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PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 New Delhi

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

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."



PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
 ■ New Delhi

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-

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.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
 Santa Fe

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-



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

A cartoon illustration of three men in suits and hats standing in front of a building labeled 'HORMUZ'. One man is holding a large key, and another is holding a small key. A ship is visible in the background. The signature 'E. Shresh' is at the bottom.

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.

RAJESH KUMAR
■ New Delhi

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.



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,

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.



(L-R): Vehicles stuck in traffic following rainfall in New Delhi and Kashmere Gate. Commuters move on a waterlogged road amid rain near Medcity Hospital in Gurugram on Friday PT

RAJESH KUMAR
■ New Delhi/Raipur

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 (CJ) Surya Kant and Justices Joydalya 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

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 vio-

lated Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act. Sibal said that even if the allegations were accepted, violation of Section 126 constituted only an electoral offence and not a "corrupt practice" under Section 123(7) of the Act. "The question is whether it amounts to a corrupt practice. Corrupt practice is dealt with under Section 123(7)," he said. It was alleged that after the commencement of the "silence period", Baghel held a "rally/road show" in clear violation of Section 126 of the RP Act and the Model Code of Conduct.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Rajpur

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai released the 30th instalment of the Mahtari Vandan Yojana from the Chief Minister's Residence Office on Friday, transferring Rs. 630.55 crore through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) into the bank accounts of 67,20 lakh eligible women across Chhattisgarh. With this instalment, more than Rs. 19,444.33 crore has been dispensed under the scheme since its launch on March 1, 2024. The Chief Minister said the Mahtari Vandan Yojana has become a major initiative for women's eco-



conomic empowerment, dignity and self-reliance. Beyond the monthly assistance of Rs. 1,000, the scheme is strengthening women's confidence and decision-making while supporting education, healthcare, nutrition and livelihoods. Beneficiaries are also investing in the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana for their daughters and undertaking livelihood activities such as

tailoring, dairy farming, small businesses and animal husbandry to supplement family income. Emphasising transparent welfare delivery, the Chief Minister said good governance means ensuring that benefits reach eligible beneficiaries in a timely manner. Direct transfer of the monthly assistance into women's bank accounts through DBT has elimi-

nated intermediaries and strengthened transparency. He said the State Government is working for the holistic development of women through education, healthcare, nutrition, skill development, self-employment and financial inclusion. The Mahtari Vandan Yojana has strengthened women's economic security, participation in household decisions and social dignity, becoming an important foundation for inclusive development. Women and Child Development Minister Laxmi Rajwade, Principal Secretary Shahla Nigar and Director Dr Renuka Shrivastava were present on the occasion.

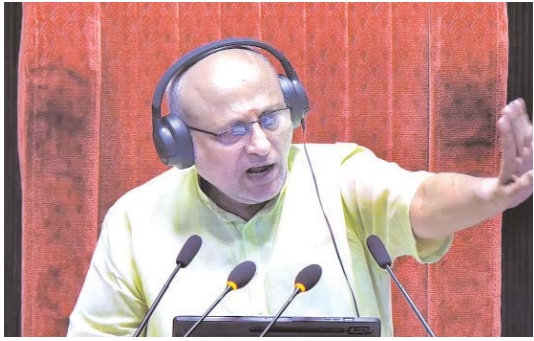
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Badal met the Prime Minister in his office in the Parliament building complex, sources aware of the meeting said. The details of the meeting were not known immediately but the interaction raised speculations that the Sa-



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.

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, 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

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 whips MPs for August 10-12 amid key bills 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.

Chhattisgarh's Kosa Set to Shine in Global Markets as Chief Minister Sai Launches Premium Handloom Brand Koshal Fab

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai participated in the State-Level Weavers' Conference and Swadeshi Exhibition organised at Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Auditorium in Raipur on the occasion of National Handloom Day. He distributed more than Rs. 10.90 crore in grants and award money to beneficiaries associated with silk, handloom, handicrafts, khadi and the Mati Kala Board, as well as meritorious students.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister launched 'Koshal Fab', the new premium handloom brand of the Chhattisgarh State Handloom Federation, and unveiled its logo and catalogue. He also launched a Handloom Inventory Management Software. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai extended greetings on National Handloom Day to the people of the state, particularly weavers and artisans. He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated the observance of National Handloom Day in 2015 in memory of the Swadeshi Movement launched on August 7, 1905. The Chief Minister said that Chhattisgarh's Kosa, Bastar



weaving and traditional handloom products are gaining a distinct identity across India and abroad. He said the State Government aims to give Chhattisgarh's handloom products a new 'Local to Global' identity through modern designs, skill upgradation, training, branding, marketing and access to new markets.

