

Raksha Bandhan wishes, Holiday Notice

On the occasion of Raksha Bandhan, the Pioneer family extends its warm greetings and best wishes to all its esteemed readers, advertisers and well-wishers. Please note that The Pioneer newspaper office will remain closed on August 28 on account of the festival. The next issue of the newspaper will be available on August 30. We wish everyone a happy and blessed Raksha Bandhan.

Editor, The Pioneer

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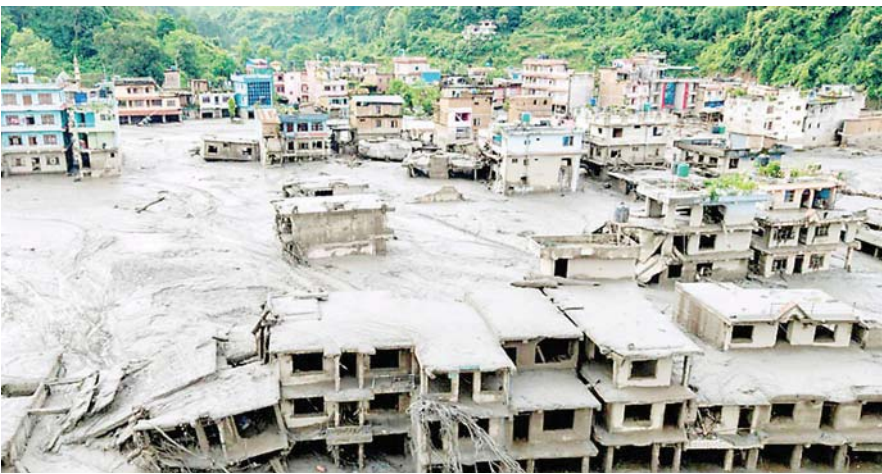


Nepal-Tibet border disaster: 359 dead, 288 Indians untraced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

At least 359 people have been killed in a devastating flash-flood and mudslide along the Nepal-Tibet border, while 288 Indian nationals remain missing and around 200 others are stranded on the Chinese side, as rescue and relief operations continue amid widespread destruction and severely disrupted communication networks. Nepali police said on Thursday that at least 359 people had perished in the massive flooding that struck the Himalayan border region a day earlier. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said India was in constant contact with authorities in Nepal and China to coordinate the rescue and evacuation of its citizens affected by the disaster.

In a post on X, Nepal's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) warned of the possibility of another major flood after the flow of the Lhunde River was obstructed around 18 kilometres above the Rasuwagadhi border area, leading to the formation of a lake covering about 0.11 square kilometres. Authorities urged people living in downstream areas to remain highly vigilant. Nepal said the flash flood, which struck the Bhoté Koshi River at around 8:40 am local time on Wednesday, had affected river-



ine areas in Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, Gorkha and other districts, causing extensive loss of life and property. The Nepal government has intensified search, rescue and relief operations and appealed for financial assistance to support immediate relief as well as long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres expressed sadness over the severe flooding in Nepal and China, extending condolences to the families of those killed and solidarity with communities affected by the disaster. He said UN

teams and humanitarian partners were mobilising supplies and personnel to support the Nepal government's response. In New Delhi, briefing reporters on Thursday, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal described the situation as "dynamic", saying communication networks across several affected districts had been badly damaged, making it difficult to establish contact with people on the ground. "The three or four districts that are affected by this, all the communication channels are broken. So, we are not able to talk to anyone," he said. The

Indian Embassy in Kathmandu is coordinating with Nepalese authorities, project officials, tour operators and state governments to verify the safety and whereabouts of Indian nationals. The government has not given any codename to the ongoing rescue and evacuation effort.

Jaiswal said 73 Indian citizens were working at the Trishuli 1 power project, with the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu remaining in touch with the project head to obtain further information about the workers. India has also stepped up humanitarian assistance to Nepal. Two Indian Air Force flights have delivered a total of 47.5 tonnes of relief material to the country. Jaiswal said 21 Indians, all from Tamil Nadu, had been rescued and were expected to reach Kathmandu before arrangements were made for their return to India. Several groups of Indian pilgrims and travellers were in the affected region when the floods struck. These included two groups from Tamil Nadu comprising 37 and 49 people undertaking the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through separate tour operators, besides 32 people from West Bengal, 61 Indians from different states and 33 people from Kerala. The MEA cautioned that the figures were preliminary and could change as authorities continued to verify information and establish contact with more affected people.

C'garh woman missing amid Nepal floods

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

A woman from Raipur has been reported missing in Nepal amid floods and landslides, prompting the Chhattisgarh government to coordinate with authorities to trace her, officials said on Thursday. Monika Yadav, a resident of Mahadev Ghat area under D D Nagar police station limits in Raipur, has been missing since floods hit parts of Nepal, according to administrative records.

Yadav had travelled to Nepal on August 22 and contact with her family has since been lost, officials said. Acting on the instructions of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, the state government is col-

lecting information about Chhattisgarh residents who have travelled to or are currently in Nepal and monitoring the situation. Officials said efforts were underway in coordination with relevant authorities and central agencies to locate Yadav and ensure her safe return. The government has also appealed to families and the public to share information about Chhattisgarh residents who may be stranded or affected in Nepal. People seeking assistance or having information can contact the state control room at toll-free number 1070 or 0771-2223471, officials said. The state government said it was extending all possible assistance to affected citizens and their families amid the natural disaster.

PIONEER IN SHORT

MORE RAIN, THUNDERSTORMS: IMD

Delhi experienced generally cloudy conditions on Thursday, with light rain reported at a few places. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast another spell of very light to light rain accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning at many places across the national capital for Friday. The weather activity is associated with a low-pressure area over southeast Uttar Pradesh and adjoining areas, which persisted over the same region, today. The system's associated cyclonic circulation extends up to 5.8 km above mean sea level and is tilting southwestwards with height. The monsoon trough at mean sea level currently runs through Amritsar, Chandigarh, Muzaffargarh, the centre of the low-pressure area over southeast Uttar Pradesh and adjoining areas, Jamshehpur and Digba before extending southeastwards towards the northeast Bay of Bengal.

PM Modi to push security, connectivity at SCO Summit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will undertake a four-day visit to Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic from August 29, primarily to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek. PM Modi is expected to hold bilateral meetings with SCO leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, on the sidelines of the SCO Summit. The Russian President and the Chinese President are also expected to participate in the BRICS Summit to be held in New Delhi on September 12-13. According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), at the invitation of the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, PM Modi will undertake a State Visit to Tashkent on August 29-30. This will be the Prime Minister's fourth visit to Uzbekistan. During the visit, the Prime Minister will hold delegation-level talks with President Mirziyoyev to further strengthen the strategic part-



nership between the two countries.

The two leaders would review cooperation in trade and investment, defence, digital connectivity, energy, education and people-to-people domains and set the agenda for the road ahead. From Tashkent, at the invitation of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Sadyr Zhaparov, the Prime Minister will travel to

Bishkek to participate in the 26th SCO Summit on August 31-September 1. Addressing a special media briefing here on Thursday, MEA Secretary (West) Sibi George said, "The SCO was established with the primary goal of countering the three evils of terrorism, separatism, and extremism, which continue to remain a challenge." He said the Prime Minister spoke about the three elements

of security, connectivity, and opportunity at the last SCO Summit. "One of the important focuses of the security element is the fight against terrorism. India's position on terrorism has been articulated well. It continues to be seen that we have zero tolerance towards terrorism and zero tolerance towards cross-border terrorism," George said. The Summit marks the 25th anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, of which India has been a full member since 2017. According to the MEA, the Prime Minister will address the SCO Summit, where he will highlight India's priorities of Security, Connectivity and Opportunity at the forum. Speaking about the bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the Summit, George said, "We are working on a few bilateral meetings. Depending on the availability of time and convenience, the meetings will be held, and as and when the meetings are scheduled, it will be conveyed to you. A meeting is scheduled between the leaders of India and Russia on the sidelines of the summit."

B'desh sets up review team on Ganges water treaty

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Dhaka

Bangladesh has formed a new team to review issues surrounding the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty with India and has already informed New Delhi of the move, Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman told parliament Thursday. "The government is now awaiting their response," Khalilur said in response to a supplementary question from Jamaat MP Abdul Alim. Last week, India's Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, regarding the treaty, said "As you would be aware the Ganga Water Treaty was signed in 1996 for a period of 30 years. "All river-related issues between India and Bangladesh are discussed under the Joint Rivers Commission. Further, meetings of the Joint Committee under the Ganga Water Treaty continue to be held at the technical level." The MEA said India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers, and all water-related issues, including the Ganga Water Treaty, are addressed through established bilateral channels. As the treaty was signed for a 30-year period, it is officially set to expire in December 2026, with official reviews, flow assessments, and bilateral talks currently underway between both nations to determine



whether the pact will be renewed, amended, or completely rewritten. On the long-running Teesta water-sharing issue, Khalilur said Bangladesh had launched a technical assessment project with China, which is expected to begin soon. Future decisions, he said, would be based on the findings of the assessment, the Daily Star reported. Responding to a separate question from BNP MP Fazle Huda, the foreign minister remarked that Bangladesh now stands tall because of what he claimed was Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's strong and successful foreign policy. "Under his leadership, we will continue to advance this policy, and Bangladesh will never bow its head to anyone again. We have buried the era of submissive diplomacy," he said.

‘Science on Wheels’ to spark innovation among students: CM Sai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jashpur

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Thursday flagged off a 'Science on Wheels' mobile laboratory aimed at taking practical science education to schools and students, particularly those with limited access to modern scientific resources. Flagging off the vehicle from his camp office in Bagiya here, Sai said the initiative would help channel children's natural curiosity through scientific thinking, experimentation and innovation. The mobile laboratory will take scientific models, experiments and exhibitions directly to schools, enabling students to understand concepts through hands-on activities rather than only through textbooks.

