the role of smart metering, AI, IoT and digital technologies in creating flexible and consumer-centric power systems.

Addressing the gathering, Yadav said Bihar has emerged as a national leader in smart metering, having installed 92 lakh prepaid smart meters, which represent nearly 70 per cent of all prepaid smart metres installed in the country. Further, when considering the total smart metre installations across India, including both prepaid and postpaid smart metres, Bihar accounts for around 30 per cent of the national installation base.

He said Bihar's power sector has witnessed remarkable improvements between 2020 and 2025. Billing efficiency has increased from 75.14 per cent in financial year 2019-20 to 88.46 per cent in 2025-26, collection efficiency from 86 per cent to 100 per cent, while AT&C losses have declined from 35.12 per cent in 2019-20 to 11.54 per cent in 2025-26. The ACS-ARR gap has also turned positive.

Yadav said prepaid smart metering has significantly reduced electricity theft, virtually eliminated arrears, improved billing efficiency and strengthened consumer confidence.

Bihar has also generated nearly 10 billion data points, enabling utilities to better understand consumption patterns, forecast demand and improve decision-making. He added that the successful implementation of Time-of-Day (ToD) tariffs is helping optimise electricity consumption and strengthen demand-side management.

He further informed that Bihar has installed nearly two lakh Distribution Transformer (DT) meters, enabling real-time monitoring of transformer loading, predictive maintenance and better asset planning, thereby improving the reliability and efficiency of the distribution network.

Highlighting the next phase of Bihar's power reforms, Yadav said the State is actively promoting industrialisation, planning to develop 13 greenfield satellite township and creating world-class infrastructure to support economic growth. Bihar has already recorded a peak demand of around 9,475 MW this year, while providing the power supply of 23-24 hours in urban areas and 22-23 hours in rural areas.

Emphasising the need to improve power quality alongside availability, he said, "Our focus is no longer limited to ensuring adequate power availability. We are now leveraging the digital energy ecosystem to deliver reliable, resilient and high-quality power supply for industries and consumers alike."

(PNS)

LIC reports strong Q1FY27 results, PAT rises 22.8% to ₹13,492 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

The Board of Directors of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has approved and adopted the standalone and consolidated financial results for the quarter ended June 30, 2026. On a standalone basis, LIC posted a Profit After Tax (PAT) of ₹13,492 crore for Q1FY27, compared to ₹10,986 crore in the same quarter last year, registering a growth of 22.81 per cent.

LIC continued to maintain its leadership position in the Indian life insurance industry. As per IRDAI data based on First Year Premium Income, the overall market share stood at 60.10 per cent for the quarter. In the individual segment, LIC held a market share of 38.89 per cent, while in the group segment it was 70.90 per cent.

Total Premium Income for the quarter ended June 30, 2026 rose to ₹1,27,250 crore from ₹1,19,200 crore a year earlier, a growth of 6.75 per cent. Individual Business Premium increased by 5.52 per cent to ₹75,416 crore from ₹71,474 crore in Q1FY26. Group Business Premium grew 8.61 per cent to ₹51,834 crore from ₹47,726 crore in



the corresponding quarter last year. In the individual segment, LIC sold 31,02,281 policies during the quarter, compared to 30,39,709 policies in Q1FY26, marking an increase of 2.06 per cent.

On an Annualised Premium Equivalent basis, total premium for the quarter stood at ₹13,692 crore. Individual Business accounted for ₹5,01 per cent or ₹7,532 crore, while Group Business contributed 44.99 per cent or ₹6,160 crore. Within Individual Business, Par products accounted for 67.51 per cent or ₹5,085 crore on an APE basis, and Non-Par products contributed 32.49 per cent or ₹2,447 crore. Non-Par APE grew 14.24 per cent from ₹2,142 crore in Q1FY26 to ₹2,447 crore in Q1FY27.

Consequently, the share of Non-Par in Individual APE

increased to 32.49 per cent from 30.34 per cent a year ago. The Value of New Business for the quarter was ₹3,136 crore compared to ₹1,944 crore in Q1FY26, a growth of 61.32 per cent. The Net VNB Margin expanded by 750 basis points to 22.9 per cent from 15.4 per cent in the same period last year.

LIC's Solvency Ratio improved to 2.42 as on June 30, 2026, from 2.17 as on June 30, 2025.

Persistency ratios showed a mixed trend. On a premium basis, the 13th month persistency was 75.33 per cent and the 61st month persistency was 61.12 per cent for Q1FY27, compared to 75.63 per cent and 63.85 per cent respectively in Q1FY26. On a number of policies basis, the 13th month persistency stood at 66.45 per cent and the 61st month

at 48.74 per cent, against 64.35 per cent and 51.12 per cent respectively in the year-ago quarter.