He said that the State Government is working with commitment for the economic and social empowerment of every section of society. He said that most of the promises made under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantees have been fulfilled by the State Government.

He said that lakhs of low-income families are realising their dream of owning pucca houses through the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. Payment of the differential amount for paddy procurement to farmers, annual financial assistance of Rs. 10,000 to landless agricultural labourers, economic empowerment of women through the Mahtari Vandan Yojana, and the revival of the Charan Paduka Yojana for tendupatta collectors reflect the government's welfare-oriented approach. The Chief Minister said that more than 50,000 devotees from Chhattisgarh have visited Prabhu Shri Ram under the Ramlala Darshan Yojana. He added that the

State Government is committed to transparent, accountable and corruption-free governance. Through the e-Office system, Chief Minister Helpline 1076 and Seva Setu Portal, citizens are being provided government services in a timely and transparent manner from their homes.

He said that the government's objective is to ensure that the benefits of development schemes reach the last person and to build a self-reliant and prosperous Chhattisgarh.

Major Initiatives for Weavers Under Good Governance

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said that the State Government is continuously

working towards the economic empowerment of weavers and artisans. Over the past two and a half years, approval has been granted for the construction of weaver sheds-cum-houses for 469 homeless weaver families. He said that around Rs. 10 crore worth of handloom products were sold through 47 exhibitions organised during the same period, providing better market opportunities to weavers.

Highlighting the important role of women in the handloom sector, the Chief Minister said that more than Rs. 68 crore has been paid as stitching remuneration to 2,001 women self-help groups over the past two and a half

years. The Chief Minister said that the Khadi and Village Industries Board supplied textiles worth Rs. 93 crore to various government departments through five sales outlets and the central warehouse. In addition, government procurement of textiles worth Rs. 436 crore produced by weavers has provided them with significant economic support.

Sai said that the State Government is making continuous efforts to provide national and international markets for handloom products.

As part of this initiative, showrooms displaying Chhattisgarh's handloom and handicraft products are being

established at five major airports in the country. He said that the Unity Mall under construction in Raipur will provide a modern marketing platform for local products. The Chief Minister further said that the state's first garment manufacturing unit is being established in Nava Raipur, which will generate employment opportunities for more than 4,500 people. The establishment of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) will also create new opportunities for young people in the design and textile sectors and help Chhattisgarh's handloom industry reach new heights.

Assembly Speaker Raman Singh Encourages Weavers

Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly Speaker Raman Singh said that nearly 1.20 lakh families in the state are associated with handloom and related activities. He said that the observance of National Handloom Day, initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has given the sector renewed recognition and energy.

He appealed to citizens to purchase at least one handloom product every year, saying that preserving the hard work of weavers, their art and the state's rich tradi-

tions is a shared responsibility.

Rural Industries Minister Recalls Legacy of the Swadeshi Movement

Rural Industries Minister Gajendra Yadav said that the Swadeshi Movement launched on , 1905, awakened the spirit of self-reliance across the country. He said that Chhattisgarh's Kosa sarees hold a distinctive place nationwide and that the State Government is continuously promoting handloom, handicrafts and village industries. He said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, the State Government is committed to providing new opportunities to weavers, artisans and local entrepreneurs and expanding markets for their products.

Chief Minister Visits Swadeshi Exhibition, Purchases Kosa Saree

During the programme, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai visited the Swadeshi Exhibition and inspected stalls set up by various institutions, including the Chhattisgarh State Handloom Federation, Bilasa Handloom, Khadi and Village Industries Board, Handicrafts Development Board, Shabari Emporium and Mati Kala Board.