The programme will cover four key modules — space technology, robotics, sustainable development and water filtration. These modules will introduce students to space science, emerging technologies, environmental conservation, water management and scientific solutions through practical experiments. Sai said science and tech-



nology have become integral to everyday life and the future would be shaped by new technologies and innovation. Early exposure to their practical applications would help students identify their interests and encourage

them to pursue careers in science, research and innovation, he said. He said the initiative was intended not as a one-time demonstration but as a means of developing sustained interest in science and technology among children. The programme seeks to promote scientific temper, logical thinking, creativity, problem-solving and innovation among students while familiarising them with emerging technologies, officials said. 'Science on Wheels' is a national initiative supported by the Department of Science and Technology and is being implemented in Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh in collaboration with Plaksha University, Plaksha Foundation and IIT Mandi. In Chhattisgarh, the initiative focuses on taking practical science education closer to students and encouraging scientific thinking and innovation among young minds.

Sai's wife Kaushalya Sai, Collector Rohit Vyas, Senior Superintendent of Police Lal Umend Singh and District Panchayat CEO Abhishek Kumar were among those present at the flag-off ceremony. A large number of women from self-help groups and other dignitaries also attended the event.

Financial system favours a few industrialists: Rahul Gandhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Congress leader and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Thursday accused the Narendra Modi government of creating what he described as two separate systems in the country - one that allegedly favours a select group of wealthy industrialists and another that places ordinary citizens under greater financial pressure. In a post on social media platform X, Gandhi targeted the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) while alleging that farmers, salaried employees and poor students faced far greater difficulties in obtaining loans or dealing with repayment defaults than certain favoured corporate groups. "If a farmer fails to repay Rs 50,000, his land is auctioned. If a salaried person is unable to pay even one EMI, bank recovery agents reach



his home. Poor students do not even get loans for education," Gandhi said. He alleged that the rules appeared to be different for a select group of influential industrialists. "However, for a select group of 'friends', bank money is treated like private property - withdraw as much as you want and repay whatever you wish," Gandhi alleged. The Congress leader said the Modi government had created an unequal economic and financial structure that treated different sections of

society differently. "The Modi government has created two systems in the country - one for a handful of billionaires and another for everyone else," Gandhi said. The National Company Law Tribunal is a statutory body that deals with matters involving companies, corporate disputes, and insolvency proceedings. Gandhi and the Congress have repeatedly accused the BJP-led Central government of pursuing policies that allegedly benefit a small group of major corporate interests while increasing financial pressures on farmers, workers, salaried families and young people. The BJP and the government have rejected similar allegations in the past, maintaining that their policies are aimed at promoting economic growth, encouraging investment, and expanding financial inclusion across the country.

States Focus



PUNJAB GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES HIGHEST-PAID IN COUNTRY: MANN

The employees of the Punjab Government are the highest-paid among all the Government servants in the country, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann claimed on Thursday.

"If the Centre pays ₹30,000 to ₹32,000 to an employee, the Punjab Government pays ₹50,000. It is a matter of immense pride and satisfaction that the state Government pays the highest salary to its employees, who are its backbone," Mann said here.

His statement came on a day when Punjab Government employees went on a statewide strike to press the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) regime to accept their demands, including releasing the pending dearness allowance.

More than 150 employees' bodies under the banner of Punjab Sanjha Mulazam Manch joined hands for the "maha hartal", with over three lakh employees joining the stir, affecting public services. (PTI)



RAJASTHAN GOVT COMMITTED TO PROVIDING FACILITIES TO YOUTH: CM

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma described the youth as the country's biggest asset and said on Thursday that their patience, confidence and relentless efforts would be crucial to realising the vision of a developed India.

Addressing the 'My Bharat Khelo India' dialogue programme virtually – which Prime Minister Narendra Modi also addressed – Sharma said a positive environment for sports has been created in the country under Modi's leadership. He said talent from villages is now getting opportunities to compete on national and international platforms and the Government is committed to providing opportunities and facilities to youth.

The chief minister said the "double-engine" Government in Rajasthan was working continuously to take sports to new heights. "Players are being prepared for world-class competitions through better training, modern facilities, financial security and recognition," he said. Sharma said 50 Khelo India centres were established in Rajasthan, while Centres of Excellence for athletics, archery and boxing were being developed at Sawai Mansingh Stadium. (PTI)

Bihar CM conducts aerial survey of flood-hit Nepal border areas



A view during an aerial survey being conducted by Bihar CM Samrat Choudhary, unseen, of the flood situation in border areas of Bagaha, Valmiki Nagar, Bettiah and Motihari following flash floods in neighbouring Nepal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary on Thursday conducted an aerial survey of the flood-affected areas in the state that shares a border with Nepal, where devastating flash floods claimed the lives of at least 162 people and left many untraceable a day ago.

After the aerial inspection at Valmikinagar in West Champaran district, he said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was monitoring the situation.

Bihar was put on alert

as floodwaters from the neighbouring country entered the Gandak river and reached the Gandak barrage on Wednesday, prompting authorities to open all 36 gates to control the surge.

In a post on social media, Choudhary wrote, "In view of the floods in Nepal, I conducted an aerial survey of the flood situation in Bihar's border areas, including Bagaha, Valmikinagar, Bettiah, and Motihari. I also reviewed the administrative preparedness regarding the potential impact, necessary precautionary measures, safety, and relief and rescue operations."

He also directed the officials concerned to take all necessary steps with utmost promptness and preparedness.

Ensuring the safety of citizens in flood-affected areas and providing them with every possible assistance remains the highest priority of the state Government, Choudhary said.

Talking to reporters, the CM said, "With the blessings of the Almighty, things are returning to normalcy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is monitoring the situation. The

discharge of water from the Gandak barrage has started declining. Due to fresh rainfall, the water level in the Gandak river has increased slightly, but the discharge from the barrage is still around 1 lakh cusecs."

The water discharge from the Gandak barrage at Valmikinagar declined from 1.50 lakh cusecs at 11 pm on Wednesday to 1.04 lakh cusecs on Thursday morning. "The water discharge from the Gandak barrage at Valmikinagar peaked at 1.50 lakh cusecs at 11 pm on Wednesday, after which the water level began receding," said the Water Resources Department (WRD) in a statement on Thursday.

The water level of the Gandak river, which was in spate after the flash floods in Nepal a day ago, was showing a receding trend on Thursday, bringing respite to the residents of low-lying areas in northern parts of Bihar, officials said.

The Nepal Police said that the death toll rose to 162 in the flash floods on the Bhotekoshi river that wreaked havoc across three districts of the neighbouring country on Wednesday.

The flash floods were caused after an avalanche blocked the flow of the Hende tributary of the Bhotekoshi river and first hit Timure, near Nepal's border with China, at Rasuwagadhi.

Many from Kolkata missing



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

A pall of gloom, had descended in parts of Kolkata. Hooghly and other areas as more than 35 people including the 32-member group continued to remain on the missing list after a devastating flash-flood hit the Nepal-Tibet border.

The pilgrims from Kolkata had left Kolkata on August 21 for Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra.

According to sources in the travel agency the travellers were at Rasuwagadhi at around 8 in the morning when the flash floods hit. "Since then we have not been able to establish contact with the members of the group," that include two travel managers. About 133 Indians, many of whom were from Bengal went missing after the mishap.

11 from Gujarat missing



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ahmedabad

Eleven persons from Gujarat remain missing in flood-hit Nepal, with authorities establishing contact with one woman who was earlier reported untraceable but was found to be safe later, officials said on Wednesday.

The Gujarat State Emergency Operations Centre (SEOC) had earlier received information that 12 persons from the state were missing following the devastating floods in Nepal. Relatives had called SEOC and district emergency centres to share information about the people who were untraceable after the flood.

West Bengal Govt probes 60 infant deaths in three weeks

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The West Bengal Government has demanded detailed information on reported deaths of at least 60 infants in the first three weeks of August including 10 in a single day in Malda district of North Bengal.

The reports have been sought from the Malda Medical College and Hospital (MMCH) where most of the deaths occurred. Health Department sources said adding private nursing homes too have been asked to be scrutinized for any deaths in the corresponding period.

MMCH doctors said that the

deaths had occurred because of a number of reasons adding a number of deaths had been "referral cases" sent from the block level centres.

Speaking on condition of anonymity one of staff said that a preliminary report had already been sent by the Medical Superintendent adding, 16 other hospitals had also been investigated.

Bengal Health Minister Saradwat Mukherjee had been regularly visiting the hospitals including conducting surprise checks, sources said. Meanwhile, in a parallel development the Health Department had



questioned several fourth-year students of two prominent medical colleges regarding reports of an interstate blood smuggling selling racket.

Three lab technicians had also been questioned from Panskura in West Midnapore district.

Recent investigations had unmasked a blood-smuggling racket that involved selling blood from local Government hospitals to private entities and individual buyers outside Bengal.

The states where the bloods were smuggled out included Bihar, Jharkhand and even Mumbai, sources said.

Coast Guard brings 2 Chinese survivors of sunken cargo ship to Odisha, search on for missing crew

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Indian Coast Guard ship Varad, deployed for a search and rescue operation after a Panama-flagged bulk carrier sank in the Bay of Bengal nearly a week ago, safely brought two Chinese survivors to Odisha's Paradip on Thursday, an official said.

The merchant vessel MV Ocean Winner, carrying 24 crew members — 20 Chinese, three Myanmar and one Bangladeshi — was heading to Singapore when it sank about 240 nautical miles from the Paradip coast on August 22.

The Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Sri Vijaya Puram immediately diverted MT Aisopos, a commercial vessel that was in the vicinity, to "search for the vessel or liferafts and render assistance".



Two survivors were rescued that night.

"Indian Coast Guard ship Varad safely brought two Chinese survivors — Pan Tonglai and Chen Jianhe — to Paradip today. Rescued from a liferaft on August 22, both received medical care onboard during transit and have now been handed over to authorised company representatives in the presence

of Bureau of Immigration and local police officials," an ICG spokesperson said.

He said coordinated sea and air search operations are underway to locate the missing crew members.