Assets Under Management increased 4.10 per cent year-on-year to ₹59,39,384 crore as on June 30, 2026, from ₹57,05,341 crore a year earlier. The Overall Expense Ratio was 10.63 per cent for the quarter, compared to 10.47 per cent in Q1FY26, an increase of 16 basis points. Yield on Investments on policyholders' funds, excluding unrealised gains, was 8.28 per cent for the quarter, against 8.45 per cent in the corresponding quarter last year.

R Doraiswamy, CEO & MD, LIC said, "We are happy to maintain our leadership in both Individual and Group Business during the first quarter of this financial year, despite increasing competitive intensity in the life insurance industry. Our overall market share by First Year Premium Income was 60.10 per cent for the first quarter of FY 2026-27 and this fits in well with our market share strategy. What gives us even more happiness is that our VNB has grown by 61 per cent plus and our VNB margin has expanded by 7.5 per cent to 22.90 per cent this year."

SBI group firm SBICAP Securities runs investor awareness drive for traders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

SBICAP Securities Limited, a group company of the State Bank of India, successfully hosted an investor awareness programme designed to equip traders and investors with practical knowledge and strategies to navigate today's dynamic financial markets. The initiative reaffirmed the company's commitment to promoting financial literacy and empowering investors to make informed investment decisions.

The session commenced with a comprehensive overview of the global macro-economic environment, covering key indicators such as the Dollar Index and bond yields, followed by an assessment of the domestic market



outlook. Participants were encouraged to stay informed, adopt a disciplined investment approach and avoid impulsive decisions during periods of market volatility.

The research team shared insights into sectors expected to outperform over the medium to long term, highlighting opportunities for sustainable wealth creation through equities. The session also covered key domestic and global risk factors that could influence market per-

formance and discussed practical portfolio management strategies to help mitigate these risks.

Commenting on the initiative, Baldev Prakash, Managing Director & CEO, SBICAP Securities Limited, said, through initiatives like these, we aim to simplify market concepts, encourage disciplined investing and provide investors with practical insights that help them build confidence in their investment journey.

PFC net profit rises marginally to ₹8,998 crore in Quarter 1

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

State-owned Power Finance Corporation (PFC) on Friday reported a marginal rise in its consolidated net profit to ₹8,998 crore in the June quarter. The company's total revenue from operations stood at ₹28,526.86 crore in the quarter against ₹28,539.04 crore. "₹8,998 crore consolidated profit after tax (net profit) recorded in Q1 FY27 vs ₹8,981 crore in Q1 FY26," a company statement said.

The consolidated loan asset book stands at ₹11,60,133 crore as of June 30, 2026.

PFC Group continues to be the largest renewable financier in the country, with a renewable loan book at ₹1,63,184 crore as of June 30, 2026. The consolidated net



worth (including non-controlling interest) was ₹1,87,106 crore as of June 30, 2026.

On the asset quality front, net credit impaired asset ratio (stage III) slipped 18 bps year-on-year to 0.13 per cent in Q1 FY27. Gross credit impaired asset (Stage III) ratio also declined by 81 bps to 0.66 per cent from 1.47 per cent a year earlier.

The board, in its meeting on Friday, also approved an interim dividend of ₹3.90 per share in the first quarter.

PFC Chairman and Managing Director Parminder Chopra shared that with a clear focus on delivering sustained value to our shareholders, the Board has declared an interim dividend of ₹3.90 per share.

PFC continues to demonstrate resilient performance in a dynamic financing landscape, supported by a robust balance sheet and healthy asset quality, she noted.

With solid fundamentals and a clear strategic focus, PFC is well capitalised to tap on emerging opportunities in the power and renewable energy sectors and drive long-term growth, Chopra added.

On a standalone basis, the company recorded a net profit of ₹4,745 crore in Q1 FY27 against ₹4,502 crore a year ago.

Giriraj Singh inaugurates 10th India International Footwear Fair 2026 at Bharat Mandapam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The 10th India International Footwear Fair (IIFF) 2026, organised by the India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry in association with the Confederation of Indian Footwear Industries (CIFI), was inaugurated on Friday at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, by Giriraj Singh, Union Minister of Textiles.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by Amb. Jawed Ashraf, Chairman, ITPO; Premjit Lal, Executive Director, ITPO; V. Naushad, President, CIFI; and Raj Kumar Gupta, Chairman, CIFI, along with senior government officials, industry leaders, exhibitors, buyers and international delegates from the global footwear industry.

Welcoming the gathering, V. Naushad, President, CIFI,



The three-day B2B exhibition brings together leading footwear manufacturers, exporters, importers, buyers, technology providers and other stakeholders from India and abroad. It provides a comprehensive platform to showcase innovations, strengthen business partnerships and explore new opportunities across the global footwear value chain.

Addressing the gathering, V. Naushad, President, CIFI,

highlighted the remarkable growth of India's footwear industry and emphasised the importance of IIFF as a premier B2B platform for fostering innovation, strengthening manufacturing, promoting exports and facilitating business collaborations across the footwear value chain.