OP Choudhary inaugurates, lays foundation for civic works

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raigarh

Chhattisgarh Finance Minister and Raigarh MLA OP Choudhary on Friday inaugurated and laid the foundation for civic infrastructure projects worth Rs 41 lakh in Raigarh city and announced plans to strengthen urban infrastructure and green spaces, according to an official statement. Choudhary performed the groundbreaking ceremony for a community hall and a boundary wall at a government school in Ward No. 28 (Panjari Plant) at a cost of Rs 33 lakh. He also inaugurated a shed built at a cost of Rs 8 lakh in Ward No. 9 (Navagadhi), the state-



ment said. Addressing the gathering, the minister said the state government was focusing on expanding civic amenities and implementing development projects that directly benefit citizens while transforming Raigarh into a modern and well-equipped city. He

announced that 10 oxygen zones would be developed in Raigarh in the coming years to increase the city's green cover and improve the urban environment. An open gym will also be set up near the Consumer Forum at Panjari Plant, he said. Choudhary said work was underway on a proposed ring road project estimated to cost around Rs 600 crore, which is expected to ease traffic congestion and support the city's future infrastructure needs. He also said a Nalanda Campus was being developed in Raigarh to provide better facilities for students preparing for competitive examinations, while efforts were underway to establish

nursing and physiotherapy colleges in the district. The minister said educational and healthcare infrastructure would continue to be expanded so that residents need not depend on other cities for quality services.

During the programme, Choudhary planted a sapling under the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign and appealed to citizens to plant and nurture more trees to promote environmental conservation. Mayor Jeevardhan Chauhan, Municipal Corporation Chairman Degreelal Sahu, public representatives, officials and local residents were present on the occasion, the statement added.

MLA to undertake 151-km Kanwar Yatra from Aug 10

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kabirdham

Pandariya MLA Bhawna Bohra will undertake a 151-kilometre Kanwar Yatra from Maa Narmada Temple in Amarkantak to Bhoramdev Temple from August 10 to 16, dedicating the pilgrimage to prayers for prosperity, peace and public welfare in Chhattisgarh. According to a statement issued by the MLA's office, Bohra will begin the seven-day pilgrimage at 7 am on August 10 after collecting holy water from Maa Narmada Temple. The Yatra

will pass through dense forests, hilly terrain and remote forest areas before culminating at Bhoramdev Temple, where she will perform Jalabhishek of Lord Shiva. The statement said prayers would be offered during the Yatra for the state's prosperity, farmers' welfare, employment opportunities and a brighter future for the youth, besides the well-being of the people. Bohra had undertaken the same pilgrimage last year and, according to the statement, became the first woman public representative from Chhattisgarh to complete the

Kanwar Yatra from Amarkantak to Bhoramdev. Addressing devotees ahead of the pilgrimage, Bohra said the holy month of Shravan symbolises devotion to Lord Shiva, service, self-discipline and public welfare. She said the Kanwar Yatra is not only a religious tradition but also promotes the values of Indian culture, discipline, social harmony and environmental conservation. She said last year's Yatra was completed successfully with the support of devotees and local residents and expressed hope for similar participation this year. As per the itin-

erary, the Yatra will proceed from Amarkantak to Lamani on the first day, followed by Mahamai via Niwaskhar on the second day, Dullapur Bazaar on the third, Gaurkampa and Mohtara on the fourth, Dongaria Mahadev on the fifth, Bodla on the sixth and Bhoramdev Temple on the final day, where the pilgrimage will conclude with Jalabhishek.

Bohra appealed to Shiva devotees to assemble at Maa Narmada Temple in Amarkantak on August 10 and join the Yatra with chants of 'Bol Bam'.

News, Bhakt Prahlad, He Ram clear Chhattisgarh police exams

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

Chhattisgarh's latest police recruitment exam results have drawn widespread attention after a bizarre mix of candidate names, such as 'News', 'Space Rani', 'He Ram' and 'Tufail', surfaced on the qualifying list, prompting the Opposition Congress to allege irregularities, even as candidates came forward to defend their unique monikers. While the Congress seized upon the peculiar roster of names to allege irregularities in the preliminary recruitment exam for the posts of subedar, sub-inspector and platoon commander, the Chhattisgarh Public Service Commission (CGPSC) rejected the claim, saying the records accurately reflect the data provided by candidates during registration. The commission clarified that these candidates had appeared for document verification, physical tests and the preliminary examination under the same names, also printed on their admit cards. The CGPSC conducted the preliminary

छत्तीसगढ़ लोक सेवा आयोग, रायपुर		
गैर आरक्षण, वेतन-19, २०		
क्र.सं.	नाम	रैंक
80	VINAY MINJI	30-0
81	SANDEEP BHAGAT	30-0
90	YOGESH YADAV	21-0
95	ABID KHAKHA	26-1
33	VIJAY KUMAR CHAUHAN	24-0
34	DIVYA NAYAK	21-0
35	GOKUL SIDAR	14-0
10	ALIN KUMAR	03-0
13	NEWS	02-0
21	PURUSHOTTAM PAINKRA	10-1
74	NIKHIL SAHU	01-0
79	MANISH YADAV	05-1
87	RAJAT DEWANGAN	31-1
87	AKASH GADHTIYA	28-0
90	YOGENDRA KUMAR SAHU	23-2