MRCC, Sri Vijaya Puram, is continuously coordinating with all participating assets in the ongoing rescue efforts, the spokesperson added.

On Tuesday, the ICG said

the search and rescue efforts for the missing crew members were being "further augmented in coordination with the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, Beijing".

Additional Coast Guard assets and merchant vessels were being deployed and coordinated to intensify the search operation, the official had said.

On August 22, the ICG deployed three of its ships for the search and rescue operation. ICG ships Varad and Anmol were deployed for the rescue efforts, while Vijit was deployed from Sri Vijaya Puram to augment the operation. MV Ocean Winner's last port of call was Paradip, and its next port of call was Singapore, the spokesperson said.

The ship was carrying iron ore from Odisha, officials had said earlier.

Sri Lankan Navy commander holds talks with Indian Navy chief, Defence Secretary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy, Vice Admiral Damian Fernando, held talks with Navy Chief Admiral Krishna Swaminathan and Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, aiming to bolster maritime security cooperation and enhance training synergy between the two navies, officials said on Thursday.

Vice Admiral Fernando is on an official visit to India from August 26-29, and the visit is aimed at further strengthening bilateral maritime cooperation and enhancing navy-to-navy engagements between India and Sri Lanka.

V Adm Fernando assumed office as the 27th Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy on July 1. This is his first official visit

abroad, they said. He was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour at the South Block lawn. He also paid homage to the fallen soldiers by laying a wreath at the National War Memorial on Thursday.

"He also held discussions with Navy Chief Admiral Krishna Swaminathan on furthering bilateral maritime cooperation, including joint operations, capacity building, training and measures related to maritime security," a spokesperson of the Indian Navy said. As part of the visit, V Adm Fernando will travel to Kochi to visit Indian naval training establishments and headquarters of the Southern Naval Command, with a focus on enhancing training linkages and professional exchanges between the two navies, the official said.

The Sri Lanka Navy is an important and longstanding



Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh during a meeting with Sri Lankan Navy Commander Vice Admiral Damian Fernando in New Delhi

ing maritime partner of the Indian Navy. "The visit of V Adm Damian Fernando is expected to further consolidate the longstanding and multifaceted navy-to-navy

relationship between India and Sri Lanka, contributing to enhanced maritime cooperation and greater stability in the Indian Ocean Region," he added.

BJP cites Jhooth Ki Goonj website to accuse Rahul Gandhi of misleading youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The BJP on Thursday cited a website, which claims to fact-check Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's statements during his 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' campaign, to accuse him of misleading the youth and said his "falsehoods" will now be answered with facts.

The party fielded a battery of its spokespersons to launch an all-out attack against Gandhi, saying his utterances are driven by "frustration and envy" towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi. They also described the website — titled 'Jhooth Ki Goonj' — as a "nemesis" to Gandhi's campaign

and shared its link on their posts on social media.

BJP MP and national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said Gandhi is the "flag-bearer of lies" and alleged that his statements are fuelled by frustration and envy towards Modi.

"No matter how much Rahul Gandhi, the flag-bearer of lies fueled by frustration and envy towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, continues to spread falsehoods, every lie is now being exposed through facts. The Jhooth Ki Goonj website is one by one exposing the reality of Gandhi's claims," Trivedi said in his post.

Party national media head

and chief spokesperson Anil Baluni said Gandhi's claims will now be countered with facts. "Let Rahul Gandhi keep on lying, no problem... now every lie will be answered with facts. The faster the propaganda will echo, the louder the truth will emerge in response," Baluni said.

Its national media co-charge and spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari said the youth have launched the website in response to Gandhi's "fake narrative".

"Tired by Rahul Gandhi's fake narrative, youth have launched the website. Slowly, youth are busting the propaganda of the Congress and its proxies," he said. Later,



addressing a press conference, Bhandari alleged that the country's youth are "troubled, irritated and angry" with Gandhi's lies. "You know, the youth of the country is so irritated and angry with the series of lies Rahul Gandhi is

spreading, that today the country's youth have launched Jhooth Ki Goonj. For all the lies Rahul Gandhi has told, in parallel to that — this I saw on the internet, some youth sent it to me — the youth of this country has

launched 'Rahul Gandhi's Jhooth Ki Goonj,'" he told reporters. Bhandari said Gandhi had made 40 claims in his last four programmes and the youth are saying all 40 are either lies or misleading.

"This makes it clear that the real youth of the country, the youth who is on the ground, who is India's youth, not the Congress PR stunt one, the real youth of India is talking about 'Jhooth Ki Goonj,'" he claimed. BJP national spokesperson Prem Shukla said the website is exposing Gandhi's claims one by one.

"Rahul Gandhi's lies answered with facts. The 'Jhooth Ki Goonj' website is exposing each and every

claim of Rahul Gandhi one by one. The name is spot-on too: Jhooth Ki Goonj," Shukla claimed. Another BJP spokesperson Pratyush Kanth said the website is examining Gandhi's claims using documented facts and sources.

"Rahul Gandhi may continue to spread his narrative, but now every claim will be met with facts and evidence. 'Jhooth Ki Goonj' is systematically examining Rahul Gandhi's claims and exposing them, one by one, with documented facts and sources," Kanth said.

Senior Supreme Court lawyer Mahesh Jethmalani also joined the BJP leaders in criticising Gandhi saying

his 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' has met its "nemesis" in 'Jhooth Ki Goonj'.

"Rahul Gandhi's 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' finally has met its nemesis... From a GenZ," he said. Jethmalani claimed that the website examined 40 claims made by Gandhi during four rallies using 134 sources, with 29 rated "false" and 11 "misleading".

The website claims to fact-check statements made by Gandhi during his 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' events. It examines claims on issues including employment, NEET-related expenditure and crimes against women, and provides sources and evidence alongside them.

Raksha Bandhan Gift: CM gives e-rickshaws to 50 women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jashpur

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Thursday launched the 'Jashpur Express' scheme and distributed e-rickshaws to 50 women from self-help groups in Jashpur district on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan, officials said. The scheme aims to promote women's economic empowerment and provide them with sustainable self-employment opportunities, they said. At an event held at Sai's Bagia camp office, women from self-help groups tied rakhis to the chief minister and extended Raksha Bandhan greetings. Sai reciprocated by wishing them well and presenting sarees and sweets. Sai said women's economic self-reliance was the founda-



tion of strong families and a prosperous society. An e-rickshaw, he said, could provide women with a regular source of income and dignified employment. He said 14 women from self-help groups had been provided e-rickshaws during the previous Raksha Bandhan, while 50

more received the vehicles this year under the Jashpur Express scheme. Besides, 92 e-rickshaws have been provided to women in Raipur with the objective of promoting self-employment, he said, adding that women operating the vehicles were earning up to around Rs 15,000 per

month. "When a woman earns an income of her own, the entire family benefits," Sai said, noting that their earnings help support children's education, meet household needs and facilitate savings. He urged women associated with self-help groups to make greater use of schemes such

as MUDRA loans and take up businesses according to their interests and capabilities. The Jashpur Express initiative is intended to link women with local employment opportunities while also improving transportation facilities in the district. On the occasion, Sai also performed the bhoomi puja for a rest house in Bagia to be constructed at an estimated cost of nearly Rs 3 crore and for a cement-concrete road to Yadav Mohalla. He said the expansion of roads, buildings and other basic infrastructure in rural areas remained a priority of the state government. Jashpur Collector Rohit Vyas, Senior Superintendent of Police Lal Umed Singh, District Panchayat Chief Executive Officer Abhishek Kumar and other officials were present at the event.

Dy CM Sao urges youth to embrace sports, shun drugs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister and Sports and Youth Welfare Minister Arun Sao on Thursday urged young people to stay away from substance abuse and work hard to contribute to the building of a developed India. Sao was addressing youths at a 'Khelo India Samvad' programme organised at the National Institute of Technology (NIT) in Raipur to mark National Sports Day. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya virtually addressed the nationwide programme, which brought together more than eight lakh youths from around 1,600 locations across the country, officials said. Speaking at the Raipur event, Sao said hard work was the key to success and urged the youth to overcome their shortcomings and stay away from drugs. "Only a drug-free youth can build a developed India," Sao said, adding that addiction weakens individuals and harms society. He urged young people not to lose confidence after facing failures and instead work with determination to achieve their goals. Modi, addressing the nationwide programme virtually, said sports were not merely about winning medals but about harnessing India's sporting talent and youth power towards building a 'Viksit Bharat'. He said the government was committed to creating a modern sports



ecosystem, with institutions ranging from sports universities to training centres to support athletes from talent identification to the international level. The prime minister also said 'Khelo India Samvad' was a platform for young people to share ideas and suggestions on sports infrastructure, talent development, governance and India's sporting vision, which could contribute to policy formulation. International cricketer Tilak Varma, who interacted with youth at the Raipur event, said sports teach resilience, teamwork, mental strength and the ability to handle pressure, besides promoting health, fitness and nutrition. Youth icon Priyanka Bissa urged young people to take ownership of their initiatives and play an active role in leadership, governance and nation-building. Students, athletes and youths from NIT shared suggestions on strengthening sports infrastructure, developing talent for the 2036 Olympics, expanding sports facilities, preventing substance abuse and promoting youth participation in governance.

Illegal cannabis cultivation busted, man held



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kanker

Police have seized 850 illegally cultivated cannabis plants worth an estimated Rs 4.3 lakh from the backyard of a house in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district and arrested a 40-year-old man, police

said on Thursday. The action was taken on Wednesday by the Bhanupratappur police under the 'Ujiyara Abhiyan' against illegal narcotics, Kanker Superintendent of Police Nikhil Rakhecha said. Acting on a tip-off, a police team raided the backyard of a house in Bharsa Tarhul

village and allegedly found cannabis plants being cultivated among pigeon pea and other crops. The plants, seized along with their roots and soil, weighed 8.660 kg and were valued at around Rs 4.3 lakh. The accused was identified as Subhash Koreti, a resident of Bharsa Tarhul.