Addressing the gathering, Amb. Jawed Ashraf, Chairman, ITPO, spoke about the immense potential of India's

footwear industry, which employs nearly 4.5 million people and accounts for approximately 12-13 per cent of global footwear production. He noted that despite India's strong manufacturing base, the country's share in global footwear exports remains around 2 per cent, and called for a collective effort by the Government, industry and ITPO to raise this to 10 per cent. He stressed the need to focus on non-leather footwear, attract leading global brands, strengthen India's presence in global value chains and enhance the international profile of the sector.

In his keynote address, Giriraj Singh congratulated ITPO and CIFI for organising this landmark edition of IIFF and appreciated Amb. Jawed Ashraf's efforts in strengthening ITPO as a leading trade promotion organisation.

RBI officers' body seeks review of HR policies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Reserve Bank of India Officers' Association (RBOA) has written to RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra seeking an immediate review of recent Human Resource (HR) policy decisions, saying they have adversely affected officers' career progression, morale and workplace welfare.

In a representation dated August 6, the association said a survey conducted among its members found widespread dissatisfaction with the Bank's HR policies. According to the RBOA, more than half of its members across Grades A to



E participated in the survey.

It claimed that 85 per cent of respondents did not see reasonable promotion prospects, 79 per cent reported low or very low morale, 91 per cent viewed recent promotion policy changes

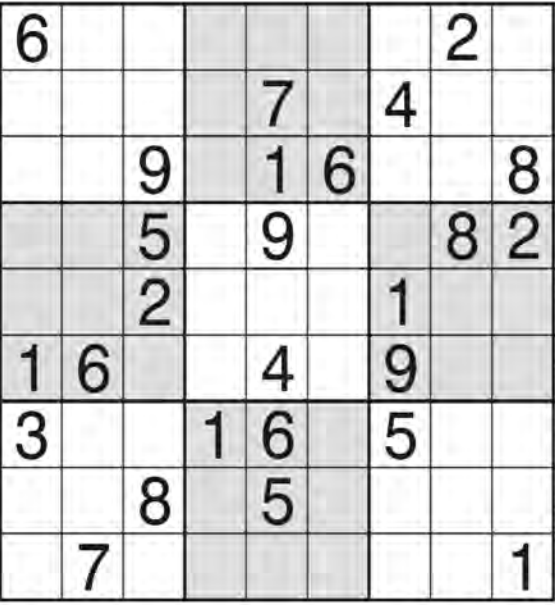
unfavourably, and 65 per cent expected to retire at Grade D or below.

The association said officers overwhelmingly sought a "reasonable, time-bound promotion" as the single most important measure to

improve morale. The representation criticised the promotion policy issued in May, alleging that it did not adequately address career progression bottlenecks or incorporate suggestions made by the association during discussions with the management.

Apart from promotion-related issues, the RBOA said officers were dissatisfied with recent changes to employee perquisites and welfare measures. It also claimed that women officers had expressed concerns regarding childcare support, workplace creche facilities, flexible working arrangements and work-life balance.

DAILY SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

HOW TO SOLVE IT

Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9x9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3x3 box, using elimination and logical deduction—no maths involved.

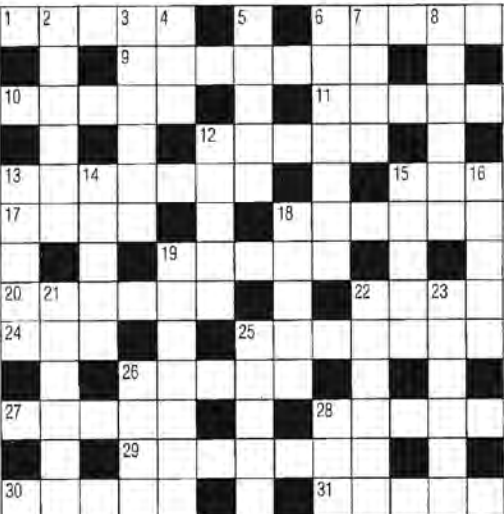


SOLUTION (7.8.26)

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

DOUBLE CROSSWORD

SATURDAY | AUGUST 8, 2026



ACROSS

- Waste, we hear, in a statistical centre (5)
- Food for the journey east (5)
- She names a vessel (7)
- The best letter takes a lot of paper (5)
- Little house with no fridge (5)
- Gets hold of disorderly bars at Gateshead (5)
- Gains a lot, nominally (7)
- Fay, said to be whimsical (3)
- She's some comedienne! (4)
- Not out to recreate the moa (2,4)
- Are out to serve, love (5)