छत्तीसगढ़ लोक सेवा आयोग, रायपुर		
आरक्षण, वेतन-19, २०		
क्र.सं.	नाम	रैंक
455	2402105101	JYOTI
456	2402105102	OMPRAKASH
457	2402105105	DURGESH KUM
458	2402105106	HARISHANKAR
459	2402105109	SUSHIL KUIJUR
460	2402105117	RAVI KUMAR
461	2402105118	GAYATRI SAHU
462	2402105130	ASHLESHA PRAI
463	2402105131	KRISHNA KUMA
464	2402105147	KISHAN KUMAR
465	2402105160	RAJARAM PATR
466	2402105168	HARISH GOYAL
467	2402105174	SPACERANI
468	2402105197	NARENDRA KUN
469	2402105200	AKSHAY SHARM
470	2402105208	HARISH KUMAR
471	2402105217	AAKRITI TIWARI

examination for recruitment to 341 posts of subedar, sub-inspector and platoon commander under the home department on July 12 across all 33 districts. The preliminary examination result was declared on August 4, with 7,301 candidates qualifying for the mains. However, a controversy erupted after a clipping of the list of qualifying candidates with names such as 'News', 'Space Rani', 'He Ram', 'Bhakt Prahlad' and 'Tufail' went viral

on social media. Congress leaders questioned the recruitment process, with former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel taking a dig at the government over the names. Baghel shared the list of unusual names on X, saying, "The Public Relations Department should spend Rs 1 crore daily on advertisements to display this achievement at public intersections so that, in the coming days, 'Radio' and 'Space Rajat' might also succeed in some exam-

ination." State Congress communication wing chief Sushil Anand Shukla alleged that the BJP government, which had promised to conduct PSC examinations on the lines of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), is "playing with the future of young people". He claimed that the names on the list showed the CGPSC and the government's alleged "negligence" in conducting examinations. The Congress leader further claimed that several recruitment and promotion examinations conducted in the state over the past two-and-a-half years, including those for forest guards, police constables and RI formations, were under a cloud of suspicion. The CGPSC, in a statement issued on Thursday, termed the social media claims "misleading and baseless" and said they were mocking the actual names of candidates and questioning the examination result. The commission said that it "strongly refutes" the claims made in reels and short videos circulated on social media. "The names of the candidates displayed in the examination result are the

same as those entered by them in their online application forms, which they finally submitted. The candidates appeared for document and physical tests as well as the preliminary examination under these names, and their names were also displayed accordingly on their admit cards," it stated. The CGPSC advised candidates and the public not to believe misleading information and to rely only on information published on its official website. As his name became a subject of debate online, News Kumar Pradhan, one of the qualifying candidates, said he had cleared the CGPSC sub-inspector preliminary examination, but questions are being raised over his name unnecessarily without confirming the facts. "My name is News Kumar Pradhan. My surname was not added to my Class 10 marksheet. My marksheets of Classes 10 and 12 and Aadhaar card carry the name News, without the surname. People think that the name is incorrect," he said in a video statement, adding that he is a resident of Bhatanpali in Raigarh district.

नाम परिवर्तन सूचना

सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि मैं ममता भंसाली, धर्मपत्नी मुकेश भंसाली निवासी म.नं. बी-30/5, सरदार बगीचे के पास, टोपूर नगर, रायपुर (छ.गं). यह घोषित करती हूँ कि मेरे आधार कार्ड में मेरा नाम 'ममता भंसाली' दर्ज है, जबकि मेरे पासपोर्ट में मेरा नाम 'ममता देवी भंसाली' अंकित है। मैं यह घोषणा करती हूँ कि ममता भंसाली एवं ममता देवी भंसाली दोनों नाम एक ही व्यक्ति के हैं।

अतः आज से समस्त शासकीय, अर्धशासकीय व अन्य दस्तावेजों तथा भविष्य के सभी कार्यों में मुझे मेरे सही नाम ममता भंसाली, धर्मपत्नी मुकेश भंसाली से ही जाना व पहचाना जावे।

ममता भंसाली
म.नं. बी-30/5, सरदार बगीचे के पास, टोपूर नगर, रायपुर (छ.गं)

Govt approves additional funds to upgrade Nandghat-Mungeli road to four lanes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

The Chhattisgarh government has approved an additional Rs 21.81 crore for upgrading the Nandghat-Mungeli road from a previously sanctioned two-lane carriageway to a four-lane road, an official statement said on Friday. The project, connecting Nandghat in Bemetara district with the Mungeli district headquarters, will now be executed at a total cost of Rs 137.81 crore.