A case has been registered at Bhanupratappur police station under Sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. Further investigation is underway. The district police urged people to share information about suspected illegal activities through its crime helpline, 94791-55125, assuring that the identity of informants would be kept confidential.

Turn dairy tour lessons into livelihoods: Dy CM Sharma

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kbirdham

An educational tour to dairy cooperatives in Gujarat's Banaskantha district has inspired women members of 'Bihan' self-help groups and livestock farmers from Chhattisgarh's Kabirdham district to adopt modern dairy and animal husbandry practices in their villages. After returning from the tour, members of the self-help groups and livestock farmers met Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister and Kawardha MLA Vijay Sharma at his residence in Kawardha on Thursday and shared their experiences. The women also tied rakhis to Sharma and extended Raksha Bandhan greetings. Sharma welcomed the delegation and said the purpose of an educational tour is fulfilled only when



the knowledge gained is implemented locally to create new livelihood opportunities. He urged the participants to apply the techniques they learned in Banaskantha in areas such as dairy management, animal husbandry, fodder development, milk collection, quality testing and cooperative management.

The tour was organised through the efforts of Sharma, with women from 17 Bihan self-help groups and 17 livestock farmers from Kabirdham visiting dairy cooperatives, including Amul, in Banaskantha. During the visit, the participants observed modern animal husbandry practices, balanced

nutrition and fodder management, methods to increase milk production, milk collection and processing systems, quality testing, and dairy product manufacturing and marketing. They also studied the cooperative model under which small livestock farmers are collectively linked with markets to improve incomes

and strengthen the rural economy. The women said they were particularly impressed by the systems for connecting milk producers with markets, maintaining quality and ensuring better prices. They said they planned to share the techniques and management practices with other women and livestock rearers in their villages. Sharma said the state government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, was working to economically empower rural women and livestock rearers through self-help groups and livelihood activities. He said the Banaskantha visit was not merely a tour but an effort to translate successful dairy practices into local livelihood opportunities and strengthen milk production, women's self-help groups and the rural economy in Kabirdham.

UCC panel holds stakeholder consultation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

The committee constituted by the Chhattisgarh government to examine the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) on Thursday held a consultation with representatives of religious and social organisations, commissions, corporations and boards in Raipur and invited their suggestions. The meeting was held at the New Circuit House in the presence of committee members, including retired IAS officers Shatrughn Singh and M K Raut, senior advocate Mohan Pawar, retired official Jyoti Rani Singh and Member Secretary Shyam Dhavde. Representatives from various communities



and organisations participated in the consultation and shared their views on issues relating to marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance and adoption. The committee has been constituted with the objective of preparing an inclusive draft in accordance with Article 44 of the Constitution, which provides for the state to endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code for citizens. According to the proposal discussed at the meeting, the UCC would

seek to establish uniform rules governing personal matters irrespective of religion, caste or creed, while providing equal inheritance rights to sons and daughters and addressing provisions that may result in discrimination. Representatives who participated in the consultation included Central Region Tribal Development Authority Vice-Chairman Pranav Kumar Marpachchi, Vishwa Hindu Parishad president Lalit Makhija, John Rajesh Paul representing the

Christian community, Muslim community president Salam Rizvi and Gurudwara Committee president Inderjit Chhabra. State Policy Commission Chairman Ganesh Shankar Mishra, State Food Commission Chairman Sandeep Sharma, Women's Commission Chairperson Mamata Sahu, State Minorities Commission Chairman Amarjit Chhabra, Scheduled Tribes Commission Chairman Roop Singh Mandavi and other

public representatives and community leaders also shared their suggestions. The committee said the proposed framework would seek to promote equality in personal matters and simplify the existing legal framework governing marriage, divorce, inheritance and other family-related issues. It also said the impact of any proposed reforms on the state's tribal communities and their customary practices would be examined sensitively. The committee is conducting consultations across the state with citizens, socio-religious organisations, legal experts and other stakeholders through field studies, an online portal and public consultations before preparing the draft UCC.

Bastar women craft sugar-free Kaju-Katli

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jagdalpur

Women members of a self-help group in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region have developed a sugar-free Kaju-Katli using locally sourced organic cashews and pure organic jaggery, creating a new avenue of self-employment and value addition to forest produce. Members of the 'Dharni Karin' Self-Help Group, operating under the Van Dhan Vikas Kendra in Bakawand of the Bastar Forest Division, have developed the product as part of their efforts to promote local entrepreneurship, officials said. The group initially purchased raw cashews at market rates using a loan from the revolving fund of the Chief Conservator of Forests' office in Jagdalpur. After earning profits by processing and selling cashews, the women experimented with producing sugar-free Kaju-Katli. The product, made from organic cashews and jaggery, is available in 500-gram and one-kilogram packs and has received a positive response in the market, officials said. The women recently met Forest and Climate Change Minister Kedar Kashyap at the



Circuit House in Jagdalpur and presented him with the first batch of the product. Kashyap praised the taste of the Kaju-Katli and appreciated the group's efforts to create livelihood opportunities by adding value to local produce. The women informed the minister that the product would be made available through departmental 'Sanjeevani' outlets ahead of Bastar Dussehra and Diwali to meet public demand. Kashyap directed senior forest officials to provide all possible departmental assistance to the self-help group. The initiative is aimed at strengthening women's self-employment while promoting local forest produce and creating better market opportunities for rural communities in Bastar.

Over 1.5L devotees benefit from Sawan bhandara



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kbirdham

More than 1.5 lakh devotees and Kanwar pilgrims were served free meals and Prasad during the holy month of Sawan

at Madhya Pradesh's Amarkantak town and Dongariya in Chhattisgarh's Kabirdham district, an initiative organised by Pandariya MLA Bhawna Bohra. For the fifth consecutive year, Bohra arranged free meals and resting facilities

for Kanwar pilgrims at Amarkantak. The service, which began on July 30 at the dome in the fairgrounds and the new Municipal Council complex, concluded on August 24. A Bhandara (community feast) was also organised throughout Sawan at the Jaleshwar Mahadev Temple in Dongariya village, where villagers, Kanwariyas and other devotees were served meals daily. At Amarkantak, resting facilities were provided along with meals to help pilgrims recuperate after their Kanwar journey. Bohra said serving devotees while worshipping Lord Mahadev was not merely a religious activity for her but also a responsibility rooted in public service and cherished values. She said it was a privilege to serve Kanwar pilgrims for the fifth consecutive year and expressed gratitude to volunteers, social workers and people of Kabirdham for their support. Bohra also said that over the past two years, she had undertaken the 151-km Kanwar pilgrimage on foot from the Maa Narmada Temple in Amarkantak to the Bhoramdev Temple. She said members of the Bhawna Samaj Sevi Sansthan and other volunteers worked round the clock to attend to the needs of pilgrims.

MBBS interns promote healthy growth, malnutrition prevention



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

MBBS interns of the 2021 batch organised a health education and awareness programme on nutrition for children under five years of age at the Urban Health and Training Centre (UHTC), Labhandi, here, officials said. The programme was organ-

ised under Shri Balaji Institute of Medical Science, Raipur, with the objective of educating parents and community members about balanced diets, healthy growth and development, and prevention of malnutrition among young children. During the session, the interns explained the importance of essential nutrients

such as protein, iron, vitamins and calcium, along with age-appropriate diets, breastfeeding and complementary feeding. Parents were also sensitised about the need for regular monitoring of children's growth and weight, personal hygiene, proper handwashing and consumption of clean and safe food. The interns

explained how to identify early signs of malnutrition and stressed the importance of seeking timely medical advice at a health centre. They also encouraged parents to provide children with a varied and nutritious diet using locally available food items. The programme was organised under the guidance of Dr Priyanka Sahu, head of the department, and the direction of Dr R. Shrivani, associate professor. Medical Social Worker Israt Parveen coordinated the programme and helped organise the health education activities. MBBS interns Akanksha Sharma, Aasna Meghani, Aastha Baderia, Aastha Singh, Abhishek Patel, Abhishek Pradhan, Akash Bhargava, Abhishek Bana and Aarushi Yadav participated in the programme. The initiative aimed to strengthen community awareness about child nutrition, healthy growth and development, and prevention of malnutrition.

In a first, CM Vijay sits with ministers in TN Assembly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay on Thursday made heads turn in the state Assembly when he casually moved from his chair in the House and sat besides ministers in the front row, marking a major departure from a long-standing tradition vis-a-vis seating.

Normally, the chief minister occupies a separate and spacious chair close to the Speaker's Chair and the ministers are seated separately, next to him/her, as per their seniority, in the front row.

The facing row is occupied by the Leader of the Opposition and leaders of the Legislature parties based on their numerical strength in the 234-member House with their respective party members behind.



In the afternoon session, Vijay casually moved from his chair, located on the right side of Speaker JCD Prabhakar and sat between Ministers K A Sengottaiyan (also Leader of the House) and Aadhav Arjuna.

According to a source, in the past no chief minister sat on the seat meant for ministers. Normally, the ministers or legislators change their positions for a brief

while to speak with their colleagues. But this perhaps is the first time a chief minister has shifted from his official chair to have a word with his colleagues.

Earlier in the day, Leader of the Opposition Udhayanidhi Stalin pointed out that the department secretaries should be asked to be present in the House when important issues are raised in the House by the members.

"The Speaker mentioned that then chief minister spoke about the Karur (stampede) incident during the previous DMK regime. Then our leader and CM (MK Stalin) was present in the House and so were the chief secretary and department secretaries. Now, both the chief minister and department secretaries are not present in the House," Udhayanidhi said.

Responding, Aadhav Arjuna said the secretaries were present in the adjoining "war room" and taking notes from the members' speeches.

The Speaker concurred with Udhayanidhi and said the senior officials will be asked to be present in the House during Assembly sessions. The CM had attended certain Government events earlier in the day, and had turned up for the session later.