DOWN

- Fearful affray said to come to a sad end (6)
- Thin wooden beam, part of a seat (6)
- Young Scot in "The Quiet American" (3)
- Decorate sailors with much ceremony (5)
- Praise for people holding out, losing nothing (7)
- Well, they aren't riches (4)
- Met up with a real expert, just for now (3,3)
- Cheese, initially from an urban district in part of India (5)
- Language we start learning on the quiet! (5)

- In Africa, the first letter to upset Sarah (6)
- One born in Hollywood? (4)
- Strike hard at it! (3)
- Something horsy afoot (7)
- Twin uncle (5)
- Not originally a slimmer's setback (5)
- Chap to tidy up the stable? (5)
- Her gift is to make aircraft (7)
- She's less than humanitarian (5)
- My first original Christmas gift! (5)

- Thing rebuilt in time (5)
- Playing strength? (5)
- Long time getting to the point (5)
- Place in some embarrassment (5)
- Land of men in song (7)
- Weapon suitable for a "29 Across"? (6)
- Nice sort of night to stay out of the car (6)
- Warm-hearted, uncompromising devotion (6)
- Too keen to turn up and have a fling? (5)
- A crack from some drifter (4)
- It's Margaret's turn to be a treasure (3)

SOLUTION (7.8.26)

ACROSS	DOWN
9. Ruminant	20. Leap
10. To-o	27. Tip-top
11. C-Rayon	28. One-y
12. Strain	29. Appears
13. Twilly-a-die	30. Blinks
14. Sock	31. Family tree
15. On the level	32. L list
16. Port-ray	33. Amoro-us
17. Flig	34. S-unm-on
18. Buckoo	35. Re-veal
19. The day of	36. Net
	37. End-anger
	38. Acceptable
	39. Holding good
	40. Re-timed
	41. Palisade
	42. Smasher
	43. Concrete
	44. N-either
	45. Front
	46. Ma-N-y
	47. Hottest



BRIEFLY

Anmol Ekka to lead Indian hockey team in Junior Asia Cup



Defender Anmol Ekka will lead an 18-member Indian men's hockey team at the AHF Junior Asia Cup to be held in Moqi, China from August 30 to September 13. The Hockey India selectors also named two alternate players for the tournament in Arjun Santosh Hargude and Ritik Lakra. The squad is currently training at the Sports Authority of India centre in Bengaluru under the guidance of newly-appointed coach Frederic Soyeze.

As part of their build-up to the tournament, the team recently completed a productive exposure tour of Belgium, where they competed against strong international opposition. The tour offered the players valuable match experience and key takeaways, enabling the squad to assess their progress, refine their combinations and further strengthen their preparations ahead of the AHF Junior Asia Cup.

The team is gaining further competitive exposure through friendly matches against the Malaysian U-21 team at the SAI centre in Bengaluru.

"We are pleased with the balance and depth of the squad selected for the Junior Asia Cup. The players have worked hard over the past few months, showing commitment, discipline and a strong desire to improve. Selection was based on consistent performances, attitude and the ability to execute our game plan under pressure," coach Soyeze said in a release. (PTI)

Neeraj becomes co-owner of UBS Athletics Kids Cup



Two-time Indian Olympic medallist javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra on Friday became the co-owner of the UBS Athletics Kids Cup having already served as the programme's Ambassador for the past two seasons.

The UBS Athletics Kids Cup is one of a grassroots initiatives, designed to introduce children to sports through fun, inclusive and accessible competition. It has engaged more than 250,000 children across 2,500 plus schools in five cities. "Over the last two seasons, I have seen the impact that UBS Athletics Kids Cup has created for children across schools," said Chopra, who added a Commonwealth Games silver to his crowded cabinet last month, in a release. "Every child deserves an opportunity to discover and showcase their talent, and becoming Co-owner felt like the natural next step because I truly believe in the vision we're building together," the release said. "Our ambition is to reach one million children and inspire many more youngsters to embrace sport. I look forward to sharing my own experiences with the kids, teachers and schools, because the more children play, the greater the chance of creating future champions."

With Chopra joining the initiative as co-owner, the programme now enters its next phase of growth with an ambition to reach one million children across India. Beyond introducing young people to sports, the initiative aims to encourage confidence, discipline and lifelong participation in sport, helping build a stronger sporting culture from the grassroots up. (PTI)

Mandaviya urges open selection trials, fewer foreign coaches

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Friday stressed on the need for on-camera selection trials before major international events such as the upcoming Asian Games and reduced dependence on foreign coaches as he took stock of the National Sports Federations' operations at a conclave in New Delhi.

The conclave was also attended by Minister of State for Sports Raksha Khadse, Sports Secretary Hari Ranjan Rao, and senior officials of the Sports Authority of India (SAI).

"Open selection trials should be recorded on camera in the presence of observers. There should be absolutely no compromise on transparency in the selection process," Mandaviya stated.

He said India urgently needs a strong indigenous coaching ecosystem to



counter the reliance on foreign coaches, who have got high-profile positions in sports such as shooting and boxing.