The state government had earlier sanctioned Rs 116 crore under the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) scheme in 2024 for construction of the 36.40-km-long two-lane road. Following directions from Deputy Chief

Minister and Public Works Minister Arun Sao to widen the road to four lanes, the Public Works Department issued an approval for the additional Rs 21.81 crore, the statement said. The proposed four-lane road has been a long-pending demand of residents of the region. The upgraded highway is expected to improve connectivity and make travel to Raipur faster and safer for people from Mungeli, Lormi, Pandariya and adjoining areas, it said. Food and Civil Supplies Minister and Navagarh MLA Dayaldas Baghel thanked Deputy Chief Minister Arun Sao for approving the road widening project and said the decision would benefit people across the region, according to the statement.

GPM to host 26th State-Level School Sports Meet from Aug 18

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gaurela

The Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi (GPM) district will host the 26th State-Level School Sports Competition from August 18 to 21, with around 540 athletes from across Chhattisgarh participating in four disciplines, an official statement said on Friday. The four-day championship will bring together boys and girls in the 14-19 age group from all five divisions of the state to compete in gymnastics, cricket, taekwondo and kabaddi. Gymnastics and taekwondo competitions will be held for both boys and girls,



while cricket will be organised for boys and kabaddi for girls. The event is being organised as part of the state government's efforts to encourage sporting talent and promote young athletes to higher levels of competition, the statement said. Ahead of the championship, Collector Vijay

Dayaram K. reviewed the preparations with officials of various departments and directed them to ensure timely arrangements for the smooth conduct of the event. The administration is making arrangements for sports venues, accommodation, food, transportation, medical

facilities, drinking water, electricity, sanitation, security, traffic management and the opening and closing ceremonies, it said.

Chief Executive Officer of the District Panchayat Mukesh Raote, Additional Superintendent of Police Avinash Mishra, District Education Officer Rajneesh Tiwari and officials of the Sports and Youth Welfare, Forest, Health, Tribal Development, Public Works, Public Health Engineering, Electricity, Food, Transport and Urban Administration departments attended the review meeting.

बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा
Bank of Baroda

BRANCH: KOTA
DISTT.- BILASPUR (CHHATTISGARH)

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN to the general public that Bank of Baroda, KOTA Branch, KOTA, Dist. BILASPUR, C.G. intends to accept the schedule of properties detailed below, belonging to Mr. SHRI GOPAL AGRAWAL S/O: LATE NATHULAL AGRAWAL, R/o- Mouza- CHANGORI, R.N.M. KOTA, Tehsil- KOTA District-BILASPUR, C.G. as security/mortgage for credit facilities granted to be granted by the Bank.

Any person(s) having any claim, right, title, interest, lien, charge, mortgage, lease, or objection of any nature whatsoever in or over the schedule properties or any part thereof are hereby required to make the same known in writing along with documentary proof within 10 (Ten) days from the date of publication of this notice to the undersigned Advocate or directly to the Bank Branch.

If no claim or objection is received within the stipulated period of 10 days, it shall be presumed that the scheduled properties are free from all encumbrances, claims, and charges, and Bank of Baroda shall proceed with the creation/liquidation of the mortgage. Any claim received after the expiry of the stipulated period shall be treated as waived and non-binding on the Bank.

1. Property Survey/ Khassa No. 370/2, 367/1, 365/7, 368/2, 365/5, PH. NO. 30/05, area 0.161 acre land is situated at- Village-Changori, PH. No. -30/05, RNM-KOTA, Tehsil-KOTA, District- BILASPUR, C.G. belonging to Mr. SHRI GOPAL AGRAWAL S/o LATE NATHULAL AGRAWAL, R/o VILL. CHANGORI, KOTA, Tehsil- KOTA, District- BILASPUR, C.G.