Won't join Omar Govt until Statehood restored: J&K Congress chief Karra

MOHIT KANDHARI
■ Jammu

Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) President Tariq Hameed Karra on Thursday once again rejected the ruling National Conference's invitation to join the Omar Abdullah-led Government, saying the Congress will not accept any ministerial berth until full statehood is restored to the Union Territory.

He also said the party would continue its political struggle to restore statehood and would not compromise its stand on positions in the Government.

Addressing a party gathering in Reasi, Karra said the Congress had maintained a consistent position that it would not accept ministerial berths while Jammu and Kashmir continues to remain a Union Territory.

The ruling National



Conference (NC) had approached the Congress on Wednesday with an offer to join the Council of Ministers ahead of a proposed expansion and reshuffle of the Omar Abdullah-led Government.

Karra had confirmed that the matter was under consideration, but the party has now reiterated that statehood is a precondition for entering the Cabinet.

The Congress, however, continues to support the

NC-led Government from outside. Karra has previously clarified that remaining outside the Cabinet does not mean withdrawing support to the elected Government and that the party would stand with it whenever it faces political challenges.

The Congress has supported the NC-led Government since October 2024 without taking office. In July, the Congress party had also participated in the National

Conference-led protest near Jantar Mantar in New Delhi in support of restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

The rift between the parties deepened at the time of the Government formation in October 2024. The NC offered one ministerial berth; the Congress sought two.

The Congress decided in 2024 not to join the Government; it said it would wait for J&K's statehood to be restored.

The trust deficit triggered a fresh war of words in October last year after the Congress accused its alliance partner of betrayal in Rajya Sabha seat-sharing. Ahead of the Rajya Sabha polls for the UT's four seats, the NC announced three candidates and offered the Congress the fourth, deemed unwinnable. The Congress said it had been assured a "safe seat", and decided not to contest.

Gujarat has not seen drought since Modi became CM in 2001: Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gandhinagar

Union minister Amit Shah on Thursday stated that Gujarat's water management has improved significantly since Narendra Modi took office as chief minister in 2001. He further claimed that the state has not experienced drought conditions in the last 25 years.

Shah made these comments after inaugurating a 21-acre lake constructed by a trust headed by diamond businessman and Padma Shri recipient Savjibhai Dholakia in Dudhala village, Amreli district. Shah referred to the severe droughts of 1985, 1986, and 1987, and alleged that the Congress Government at the time was involved in corruption, including at the Rafaleshwar cattle camp. He stated that measures to conserve rainwater and improve groundwater recharge were necessary to prevent future droughts.

"We were young then. People worked on drought relief, digging pits and filling them to earn daily wages. We distributed 250 grams of sukhdhi (a sweet) and old sandals collected from homes to those suffering

from the drought," Shah said. He cited a public water tap near a bus stand in Rajkot that had to be lowered into a pit because the water pressure was too low to reach the surface.

"Such was the situation before Narendrabhai became chief minister in 2001," Shah said. He claimed that Modi's policies changed Saurashtra and north Gujarat from drought-prone areas to regions with better water supply.

According to Shah, the Modi Government constructed 150,000 check dams in 2003. Subsequent water conservation efforts included the Narmada canal network, SAUNI Yojana, and Sujalam. Shah stated that while the foundation stone for the Narmada project was laid by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, the project gates were opened only after Narendra Modi became prime minister.

Shah said that the Modi Government prioritised water management by establishing the Ministry of Jal Shakti after Modi assumed office as prime minister.

The Union minister also mentioned desilting of reservoirs, adoption of drip and



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the inauguration of 'Gujarat Gaurav Sarovar', on World Lake Day in Amreli, Gujarat

sprinkler irrigation, and the 'Catch the Rain' campaign as initiatives to enhance water conservation.

"After becoming Prime Minister, Narendra Modi established the Ministry of Jal Shakti. Everyone believed in the mantra of 'Water is life,' but previous Governments never established such a Ministry," said Shah.

Shah stated that Narmada water now reaches Saurashtra, Kutch, and Khavda, with surplus water being directed to reservoirs and rivers through the SAUNI Yojana.

According to Shah, approximately 10,000 lakes in north and central Gujarat have been filled with Narmada water. He added that water conservation efforts have

involved the Government, individuals, and local communities.

Shah noted that before 2001, Gujarat faced a significant geographical imbalance in water resources, with most water concentrated in Bharuch, even though the majority of the population resided elsewhere.

"Through human effort, public awareness and a mass movement, efforts were made to correct this imbalance," Shah said, adding that check dams, lakes and other water conservation structures had helped raise groundwater levels and boost agriculture.

Shah said that Dholakia has constructed 208 lakes, which have contributed to

groundwater recharge in the region.

Shah stated that, according to Dholakia, the 21-acre lake, measuring approximately 360 metres by 260 metres and four metres deep, has stored significant water and helped revive wells in the area.

Shah commended Dholakia for his work in water conservation. He stated that national civilian honours, including the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, and Bharat Ratna, are not intended for families or acquaintances.

"Despite building 208 lakes, Savjibhai said, 'I didn't even submit an application, and they awarded me the Padma Shri'. Savjibhai, after doing so much work for water conservation by building 208 lakes, if you had to apply for it, our Government would be considered blind," said Shah.

"Since Modi became the Chief Minister, Gujarat has not witnessed a single drought up to the year 2026. This time, everyone said a drought was imminent because of El Niño. Though there was less rainfall in some villages, the dire need to take cattle and migrate towards South Gujarat never arose.

Nations need resilient supply chains and rapid innovation to fight protracted conflicts: Rajnath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jabalpur

Nations with resilient supply chains, strong industrial capacity and ability to innovate rapidly would be better equipped to withstand prolonged conflicts, said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday in the backdrop of the more than four-year-old Russia-Ukraine war.

Against this backdrop, he said the Centre was committed to ensuring that India's armed forces were not dependent on foreign supply chains for critical defence requirements.

"Our aim is to manufacture defence equipment domestically, undertake repair and maintenance within the country, upgrade existing systems with modern technologies, and develop next-generation capabilities indigenously," Singh maintained.

He said these efforts reflected India's emergence as a global manufacturing hub, a reliable technology partner and a trusted defence partner.

Singh made the remarks



Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh performs a ritual as Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav looks on during the 'Bhoomi Pujan' ceremony for the T-72 and T-90 Tank Overhaul Project at the Vehicle Factory in Jabalpur on Thursday

after laying the foundation stone of a ₹472-crore facility for the overhaul of T-series battle tanks at the 57-year-old Vehicle Factory Jabalpur (VFJ).

Highlighting the changing nature of warfare, he noted countries possessing advanced technologies, resilient supply chains, robust industrial capabilities and dynamic innovation ecosystems would be in a stronger position to sustain themselves during long-drawn conflicts.

Singh said the T-series tank overhaul facility would help build a resilient domestic supply chain by generating demand for a wide

range of mechanical, electrical, electronic and hydraulic components, assemblies and subsystems.

"The sourcing of these items would create opportunities for local MSMEs in manufacturing and ancillary services associated with tank overhauling, while helping develop a strong and self-sustaining industrial ecosystem," he stated.

The project would prove to be a boon for soldiers and generate employment opportunities in Jabalpur and surrounding areas, including for workers, youth, small entrepreneurs and other sections of the local population, Singh said.

CEC Gyanesh Kumar interacts with BLOs, hails them for ground efforts



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

Describing BLOs as the foundation and backbone of Indian democracy, Chief Election Commissioner of India (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar on Thursday interacted with field-level poll machinery and youth delegates during the ECI's Regional Conference on "ELC & ECINET" held at Kalaivanar Arangam here.

The day-long conference, organised by the ECI in coordination with the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu, focused on grassroots electoral preparedness and voter awareness across Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Interacting with over 500 Booth Level Officers (BLO) from 14 surrounding districts, the CEC commended their dedicated door-to-door verification and on-ground efforts.

"Booth-level officers are the foundation of any democracy. The booth-level officers of Tamil Nadu, as well as all parts of the country, are working booth to booth, house to house to ensure that the electoral rolls and voter lists are correct, cleaned up, and free of mistakes. The Election Commission of India salutes them," the CEC said,

adding that valuable suggestions shared by the officers would be reviewed by the Commission for appropriate action. The session with field functionaries concluded with a vote of thanks by the District Election Officer (DEO), Chennai.

Addressing an afternoon gathering of nearly 1,000 delegates, including first-time voters, students, and educators representing 300 schools, 75 colleges, and 25 universities across 38 districts of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, the CEC urged young citizens to champion democratic values, adopt informed voting practices, and actively drive voter literacy through institutional Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs).

Delegates also participated in interactive exhibitions and witnessed live demonstrations covering essential stages of the electoral cycle, including electoral roll preparation, voting procedures, and vote counting.

Earlier, speaking to reporters at the Chennai airport, Kumar congratulated both Tamil Nadu and Puducherry for achieving the highest number of votes polled as well as the highest voting percentages in the recently held Assembly elections.

Need robust Indo-German arbitration mechanism as trade grows: CJI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Highlighting substantial and growing economic relationship between India and Germany, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Thursday said there is a necessity of having trust in international commerce and a robust arbitration mechanism can build the confident ecosystem.

Speaking at the Indo-German arbitration conclave in Berlin, Germany, CJI Kant pointed out that disputes are a natural feature of commercial activity but their existence does not necessarily indicate a failure of trust.

"What matters is whether the legal system provides a reliable mechanism through



which disagreements can be resolved without undermining the commercial relationship itself," he said, adding that an arbitration agreement is more than a procedural clause in a contract which represents a commitment to a method of resolving future disagreements.

"India and Germany share a substantial and growing economic relationship. German investment in India spans important sectors, while Indian companies are increasingly entering the German market. As these relationships become more sophisticated, the con-

tracts that support them also become more complex," he said.

He further said that long-term supply arrangements, infrastructure projects, technology agreements, joint ventures and cross-border investments inevitably raise questions that may not always be resolved through negotiation alone.

CJI Kant pointed out that the arbitral process must be supported by efficient institutions, capable arbitrators and courts that intervene only where it is extremely necessary, without delaying or displacing the arbitral process.