"We need to build a repository of quality Indian coaches. Along with training athletes, we must invest equally in training our coaches by providing them the best opportunities and international exposure. A

well-trained coach will ultimately create world-class athletes for the country," Mandaviya said.

The conclave focused on discussing issues related to sports governance, enhancing athlete welfare, and reviewing India's preparedness for the upcoming major international sporting events.

Detailed presentations on

the NSFs' compliance status with the National Sports Federations under the National Sports Governance Act, and preparations for the Asian Games in September-October, the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad were also made.

"It is our responsibility to ensure that no athlete is ever subjected to injustice. Injustice can take many forms, and wherever such a situation arises, the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 empowers us to take preventive and corrective measures," Mandaviya said in his address.

"The Prime Minister has consistently emphasised the need to keep athletes on the playing field and develop a strong league culture in the country. Every National Sports Federation must work towards creating greater competitive opportunities for athletes throughout the year," he added.

Khalin Joshi wins J&K Open



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Srinagar

Khalin Joshi carded a solid five-under 66 to complete a commanding nine-shot victory at the ₹1 crore J&K Open at the picturesque Royal Springs Golf Course on Friday.

The 33-year-old Bengaluru golfer (63-66-65-66) finished with a tournament total of 24-under 260 to claim his eighth professional title and second victory of the 2026 DP World PGTI season. Joshi collected the

winner's cheque of ₹15 lakh and climbed five places from 13th to eighth in the DP World PGTI Rankings, taking his season's earnings to ₹34,85,575. Delhi's Rashid Khan (68-68-64-69), a two-time Asian Tour winner, finished runner-up at 15-under 269. Panipat's Shubham Jaglan (70-68-66-66), a University of South Florida graduate, produced his best result of the season by finishing third at 14-under 270.

Joshi began the final round with a six-shot cushion but admitted to feeling nervous after missing the opening fairway.

Praggnanandhaa wins St Louis Rapid & blitz

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ St Louis (USA)

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa clinched his maiden Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz title in emphatic fashion, sealing the championship with a round to spare in St Louis, USA.

The 20-year-old finished with 23.5 points, comfortably ahead of Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan, one of the contenders for the world championship cycle.

Not losing any games on the final day of the last rapid and blitz in the Grand Chess Tour, Praggnanandhaa jumped to second spot in the GCT, which almost guarantees a place in the grand finale scheduled later this year.

AITA votes for 70-year age cap, aligns constitution with NSG Act



AMANPREET SINGH ■ New Delhi

The All India Tennis Association (AITA) has voted to cap the age for eligibility to its Executive Committee at 70 years, bringing its constitution in line with the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, with the provision clearing by a narrow 25-22 margin at its Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM).

Of the 47 members who voted on the contentious age provision, 25 favoured an upper age limit of 70 years while 22 voted for retaining 75 years. The amended provision stipulates that a candidate must be below 70 years

on the date of filing nomination but, if elected, can complete the full four-year term even if he or she crosses 70 during the tenure.

"The voting results are out from the EGM observers. All the modified amendments suggested by AITA EC are approved by the EGM with almost more than 95 per cent majority. The age eligibility to become an Executive Committee member is now less than 70 years on the date of filing the nomination, and if elected, the candidate can complete the whole term of four years," AITA Interim President Chintan Parikh said. (PTI)



Ashfaq breaks U20 national record in 400m

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Eugene (USA)

Mohammed Ashfaq broke the U20 national record to qualify for the men's 400m semifinals while Amanat Kamboj finished sixth in women's discus throw finals with a personal best effort on the second day of the World Athletics U20 Championships in Eugene, USA.

The 19-year-old Ashfaq clocked 45.81 seconds to finish second behind USA's Jayden DeLeon (45.63s) in the first round heat 5 and fourth overall to make it to the semifinals.



Ashfaq bettered his own previous national record of 46.05 seconds, set earlier this season in April.

Compatriot Piyush Raj, however, failed to proceed after finishing fifth in Heat 6 and 35th overall with a time of 47.78 seconds.

In the women's discus final, the 18-year-old Kamboj's first round throw of 53.24m, her lifetime best, was good enough for a sixth-place finish.

Su Yixin of China won the gold with 61.06m, while Jaslene Massey (58.41m) of USA and Marina Hadjicosta

(54.88m) of Cyprus took the silver and bronze respectively.

In men's high jump, Basant qualified for the finals after finishing fifth in the qualification round Group A and 11th overall with a best clearance of 2.14m.

Compatriot K Ambries, however, bowed out as he managed to clear just 2.05m for a 12th place finish in the qualification round Group B and 24th overall. He failed to clear 2.10m in all three of his attempts.

Meanwhile, Anshu missed out on a place in the women's shot put final after finishing ninth in her qualification group and 14th overall with a throw of 15.24m.