Boundaries as per sale deed: Khassa No. 370/2, 367/1, 365/7, 368/2, 365/5: North- Plot of Ghanashyam, South- KOTA-LORMI ROAD, East- Owner's Property, West- Plot of Vishnu Gupta & Lalita Devi

2. Property Schedule: Property bearing Khassa Nos. 370/2, 367/1, 365/7, 368/2, 365/5, 0.777 hectares aggregating to 0.161 acre, situated at Village - Changori, PH. No. 30/05, RNM-KOTA, Tehsil - KOTA, District - BILASPUR (C.G.), belonging to Mr. GOPAL AGRAWAL S/o Mr. LATE NATHULAL AGRAWAL, R/o Vill.- Changori, KOTA, Tehsil-KOTA, District-BILASPUR (C.G.).

Bank of Baroda
KOTA Branch
KOTA, Dist.-BILASPUR, C.G. Mob. No. 9109138487

Advocate
Mr. Vikash Bisen
Mungeli C.G., Mo. 9827563265

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-Anguri-

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-Sonapat 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-Sonapat 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 Chhalavadi 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.



Karnataka BJP leader Chhalavadi Narayanaswamy

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.

Omar backs Bhagwat's remarks, says Gen Z protests are not anti-national

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 nets, 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.



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Order Order

TN CM Vijay’s wife Sankgeetha withdraws divorce petition



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay's wife Sankgeetha on Friday withdrew her petition filed before a family court at Chengelpattu 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.

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 wageer, 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.

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.

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 to decide on the petitioner's request by Saturday.

The judge said he was not passing any direction on

whether permission should be granted or denied, but the petitioner should be informed about the decision of the authorities.

Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma said Independence Day is around the corner and prohibitory orders are in place in the said area.

He also informed that the Supreme Court is already considering the issue of having an alternative protest site.

On August 3, the Supreme Court agreed to examine a PIL contending that Jantar Mantar in the heart of the capital is no longer a suitable venue for protests as they cause inconvenience to residents and disrupt essential services.

The petitioner's counsel said around 75 persons were expected to join the protest, and Delhi Police can even assign an alternative protest venue to them for August 10.

“The Delhi Police shall decide the application and convey its decision by tomorrow,” the court said.

The petitioner is seeking permission to protest peacefully at the Jantar Mantar over their long-standing demand for inclusion of Dalit Christians within the Scheduled Castes framework.

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

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 Chandrashekhara 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 benefits solely on account of conversion to Islam.

He said the state Government's order created a level playing field by preserving affirmative action bene-

fits 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 Lebbai” 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 contended 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 Ahamad had approached the high court challenging the rejection of his application seeking issuance of a Backward Class (Muslim) community certificate as “Muslim Lebbai”.

“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.

It said pending the writ proceedings before the high court, the state Government, acting upon the recommendation of the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission, issued the GO. “It prescribes the policy governing issuance of Backward Class (Muslim) community certificates to eligible persons who had embraced Islam from among the Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes, Denotified Communities and Scheduled Castes.

“The object of the Government Order was to ensure that persons belonging to socially and educationally backward communities are not deprived of reservation benefits solely on account of conversion to Islam and thereby to create a level playing field by preserving affirmative action benefits despite change of religion,” it had said.

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.

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



JAYANTA MITRA

GATI KOCHAR

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.

We hired a stranger and called it recruitment



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

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

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.

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

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 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



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.

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.

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



MONIKA MALIK

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.

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

Punjab Congress and the politics of parallel power

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 once again 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.

The writer is Chief Reporter with The Pioneer, Chandigarh



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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

ment 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.

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.

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

virodh hai (India is not in favour of a BRICS currency. We do not support the introduction of any such BRICS currency scheme; India opposes

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

irrespective of their origin, domestic manufacturing is critical to generate employment, strengthen industry capabilities, and ensure supply chain resilience especially during global disruptions, Joshi noted.

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.

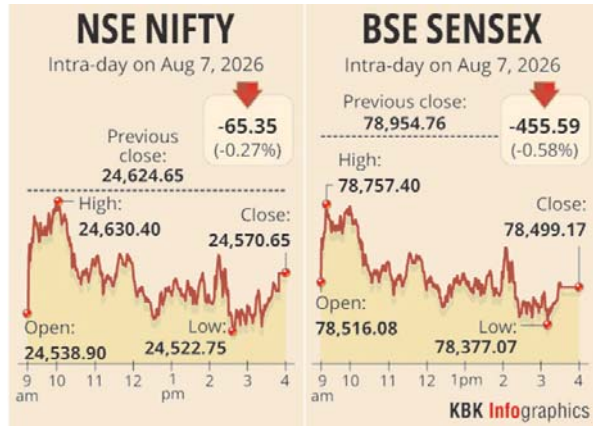
The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 455.59 points, or 0.58 per cent, to settle at 78,499.17. During the day, it tanked 577.69 points, or 0.73 per cent, to 78,377.07.