"International commerce depends upon trust at every stage. Businesses must trust

their contractual partners and have confidence in the legal framework. When a dispute arises, they must be confident that there exists an institution capable of resolving it fairly, efficiently and in accordance with law. Arbitration can fulfil this role only when the entire ecosystem surrounding it commands that confidence," CJI Kant said.

He emphasised the need for specialised arbitral institutions, arbitrators, counsel and, equally importantly, the courts that support the arbitral process.

The CJI said institutional trust is not created overnight and is built through consistent practice, professional integrity and sustained engagement.

Two-wheelers to have low-beam auto headlamps from April 2028

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

From next April, automatic headlamps in new two-wheelers will work only in passing beam (low beam) mode, and headlamps of cars and other vehicles will have less intense illumination to reduce glare considering that such lights cause visual discomfort or impairs the vision of other road users. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has proposed amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles rules to make it mandatory for automatic headlamps in new two-wheelers to work only in passing beam (low beam) mode.

The move is aimed at reducing glare and improving vision of other road users. The MoRTH, in a draft notification said, "In the principal rules...provided further that, on and after 1st April 2028, the automatic head lamp on operation shall operate in passing beam only," it said.



The amendments in automotive vehicle standards are being made because efforts to persuade drivers and make them aware of the need to use low-beam mode have not yielded desired results.

At present, the Automatic Headlamp On (AHO) system can switch on both low beam and high beam modes depending on vehicle settings. The proposed rule man-

dates that when the automatic system is active, the headlamp will be on low beam.

According to the draft notification, as for high-intensity headlamps, the maximum permissible intensity has been reduced from 1.5 lakh candela or cd (official base unit of luminous intensity) to 1 lakh cd for two-wheelers.

The maximum permissible inten-

sity for four-wheelers (cars) has been reduced from 2.25 lakh cd to 1.5 lakh cd.

It has also been proposed that the mounting height of main-beam headlamps be equivalent to that prescribed for passing-beam headlamps. These measures target one of the major causes of night-time road crashes in India – drivers using headlamps on high beam in urban areas, which can temporarily blind motorists approaching from the opposite direction, reducing visibility and increasing the risk of crashes.

In another safety measure, buses and other heavy vehicles could be required to use genuine reflective tapes. The aim is to make such vehicles more visible to motorists during nighttime driving and periods of poor weather.

If implemented, the proposals would mark a significant tightening of vehicle lighting standards with road safety and glare reduction as key objectives.

Raksha Bandhan symbolises feelings respect and mutual care, says President



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday greeted citizens on the eve of Raksha Bandhan, saying the festival symbolises feelings of respect and mutual responsibility not only between brothers and sisters but also among families, friends and society.

"This festival reminds us that every relationship rests on the pillars of trust, sensitivity and mutual cooperation," President Murmu said in a message. The festival of Raksha Bandhan has been an integral part of our culture and tradition since ancient times, she said. "In many 'shlokas' and 'mantras', we find the words 'Raksha, Ma Chala, Ma Chala'. These words express the imploration, 'May this bond of protection continue forever'," she said.

Raksha Bandhan has become popular as a social festival in which sisters tie a Rakhi on the wrists of their brothers, the president said.

"This symbolises the feelings of warmth, respect and mutual responsibility, not only between brothers and sisters but also among siblings, families, friends and society," she said.

Editor's
TAKE

Himalayan catastrophe

The warming of Himalayas is turning them into a ticking time bomb; only concerted action by Nepal, India and China can avert disaster

On the morning of August 26, a slab of glacier broke off a mountainside on the Nepal-Tibet border, crashed into a valley and blocked the Lhende River. The lake it formed burst almost instantly, sending ice, rock and water down the Bhote Koshi and Trishuli rivers into Nepal's Rasuwa and Nuwakot districts, and across into Tibet's Gyirong County. Nepal's police have confirmed over 160 dead and hundreds missing, among them more than a hundred Indians, many on the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage, and foreign nationals from half a dozen other countries. Bridges, highways and roughly an eighth of Nepal's hydropower capacity were knocked out within minutes.

The immediate trigger was natural, violent enough that seismographs first mistook it for an earthquake. But natural is not the same as normal. Nepal's glaciers are retreating up to 15 metres a year, and glacial-origin floods across the Hindu Kush Himalaya, once expected roughly once a decade, numbered three in just two months last year, according to ICIMOD, the region's mountain-research body. What has shifted is temperature, not geology.

Layered on top is a man-made factor: hydropower stations, roads and settlements pushed into unstable valleys with almost no early-warning cover, in a country that emits less than a tenth of one per cent of the world's carbon. Cutting the toll of the next flood, and there will be one, means treating glacial lakes as the infrastructure risk they are: systematic mapping of the region's most dangerous lakes, sensor-based warning systems extended from a handful of pilot valleys to every settlement below a glacier, zoning that keeps construction off riverbanks, and hydropower design built for catastrophic failure, not average monsoon rainfall.

Nepal and its neighbours have already piloted much of this; what's missing is scale and money. This flood crossed from Tibet into Nepal in minutes, and from Nepal into India within hours, since the Trishuli becomes the Gandak, putting Bihar on flood alert before rescue teams had finished searching Rasuwa.

A hazard indifferent to borders needs cooperation that matches it: real-time hydrological data-sharing between Nepal, China and India, built on existing frameworks such as ICIMOD's glacial-lake inventories and the Koshi Basin Initiative, not one-off goodwill after each disaster. The UN's response has followed the standard emergency script: Secretary-General António Guterres's condolences, followed swiftly by the WFP, WHO, UNICEF, UNDP and OCHA deploying rations, medical kits and satellite mapping.

Nepal needed monitoring and money years before this week, not sympathy after it. India moved with familiar speed: Modi's call to his Nepali counterpart Balendra Shah, the promise of all possible humanitarian assistance with NDRF teams on standby. India has as much at stake in Himalayan glacier monitoring as Nepal does. First response should now make room for first investment: shared early-warning networks, not relief flights after the water has fallen.

SCO Summit: India's Eurasian balancing act

As the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation turns 25, its Bishkek summit comes at a time of deepening geopolitical turbulence. For India, the grouping is more than a regional forum: it is a crucial platform to advance strategic autonomy, counter terrorism, strengthen ties with Central Asia and secure connectivity across Eurasia while navigating the growing influence of China



PARUL CHANDRA

The upcoming annual leaders' summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) at Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, which PM Narendra Modi will attend, comes amid ongoing geopolitical shifts and strategic realignments that continue to trigger severe global economic consequences.

The motto of the summit on August 31-September 1 - '25 years of the SCO: Together Towards Sustainable Peace, Development and Prosperity' - serves both as an ambitious goal and a test of regional cooperation.

The summit takes place against a backdrop of global turmoil driven by Russia's long-drawn war with Ukraine and the unabating US-Israel-Iran conflict. Both Russia and Iran are SCO members. These conflicts have had a major impact on the global economy and the SCO motto, therefore, assumes even greater significance.

Over its 25-year history, the SCO has expanded considerably. It now includes 10 member states, two observer states and 15 dialogue partners that encompass a vast geographical area, diverse cultures and people. For India, SCO membership provides a crucial platform to pursue its strategic interests in the vast Eurasia region.

India transitioned from an observer state in 2005 to full membership in 2017 alongside Pakistan, whose inclusion was backed by its all-weather ally, China. The other full members include the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Its two newest members are Iran, which joined the grouping in 2023, and Belarus in 2024. Afghanistan and Mongolia serve as observer states.

Additionally, the SCO's 15 dialogue partners reflect the growing interest in the grouping. They are Egypt, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

With the 10 member states encompassing a huge geographical spread of around 36 million sq km and over 3.4 billion people, India recognises the geopolitical value of remaining deeply engaged in the SCO at both multilateral and bilateral levels. PM Modi, for instance, will be meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin, among others, on the margins of the summit.

India's SCO membership also underlines its strategic autonomy in participating in a non-Western-aligned forum alongside major powers like Russia and China. Membership ensures India



INDIA'S SCO MEMBERSHIP ALSO UNDERLINES ITS STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN PARTICIPATING IN A NON-WESTERN ALIGNED FORUM ALONGSIDE MAJOR POWERS LIKE RUSSIA AND CHINA. MEMBERSHIP ENSURES INDIA A SEAT AT THE TABLE, WHILE KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON CHINA'S REGIONAL AMBITIONS AND THE CHINA-PAKISTAN NEXUS

The writer is a policy analyst who writes on foreign and strategic issues

a seat at the table, while keeping a close eye on China's regional ambitions and the China-Pakistan nexus.

As an economic powerhouse, China often seeks to dominate the SCO, which has its secretariat in Beijing. India consistently uses the platform to counter these dynamics.

At the SCO summit at Tianjin in China last year, India reiterated its opposition to Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with PM Modi emphasising that connectivity efforts "must uphold the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity".

In a strong message to China, which has often used "salami slicing" tactics to encroach on territory India claims as its own, PM Modi also noted: "Connectivity that bypasses sovereignty ultimately loses both trust and meaning." India remains the sole SCO member state that does not endorse the BRI.

For India, SCO membership is both a strategic and economic imperative. PM Modi spelt out the three pillars upon which India's policy towards the SCO is predicated at the Tianjin summit last year: Security, Connectivity and Opportunity.

India's membership of the SCO is also critical for its connectivity strategy across Eurasia. With Pakistan blocking India's direct overland access to Afghanistan and beyond to Central Asia, New Delhi must explore alternative transit routes to these regions.

Building robust ties with the 'stans' of Central Asia, which India views as part of its extended neighbourhood, is crucial to balance China's heavy influence in the region. The SCO serves as a useful platform to find common ground with them on various issues, including connectivity, energy, security, trade, critical minerals and counter-terrorism.

It's noteworthy that en route to Bishkek, PM Modi will also be travelling to Uzbekistan, with

which it has robust defence cooperation, to build on its strategic partnership.