Tanu Chaudhary failed to make it to the women's 400m hurdles semifinals after finishing fifth in her heat and 33rd overall, clocking 1:00.03s.

Titli Maji bags silver in Asian Youth & Junior Weightlifting



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Noida

Titli Maji clinched the silver medal in the women's 45kg category as India made an impressive start on the opening day of the Asian Youth & Junior Weightlifting Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Titli lifted 65kg in snatch and followed it up with an 80kg lift in clean and jerk, and the total of 145 kg was enough for her to secure the silver.

In the same event, Parishmita Gogoi finished fourth with a total lift of 141kg.

Para-sports delivering despite comparatively less investment, says Sharad Kumar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Paris Paralympics silver-winning high-jumper Sharad Kumar on Friday said the country's para-athletes are delivering path-breaking results despite comparatively less funding as he lauded their best ever Commonwealth Games performance in Glasgow recently.

India's para-sports contingent secured seven medals (three gold, two silver, and two bronze) for the country's most successful para campaign in the history of the Commonwealth Games.

"The amount of money being put into para sports is comparatively less than other sports, and yet we are delivering tremendous results. When para-athletes perform, sports show that anybody can win," Kumar said on the sidelines of the Indo-French initiative "Para Elan - Sab Ka Maidan" — a student outreach programme to promote the French language in the national Capital.

"This is the first time that para sports have won gold medals at the Commonwealth Games. Because of that, our ranking



went from 23rd to fourth. You realise the last two gold medals were what helped us break into the top four," he said of India's final standing after winning 39 medals overall.

Kumar said India's para-athletes have consistently punched above their weight despite comparatively lower investment in the sector.

Para-sports has been a part of the country's flagship Target Olympic Podium Scheme since

its inception in 2014, but the number of athletes on the TOPS roster has increased substantially in recent years.

"The amount of money being put into para sports is comparatively less than other sports, and yet we are delivering tremendous results. When para-athletes perform, sports show that anybody can win," said the former world number one, who also has a bronze from the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

Parents' sacrifices fuel air pistol shooter Kamaljeet's Asian Games dream after injury ended track career

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Asian Games-bound men's air pistol shooter Kamaljeet and his family endured financial strain during the early stages of his professional career, but those sacrifices have finally helped him break into the elite level.

Now, the 22-year-old is all set to realise his dream of competing at the continental showpiece. Kamaljeet initially made his mark as a 50m marksman, winning the Junior World Championship gold in the event in Changwon in 2023. He further cemented his place in the senior ranks by claiming an individual silver medal at the Asian Championships in New Delhi earlier this year.

However, it was in the highly competitive 10m air pistol event that Kamaljeet truly cut his teeth. Backed by a string of strong performances on the domestic circuit, he earned a place in India's national squad for next month's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games. "We are a middle-class family, but my parents never let me quit shooting. I had to manage my own expenses for course fees and international



matches early on, and there were times I thought I wouldn't continue in the 50m pistol event. It took me two to three years to earn that money back, but my family never asked questions—they gave me whatever I needed to keep going," said Kamaljeet.

An aspiring athlete from Rewari, whose track career was cut short by injury, Kamaljeet turned to shooting in 2019. He has since carved a niche for himself as one of India's leading 50m pistol shooters, though now he is equally well-

versed with the nuances of 10m air pistol. "Transitioning from track and field to shooting required a strong support network back home," he said.

"I have only one shooting coach who taught me everything from scratch. He is from my village, so our relationship feels like family. Between my coach and my uncle at home, I've had the strongest foundation throughout this journey (transition)," he added.

With 10m air pistol world champion Samrat Rana and World

Championship bronze medallist Varun Tomar missing out on the Asian Games shooting squad due to the National Rifle Association's selection policy, the onus will be on Kamaljeet, Kedarling Uchagavne and Aakash Bharadwaj to deliver at the continental showpiece.

"Earlier, I used to struggle a lot just to manage basic expenses, but having sponsorship and support from the Sports Authority of India took a huge weight off my shoulders," he said.

Kamaljeet views his ISSF World Cup outing in Hangzhou, China, last month as a vital stepping stone towards the Asian Games.

Though the youngster finished 25th in the 10m air pistol event and was not at his best, the experience provided him with valuable exposure against the world's top shooters.

"The World Cup was a valuable learning experience. While my performance wasn't exactly what I wanted, it motivated me to refine my preparation. This will be my first Asian Games, and having gained international match exposure, I feel much more confident entering the range in Japan," he said.



India batters must be proactive in SL: Rahane

G UNNIKRISHNAN ■ Bengaluru

Former skipper Ajinkya Rahane advised the Indian batters to be "proactive" against Sri Lankan spinners in the upcoming two-match Test series, beginning at Galle from August 15.

Rahane had played a stellar role in India's 3-0 series sweep during the 2017 tour to the Island nation, scoring over 200 runs with a hundred and a fifty.