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 ended 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

investors assessed the potential implications of proposed regulatory changes, he added.

The BSE SmallCap Select index went up by 0.20 per cent and MidCap Select index edged higher by 0.19 per cent. Among sectoral indices, financial services dropped 1.33 per cent, private banks index (1.04 per cent), top 10 banks (0.97 per cent), consumer durables (0.90 per cent), housing finance (0.81 per cent), bankex (0.61 per cent) and insurance (0.61 per cent). Focused IT jumped 1.44 per cent, auto (1.33 per cent), IT (1.16 per cent), PSU bank (0.76 per cent) and healthcare (0.50 per cent).

This week, the BSE benchmark climbed 404.53 points, or 0.51 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 187.05 points, or 0.76 per cent. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dipped 0.35 per cent to \$82.20 per barrel. Foreign Institutional

Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹17.86 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. "Indian equity markets ended modestly lower on Friday as renewed uncertainty surrounding the Strait of Hormuz negotiations and broad-based weakness in financial stocks overshadowed an otherwise supportive earnings backdrop."

"Investor sentiment remained cautious as markets weighed geopolitical risks alongside the potential implications of fresh regulatory proposals for the non-bank lending sector," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. For the entire week, both benchmark indices faced divergence after stock exchanges introduced a new auction mechanism for shares having futures and options (F&O) contracts.

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 land-



scape, 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.

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, particu-

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.

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 55.01 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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Shatrujeet Kapur, IPS, Director General, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), on Friday flagged off the Force-Level Mountaineering Expedition-2026 from Force Headquarters, New Delhi, by handing over the expedition flag to the Team Leader, Parikshit Shah, Deputy Commandant.

The expedition will attempt Mt Kamet (7,756 m) and Mt Abi Gamin (7,355 m) in Uttarakhand. A 27-member team, comprising 20 mountaineers and 7 administrative staff, is participating in the expedition. ITBP mountaineers had successfully summited both peaks in 2024, reaffirming the Force's

high-altitude expertise and rich mountaineering legacy.

Addressing the expedition team, the Director General said that ITBP has a distinguished history of successfully conducting numerous national and international mountaineering expeditions. He emphasised that such expeditions are an integral part of the Force's professional ethos, enhancing high-altitude endurance, operational preparedness, leadership and teamwork-qualities essential for guarding the nation's Himalayan frontiers.

Dr Akun Sabharwal, IPS, Inspector General (Training), along with other senior officers of the Force, was present on the occasion to extend best wishes to the expedition team.



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.



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.

Welcoming 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)

DOUBLE CROSSWORD

SATURDAY | AUGUST 8, 2026

ACROSS

1 Waste, we hear, in a statistical centre (5)

6 Food for the journey east (5)

9 She names a vessel (7)

10 The best letter takes a lot of paper (5)

11 Little house with no fridge (5)

12 Gets hold of disorderly bars at Gateshead (5)

13 Gains a lot, nominally (7)

15 Fay, said to be whimsical (3)

17 She's some comedienne! (4)

18 Not out to recreate the moa (2,4)

19 Are out to serve, love (5)

DOWN

2 Fearful affray said to come to a sad end (6)

3 Thin wooden beam, part of a seat (6)

4 Young Scot in "The Quiet American" (3)

5 Decorate sailors with much ceremony (5)

6 Praise for people holding out, losing nothing (7)

7 Well, they aren't riches (4)

8 Met up with a real expert, just for now (3,3)

12 Cheese, initially from an urban district in part of India (5)

13 Language we start learning on the quiet! (5)

20 In Africa, the first letter to upset Sarah (6)

22 One born in Hollywood? (4)

24 Strike hard at it! (3)

25 Something horsey afoot (7)

26 Twin uncle (5)

27 Not originally a slimmer's setback (5)

28 Chap to tidy up the stable? (5)

29 Her gift is to make aircraft (7)

30 She's less than humanitarian (5)

31 My first original Christmas gift! (5)

14 Thing rebuilt in time (5)

15 Playing strength? (5)

16 Long time getting to the point (5)

18 Place in some embarrassment (5)

19 Land of men in song (7)

21 Weapon suitable for a "29 Across"? (6)

22 Nice sort of night to stay out of the car (6)

23 Warm-hearted, uncompromising devotion (6)

25 Too keen to turn up and have a fling? (5)

26 A crack from some drifter (4)

28 It's Margaret's turn to be a treasure (3)

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 trilateral 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

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)

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 Soye.