The 'stans' are particularly important for New Delhi's efforts at connectivity with Central Asia and even beyond to Europe. There is convergence of interests in this regard, with these landlocked nations exploring alternative routes for connectivity.

India has been banking on the INSTC (International North South Transport Corridor) as a vital connectivity link to Central Asia. The ambitious project, however, is a long way away from fruition.

India's plans to access these nations and Afghanistan via the Iranian port of Chabahar, too, have been in the doldrums owing to US sanctions and the current heightened tensions in West Asia. On the security front, the SCO provides India with a vital platform to draw attention to terror, especially emanating from Pakistan. Last year, for instance, India highlighted the terror strikes carried out at Pahalgalam in Kashmir by Pak-backed attackers. India acknowledges that the SCO-RATS (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure), headquartered at Tashkent in Uzbekistan, has played a significant role in the fight against terrorism.

At the Bishkek summit, India will undoubtedly press ahead with its focus on counter-terrorism and regional connectivity. Additionally, as member states discuss establishing an SCO Development Bank to fund infrastructure, India will likely seek more clarity on its structure to ensure it aligns with territorial sovereignty principles. Ultimately, India's participation in the Bishkek summit is not merely a diplomatic routine. It's driven by a pragmatic focus on strategic autonomy, counter-terrorism, and Eurasian access. India should do its utmost to leverage the SCO to safeguard its own strategic interests and monitor regional dynamics.

The journey from faith to self-realisation



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION

Over the last several decades, the topic of spirituality has come to the forefront of public and professional consciousness. With the dawn of a new century, spirituality has received increased coverage in the media and more discussion in the workplace, in politics and in education. To many, spirituality represents a necessary essence of life that engenders both thoughts and actions.

To others, spirituality is a belief in a power operating in the universe greater than oneself. Still others define it as a sense of interconnectedness with all living creatures, and an awareness of the purpose and meaning of life. However, the lack of a universally accepted theory or definition of spirituality has created a lot of confusion as well as misunderstanding in society. Many people confuse spirituality with religion and so bring pre-existing beliefs about the impact of religion to discussions about spirituality.

Though all religions emphasise spirituality as being an important part of faith, what really needs to be answered is whether it is possible to be 'spiritual' without necessarily being a part of an organised religious community?

Recognising the difference between spirituality and religion can be a great way to begin to understand what spirituality actually means.

Those people who profess their faith in Almighty and higher beings, in living life virtuously or in following the rituals pertaining to their faith are known as religious-minded. However, there is a difference between being religious and being spiritual. Even though books and information on spirituality have flooded the world, there is still a lot of vagueness and contradiction about knowledge of the soul, its original nature, abode and role in world drama.

The first step towards being spiritual is to be soul-conscious and be free from all limitations and bondages of the physical world.

A spiritual being is aware of his/her real identity - of being a soul and a child of the Supreme Soul - and is also aware of one's true nature of being peaceful, pure, blissful and loveful. When we play our worldly roles with this awareness, we live a truly spiritual life.

We also begin to see everyone as souls and, instead of creating karmic bondages in relationships, we begin to empower each other and remain detached and loving.

Self-realization is the goal of many spiritual schools of thought, but most people go beyond satiating their curiosity to learn something new, and once they learn it or experience it, their excitement fades and they start searching for other sources of intellectual stimulation.

A spiritual person always remains content with the self and devotes his time not to material pursuits but tends to remain in the company of the divine, thereby experiencing true love, peace and happiness which are more lasting than material attainments. Such a person will see everyone as souls; be loveful to every person in this world regardless of one's religion, country, gender and other physical traits.

When we would understand the above definition of a real spiritual being, we would be spiritually awakened and enlightened and get directly connected to the Supreme Being, who would lead us to the path of self-transformation, which would further lead to world transformation. So, let's embark on this journey of becoming a 'Spiritual Being' through self-realisation and introspection.

The writer is a popular columnist and a spiritual teacher

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Raksha Bandhan: A bond beyond blood

Raksha Bandhan, or "the knot of protection", is here. Though the origin of Rakhi can be traced to the Mahabharata, with religious and historical references as well, the tradition of sisters tying rakhis around their brothers' wrists has transcended cultures and religions.

Rakhi is not just a thread; it is a promise tied with love and secured for life. It hinges on mutual respect, care and affection. It is a celebration of trust, companionship and the enduring bond between two people.

When women tie rakhis on the wrists of men who are not their biological brothers, they foster the magnificent Indian concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", the much-celebrated Sanskrit phrase meaning "the world is one family". This "world is one family" is a much-needed emotion in troubled times. No race, religion or nationality should come in the way of people-to-people interaction and bonding. A brother-sister relationship comes from the heart, not from blood.

The bond between the two is sometimes tightly woven, at times loosely held, but never broken. They are siblings by chance, but friends by choice.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Parandur airport: Back to square one?

The decision of the Tamil Nadu Government, led by C. Joseph Vijay, to cancel the proposed greenfield airport at Parandur is disappointing and could have serious implications for the State's industrial growth.

The project had reportedly completed much of the necessary due diligence, with financial closure at an advanced stage. Major industries, including multinational companies located in and around Parandur, had welcomed the airport as a long-standing requirement.

The decision could send a wrong signal to potential investors and create apprehension that a change of government could also mean a change in policies. Such uncertainty may affect Tamil Nadu's ability to attract and retain investment.

The government has cited the interests of farmers as the principal reason for shelving the project. However, the reported statement that the 1,800 acres already acquired would instead be used for other industrial purposes raises questions about how farmers' interests are being protected. Tamil Nadu needs consistent and predictable policies. Major development projects should be assessed objectively on their long-term economic, social and environmental implications rather than being reversed to fulfil political commitments

THARCIUS S FERNANDO | CHENNAI

Tackling motor insurance fraud

The Supreme Court's directive ordering states to establish dedicated Special Investigation Teams (SITs) highlights a deeply entrenched vulnerability within India's motor insurance framework. The investigation into a compensation scam of "enormous proportion" involving falsified vehicle accident records exposes a crisis that extends far beyond simple criminal deceit. It represents a systemic failure that inflicts severe, long-term economic damage on the nation's insurance ecosystem.

Fabricated claims and staged accidents artificially inflate payout liabilities for insurance companies. This rampant bleed drains underwriting reserves, distorts actuarial risk pricing and worsens loss ratios across the industry. Consequently, insurance providers are forced to adjust for these financial leaks by hiking premium rates. Honest, law-abiding policyholders are ultimately left to absorb the financial burden of a fraudulent minority through inflated annual costs. Furthermore, such widespread malpractices erode public trust in judicial compensation channels designed to aid genuine victims.

State-level SITs must combine prosecution with technology. Linking traffic, police and vehicle records can make claims verification tamper-proof, protecting insurers and consumers.

VINEETH KUMAR | KERALA

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FROM DEGREES TO LIVELIHOODS: EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

The NITI Aayog's August 2026 report, *Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047*, notes that early exposure to vocational options remains limited.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisages vocational exposure for 50 per cent of students by 2025 and all students by 2030, but implementation remains at an early stage. It also points out that the lack of such exposure limits informed career choices and the development of foundational employability skills. Therefore, corrective action must begin much earlier. Vocational and practical skills should be strengthened in schools, enabling students to discover their aptitude, interests and potential career paths. At the time of college entry, professional career counselling, based on aptitude, emerging employment opportunities and

local economic needs, should help students make informed choices rather than simply pursuing generic degrees. Colleges should not be sustained merely to protect existing staffing patterns or fill seats by introducing additional courses; institutions with genuine potential should receive greater support. At the same time, higher public investment in infrastructure, manufacturing, healthcare services and other labour-intensive sectors is needed to create employment opportunities, strengthen livelihoods and encourage private investment.

Education must ultimately connect learning with meaningful work. A stronger focus on practical skills, career guidance and employment generation can help young people move from degrees to sustainable livelihoods.

BRIJ BHUSHAN GOYAL | LUDHIANA

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

Himalayan tragedy: A disaster in Nepal, a warning for India

The disaster in Nepal is a stark reminder that natural hazards do not respect political borders. What begins as a catastrophe in a remote mountain valley can threaten lives and infrastructure in India. India and Nepal need to move from flood warnings to real-time, basin-wide impact forecasting and coordinated risk management



SATYENDRA SINGH

A catastrophic flash flood hit Nepal's Himalayan border area on August 26, killing people and causing massive destruction. Houses have been inundated; roads and bridges have been destroyed or washed away, and infrastructure like electricity have been affected. Rescue efforts are ongoing in inaccessible locations; meanwhile, it is still unclear how much damage the mega disaster has caused. However, this is not just Nepal's problem, but India's, especially Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh's. The reason is obvious: rivers carrying Himalayan waters do not recognise political boundaries.

So far, the exact reason for the flash flood is being investigated. According to initial findings, an ice-rock or glacial avalanche could have occurred, possibly along with a temporary river blockade and sudden releasing of huge amount of water, rock, and sediments. An earthquake is also one of the reasons. The idea of glacial lake outburst has so far not got enough evidence.

What should be remembered in general is that flash flood in the Himalayas is the ultimate result of a chain of events starting with glacier or slope instability, followed by river blockade and huge release of water, rocks, and sediments. The Himalayas are gradually turning into the sources of cascading disasters.

The present flooding started from the upper parts of Bhotekoshi/Lhende river system at the border between Tibet and Nepal. The flood wave travelled from the Bhotekoshi and Trishuli river systems to the Narayani and further down the river as the Gandak in India. This explains why there has been fear for the downstream areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

When the Rivers of Nepal Flow into India

To appreciate India's vulnerability, one needs to move away from the political map and consider the river-basin map. While politically Nepal and India are two separate countries, hydrologically they are one system. Himalayan water feeds the irrigation, domestic and ecological needs as well as livelihoods of millions, but if anything goes wrong in the upper basins, these very rivers can be transformed into destructive rivers.