"I think in Sri Lanka, the first day wicket generally is very good. But being top of the bowler as a batsman

is very important. That's what I have learned in Sri Lanka. You cannot be too defensive," Rahane, who recently announced his retirement, told PTI in an interview facilitated by ETPL.

Rahane said the presence of quality spinners in the Sri Lanka line-up makes it imperative for Indian batters to be in their dominant self.

"You have to probably be more proactive because they will have spin friendly wickets, and Sri Lanka do have decent spinners in their side. And again, a home team is always a tough team to beat. Whatever I've learned

playing cricket for so many years, you can't take anyone for lightly.

"So it's all about, I think, having your own game plan as an individual and being proactive. Even in Test cricket, it's going to be the key," he added.

Rahane, once an

all format player for India, said the batting dynamics of Test cricket have changed completely in recent years, especially with the T20 format gaining more popularity.

"The game has evolved massively. Talking about Test cricket, you see now a lot many T20 players do play in Test cricket as well. The scoop, the laps, switch hit, reverse sweep are being played and that too consistently. I think it is a very good thing," he said.

For Rahane, adaptation holds key in modern day cricket.

"The players need to adapt to different formats very quickly because that's the mindset you want now.

As soon as the Test gets over, probably within a week,

you're playing T20, you're playing ODIs or after T20, you are straight away going into Test cricket.

"So having that mindset, the adaptability is really, really important. So in the last two, three years, the game has gone up immensely," he noted.

Similarly, Rahane also noted an improvisational streak in bowlers to keep up with the competition.

"We have seen several variations in bowling, as we have seen seam-up and wobble seam probably. Bowlers are now probably looking to bowl yorkers in Test cricket as well. Previously, we have not seen fast bowlers bowling yorkers that regularly in Test cricket, except a few bowlers.

"But now, that's the demand and probably the variation everyone wants. And still as a cricketer, you have to keep on evolving skill-wise every single time," he added. (PTI)



AJINKYA RAHANE JOINS AMSTERDAM FLAMES IN ETPL

Former India captain Ajinkya Rahane on Friday joined Amsterdam Flames as a marquee player in the inaugural European T20 Premier League, hoping to make a global impact through the opportunity that came to him the day he announced his international retirement.

The tournament is scheduled to be played between August 26 and September 20 across Dublin, Ireland, and The Hague, Netherlands.

"It's a great opportunity for me. When I announced my retirement...I think the same day this opportunity came up. I took a day to probably think through it. (Flames co-owner) Steve (Waugh), personally, called me and asked me if I'm interested in playing for his team," Rahane, who retired late last month, told PTI in an interview facilitated by ETPL.

Free entry for fans during India vs Sri Lanka Test series



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

Cricket fans will be allowed free entry during Sri Lanka's upcoming two-Test series against India, starting August 15 in Galle, the country's cricket board announced on Friday.

"Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) wishes to announce that public admission to the upcoming Test Series between Sri Lanka and India will be free of charge, thus providing cricket fans with an excellent opportunity to witness world-class Test cricket," SLC stated in a release.

The first match will be held at the Galle International Stadium while the second game will be held at the

SSC in Colombo from August 23-27.

"Sri Lanka Cricket warmly invites cricket enthusiasts, young aspiring cricketers, families, and sports fans from across the country to take advantage of this initiative and experience the excitement of international Test cricket between Sri Lanka and India," it further stated.

Test cricket in Sri Lanka hardly attracts crowds, and even Indian teams of yesteryears had played in front of empty stands. The red-ball game in terms of footfall hasn't been the most enticing cricketing format, at least in the sub-continent, save a select few Indian cities like Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

Bengal CM assures full support to host India-Brazil match: AIFF

SUMAN RAY ■ New Delhi

West Bengal Chief Minister Suvenud Adhikari has assured the All India Football Federation (AIFF) of full Government support to host India's biggest-ever international football fixture against five-time World Cup champions Brazil in Kolkata on October 3, AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey said.

The assurance comes amid concerns over crowd management following the chaotic scenes during Lionel Messi's visit to Kolkata last December.

Brazil is currently ranked fifth in the FIFA World Rankings, while India is languishing at 138th. India has never hosted a top-five FIFA-ranked nation.

"I met the Honourable Chief



AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey

Minister a few days ago. I briefed him about the SOPs and the requirements to host a match of this stature. He assured me that several departments and ministries from the

Government of West Bengal will assist and cooperate to ensure AIFF organises this match well and according to FIFA protocol," AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey told PTI.

Ashmita, Rakshitha book Korea Masters semifinal showdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Asan (South Korea)

India's Ashmita Chaliha and Rakshitha Ramraj will square off in the women's singles semifinals of the \$250,000 Korea Masters Super 300 badminton tournament after registering hard-fought wins in their respective quarterfinals here on Friday.