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 Soye 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.

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)

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.

The Indian will just have to keep up his form in the last tournament of the season, which will be played under the Classical system.

After winning the rapid section with a marginal lead against Sindarov, Pragg lost only one game in the blitz and scored the requisite victories to end up with 11.5 points out of a possible 18.

Sindarov, who was trailing Praggnanandhaa by a full point after the rapid section, had to be content with the second spot on 22 points, whereas Wesley So of the United States came third, scoring 20 points overall.



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 Piyyush 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 Ambriesh, 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 have 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 Uchaganve 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.

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.

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.

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.

The student appeared to have shot them before attending school as normal. He waited until classes started and began shooting inside his classroom before walking out and firing more shots, Police spokesperson Trairong Piwpan said. The boy fired more than 20 shots and police found he still had 30 rounds after shooting himself, he said.

Several family members, including his uncle and sisters of the grandfather who were at the family home while police investigated, said he usually kept to himself and was a good student.

The family members said they were unaware of any troubles he faced at home or school. Thailand has one of the highest rates of gun ownership in Asia, second only to Pakistan and far surpassing its Southeast Asian neighbours.

Zelenskyy to make first visit to Russia-friendly Serbia

JOVANA GEC ■ Belgrade

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will on Saturday make his first official visit to Serbia, one of the few European countries that have maintained friendly relations with Russia despite its invasion of Ukraine.

The office of Serbia's populist President Aleksandar Vucic announced the visit late Thursday. Zelenskyy's office has not officially confirmed his trip to Belgrade.

The visit comes as Vucic tries to balance Serbia's traditional ties with Moscow against pressure to align its foreign policy with the European Union. Vucic has refused to join international sanctions against Russia over Ukraine, citing historic ties between the two Slavic Nations.

Serbia is in the process of joining the EU, but that has been stalled partly because of Belgrade's policies toward Moscow.

Serbia relies almost entirely on Russia for its energy supplies. Although Belgrade has refused to sanction Russia, it has provided aid to Ukraine and Vucic has recently stepped up contacts with Kyiv, in an apparent bid to boost his image in the West.

Russia last year accused Serbia of exporting arms to Ukraine through NATO member states, describing the move as a "stab in the back." Serbia also has promised to help rebuild Ukraine after the war.

Ahead of the visit, Vucic said he and Zelenskyy will



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 Vljajic, 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," Vljajic 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.

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

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 Shirish 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 Shirish 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.

Climber Yukta killed in Broad Peak avalanche cremated in Kathmandu

SHIRISH B PRADHAN ■ Kathmandu

Nepali climber Pur Bahadur Gurung, who was among the 10 mountaineers killed in an avalanche on Broad Peak in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, was cremated following Buddhist rituals and tradition in Kathmandu on Friday.

Gurung, popularly known as 'Yukta', and nine other climbers, including veteran Nepalese-British mountaineer Nirmal Purja, died after the avalanche struck the world's 12th-highest mountain at 8,051 metres in Pok's Gilgit-Baltistan on July 30. The climbers were declared dead on August 1.

Government officials, political leaders, tourism entrepreneurs, mountaineers, well-wishers and family members of Yukta were present when he was cremated near the Swoyambhunath Stupa in Kathmandu, according to Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) sources. A funeral procession was held before the last rites at the Swoyambhunath Stupa.

The mountaineer's body was brought to Kathmandu from Pakistan and was accorded a solemn reception at the Tribhuvan International Airport.



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

Hospital. Hours before the incident, a similar tense unrest took place at Colombo's Magazine Prison. At around 10:00 pm on Thursday, about 40 inmates rioted after breaking through a section, Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala told parliament.

One inmate was killed in the violence while 10 others were injured. According to prison officials, both prison riots have been brought under control with the deployment of troops.

Earlier on Friday, around 30 inmates at the Pallansena Prison climbed onto the roof of a ward and staged a protest following the morning breakfast, Minister Wijepala said.

He added that police and prison officials are working to control the situation. At parliament, Wijepala said that suspicions have arisen over whether the escalating violence reported at several prisons was linked to an organised plot.

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.