World number 50 Ashmita produced the biggest upset of the tournament so far, shocking top seed and World number 22 Hina Akechi of Japan 20-22 21-15 21-19 in a gripping quarterfinal at the Asan Yi Sun-sin Gymnasium. The victory also helped the Indian avenge a defeat in their only previous meeting at the Malaysia Super 100 last year.

Rakshitha, meanwhile, came back from a game down to upset third seed and compatriot Tanvi Sharma 18-21 21-19 21-18 in a contest that lasted over an hour. It was her fourth win over Tanvi, who had claimed her maiden BWF title at the Taipei Open last week.

However, India's Krishna Prasad Garaga and Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy crashed



out after suffering a 7-21, 8-21 loss to Malaysia's Man Wei Chong and Soh Wooi Yik.

In a battle between two left-handers, Hina opened up a 7-5 lead before Ashmita drew level at 7-7. The two relied on angled returns to push each other into the deep corners, but a few errors from the Indian helped the Japanese take an 11-9 advantage at the mid-game interval.

Ashmita stayed within touching distance, pulling level at 12-12 and again at 15-15 before moving ahead 17-15 and 18-16. She also earned a game point at 20-19 after Hina found the net but failed to convert it. Hina then drew level before Ashmita hit wide, allowing the Japanese to pocket the opening game with a cross-court winner.



India's Ariha wins historic gold at Aerobic Gymnastics Asian Championships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

Ariha Pangambam has become the first Indian to win a gold medal in the senior women's individual event of the Aerobic Gymnastics Asian Championships.

The Indian gymnast topped the podium with a score of 19.100 in the final, finishing ahead of the continental field to claim India's maiden gold in the event. Ariha earned 8.650 for artistry, 7.600 for execution and 2.850 for difficulty to seal the title.

Norway FA calls on Infantino to resign over failed WC plan



JAMES ROBSON ■ Manchester

Norway's soccer federation wants Gianni Infantino to step down immediately, piling more pressure on FIFA's embattled president on Friday.

Infantino is facing a revolt after his failed plan to sell stakes in the World Cup.

The Norwegian federation held a meeting on Thursday, and president Lise Klaveness said the decision had been made to ask Infantino to resign.

"We decided that there is no trust in Infantino now," Klaveness told the Guardian. "We have been worried consistently, and there has been one more step in a worrying direction every year, every part of the year. The trust is now gone for us; there is no way back for Infantino."

The announcement is the latest blow for Infantino as the fallout con-

tinues over his controversial plan to sell profits in the World Cup through a commercial subsidiary called the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE).

European soccer's governing body UEFA said Thursday its threat to boycott the World Cup and other FIFA competitions remained in place despite FIFA abandoning and apologising for its failed plan.

It reiterated its stance that it had lost confidence in Infantino.

Earlier this week, Infantino appeared to have held off the potential of an internal revolt during a summit meeting with top staff in Rabat, Morocco.

FIFA said the president had been given the full support of those in attendance.

But UEFA's response, followed by Norway's direct call for him to resign, shows the sense of anger from Europe, in particular, remains strong. (AP)

How cricket star Shane Watson's book taught archer Jadhav pressure management

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

When archer Sahil Jadhav picked up former Australian cricketer Shane Watson's self-help book 'The Winner's Mindset', all he wanted was it to be engaging enough to reduce the time he spent scrolling on his phone.

A month into the book that promises to bring the "best version of you to every game and to life", Jadhav says he has also gained useful insights into managing pressure at big events as he gears up for the Asian Games in Japan in September-October.

"I started reading a book called 'The Winner's Mindset' by Shane Watson around a month ago. My initial intent was to reduce the time I spent scrolling on my phone. However, I have received valuable knowledge on how to deal with pressure



and keep myself focused during competitions," Jadhav said during an interaction with SAI (Sports Authority of India) Media.

In the book, the former T20 swashbuckler uses his in-game experiences to prescribe an "easy-to-understand mental skills framework that helps one be performance ready for every situation, eliminating stress and anxiety."

Mental strength and patience are qualities which Jadhav has required throughout his career. The 25-year-old endured seven years of disappointment before winning the first national title that also helped him break into the Indian squad.

It was the support and sacrifices of his family that kept Jadhav going during those difficult years. "I took up archery quite late, at the age of 19. But my family was extremely supportive. In fact, my family have sacrificed more than me.

They stood by me during those difficult years and supported me in every way possible. "I took seven years to win my first medal at the national level. It was a test of patience and grit as every year I used to miss out by extremely small margins," Jadhav recalled. Jadhav won his first national medal in 2024—a gold — before tasting international success by emerging champion in the individual category and clinching a team silver at the World University Games last year. The Satara native is in good form this year, having clinched a bronze medal in the men's individual compound event at the Archery World Cup 2026 Stage 2 in Shanghai.

"As I stood on the podium, I thought about my parents, their sacrifices and all the struggle I had to undergo over these last few years," he said.