Sarda, Ghaghra, Rapti, Gandak, Burhi Gandak, Bagmati, Kamla and Kosi are some of the rivers contributing to floods in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar that originate in or travel through Nepal. India and Nepal already have bilateral agreements concerning flood forecasting and water management. The present disaster is a good opportunity for strengthening them.

Gandak is particularly relevant to the present situation. Narayani River becomes Gandak when it enters India and travels through Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and finally meets the Ganges River. Bihar is also vulnerable to other Himalayan rivers such as Kosi, Bagmati, Burhi Gandak and Ghaghra.

An unexpected outburst after an avalanche, landslide, or flooding of a river due to the formation of a dam would give very little warning time. Hence, the early warning system should not only alert about the crossing of river levels by a river. It should also warn about which villages can be flooded, what infrastructure would be affected and where the search and rescue teams and aid materials must be deployed. India requires transitioning from hazard prediction to impact prediction.

The hazard environment in the Himalayas is changing. Changes in temperature and climatic conditions have influenced rainfall patterns and the behaviour of glaciers and slopes, while roadways, tunnels, hydropower plants, tourist destinations, and development in general are increasing in fragile regions. Satellite imagery, remote sensing, automatic devices, drones and artificial intelligence technology can help a lot in monitoring. But technology alone is not enough for preparedness. A warning displayed on a government dashboard is not very useful if it does not reach those affected by it. Villagers, farmers, schoolteachers and families have to know what it means and what needs to be done to protect themselves. Equally important is the local knowledge about which embankments will collapse first, which roads will become impassible and how floodwaters will inundate their villages. Thus, the goal should



THE LARGER CONCERN ABOUT THE FLOODS FROM NEPAL COMES NOT JUST FROM THE GANDAK, BUT ALSO FROM THE RAPTI AND GHAGHRA SYSTEMS, WHICH LINK HIMALAYAN CATCHMENTS WITH EASTERN UTTAR PRADESH. THE BAGMATI, KAMLA AND KOSI RIVERS CONNECT HIMALAYAN CATCHMENTS WITH BIHAR. THESE PARTICULAR RIVERS HAVE BEEN LISTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AS SOME OF THOSE CONTRIBUTING TO FLOOD SITUATIONS BELOW NEPAL

The writer is former Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management, Government of India

be to define the affected population, identify critical infrastructure, evacuate routes and places, as well as position trained local teams and relief forces beforehand.

Lessons from Uttarakhand

The recent catastrophe in Nepal makes us recall a lesson that India had been taught earlier. The disaster in Uttarakhand clearly showed the interaction of heavy rains, floods, landslides, geological instability, settlements, infrastructure and development. The basic lesson learned was obvious: natural hazard turns into disaster due to the vulnerability of society.

The lessons teach us about zoning, restrictions on building in risky zones, Disaster Impact Assessment along with Environmental Impact Assessment, slope stabilization, protection of ecosystems, better warning systems and community preparedness. But still: do we learn from disasters or merely document them?

The solution does not lie in halting development. Connectivity, growth and security depend on roads, tunnels, hydropower and tourism infrastructure. The question is where and how such development happens.

Development in the mountains cannot happen in the same way as development on more stable terrains. Geomorphological and environmental assessment is crucial for any hydropower or tunnel project. Consequently, Disaster Impact Assessment must become a necessary element of infrastructure development in fragile Himalayan regions.

Nature needs to play a role in disaster-risk reduction as well. Forests, wetlands, stable slopes and healthy water catchments protect from erosion, runoff and siltation. Thus, their conservation and restoration should become complementary to engineering solutions.

Transboundary Himalayan Resilience Agenda

The Nepal tragedy proves one thing for certain: disaster resilience in the Himalayas must be transboundary in nature. India and Nepal must work together to create a Himalayan transboundary disaster risk management framework taking into account their shared hydrological basins. Satellite imagery, glacier and glacial lake assessment, avalanches and landslides monitoring, earthquake data, precipitation forecasts and river level monitoring should all be integrated into early warning and impact forecasting system.

The response has to be proactive, not reactive. There should be no need for downstream governments to react only after the disaster crosses the international border, but the warning must come before the flood does.

We have to shift our approach from relief to risk reduction, from hazard assessment to impact prediction, from project-level initiatives to regional water basin planning, and from national activities to transboundary cooperation.

Bihar and Uttar Pradesh should take note of this particular alarm. The lives of people downstream will rely heavily on choices being made thousands of kilometres away, perhaps even outside of India. The Himalayas are not only a natural dividing line between countries; they are a single, interconnected ecosystem.

While we cannot control our geography, we can definitely change the way we respond to whatever our geography may present to us. The real choice is not development versus disaster-risk reduction. It is risk-blind development versus risk-informed development. This was the message that Uttarakhand delivered to us, and Nepal's misfortune serves to reaffirm it. In case the Himalaya shakes, the plains must be ready. If we want to secure people, infrastructure, agriculture, energy systems and ecosystems of the Himalaya-Ganga basin, one rule must reign supreme: The river basin, not the political boundary, should be the basic unit of disaster-risk management.

After Red Corridor: India's post-Naxal challenge



VIKAS YADAV

For nearly six decades, Left-Wing Extremism remained one of India's most serious internal security challenges. Beginning with the Naxalbari movement in West Bengal, it developed into a prolonged armed insurgency across parts of central and eastern India.

In 2026, India reached an important turning point. On March 31, the Union government declared that the country had effectively achieved its objective of becoming free from Left-Wing Extremism. According to government data, the number of affected districts declined from 126 in 2014 to zero by March-April 2026. Naxal-related incidents also fell from 870 in 2014 to 234

in 2025, while fatalities declined from 310 to 100.

However, the decline in violence raises an equally important question: what happens after an insurgency loses its territory, weapons and organisational strength? The real challenge is to ensure that conditions enabling extremism do not return permanently.

India's approach has gradually moved beyond security operations towards a combination of security, development, governance and rehabilitation. The objective is not simply to establish security control, but to ensure that citizens experience the presence of the State through schools, hospitals, markets, public services and employment opportunities.

Bastar represents this transition clearly. For years, its difficult terrain and forests provided space for Maoist groups, while poor connectivity restricted the reach of government institutions. Yet reclaiming territory is only the first step. Roads must remain functional, schools need teachers, health centres require doctors and medicines, and young people need meaningful employment.

Rehabilitation is another major challenge of the post-Naxal phase. Security operations can weaken an armed organisation, but the long-term outcome depends on what happens to those who surrender. Education, vocational training, identity documents, housing, employment, psychological support and acceptance within society are necessary for genuine reintegration.

The experiences of surrendered cadres in Chhattisgarh illustrate this possibility. Some former insurgents have entered ordinary professions such as tailoring, plumbing and other service-sector work. Every former combatant successfully integrated into civilian life reduces the possibility of renewed recruitment and demonstrates that a peaceful alternative is available.

Another important issue is the possible participation of former Maoists in democratic politics. A democracy can accommodate radical or unpopular political opinions as long as political activity remains within the constitutional and legal framework. A clear distinction must therefore be maintained between political belief and political violence. The State must act firmly against violence, unlawful activities and links with armed organisations. This distinction is particularly important in the debate over who should be described as a "Naxal." Treating different forms of political activity as identical can weaken democratic debate. The most effective approach is one based on evidence, law and due process.

The post-Naxal challenge also extends into the information space. The weakening of armed groups does not automatically remove the narratives and grievances that contributed to their influence. Social media can spread political messages far beyond the regions where the insurgency once operated. Therefore, credible public communication is essential. The State must explain its policies, address legitimate grievances and demonstrate visible development outcomes, while security agencies identify genuine extremist activity without treating ordinary disagreement as a security threat.

Financial networks also require continued attention. Strong action against unlawful financing should strengthen, rather than weaken, public confidence in institutions.

Security agencies cannot simply withdraw after the declaration of a Naxal-free India. The more sustainable approach is a gradual transition from intensive counter-insurgency operations to normal policing and civilian administration.

Economic development will also be central to lasting peace. Businesses, cooperatives, self-help groups and skill-development programmes can create employment and alternatives to underground networks, particularly for young people and former insurgents. Communities with functioning markets, secure livelihoods, education and opportunities for advancement are less vulnerable to the appeal of armed politics. Ultimately, the success of an insurgency can be measured through statistics such as fewer attacks, deaths and affected districts. It is visible when children attend school regularly, patients can reach hospitals, farmers can access markets, young people find employment and former insurgents rebuild their lives.

India has made substantial progress in dismantling the armed infrastructure of Left-Wing Extremism. Yet the next phase will determine whether this achievement becomes permanent. The task now is to ensure that the vacuum left by insurgency is filled with roads, schools, jobs, accountable governance, democratic participation, justice and sustained public trust.

India may have moved beyond the era of the Red Corridor. The guns may be falling silent, but the real challenge is to ensure that peace, development and democratic participation take their place permanently across formerly affected regions and communities in the future.



The writer is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Delhi

Gen Alpha's AI shadow: Protecting the right to outgrow childhood data



ANURADHA PS

For previous generations, childhood slowly faded from their memory. For Gen Alpha, it may become something that machines remember. Search engines, recommendation systems, digital classrooms and AI tutors as part of everyday learning do more than just capture the things children do: they infer what they do, predict what they like and create opportunities for them. This is the start of an 'AI shadow' — a series of guesses and presumptions that a machine draws from a child's online footprints. This is important, as AI continues to grow up quicker than the organisations that regulate it.

The child that India is today is an impressive digital kid. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024, 89.1 per cent of adolescent youths aged 14-16 mentioned they had a smartphone in their home. However, how they use that access demonstrates it: 76 per cent of them use their smartphones most often for social media, and only 57 per cent use them most often for educational purposes. This is also highlighted in UNICEF India's guidance, which states that access to the internet still has to catch up with the institutional infrastructure, as only 63.5 per cent of schools in India have internet facilities as part of

their infrastructure. A study conducted by UNICEF U-Report also reveals that 40 per cent of young people use the internet for more than four hours a day. The key change is not that kids are growing up digital, however. Digital interaction is becoming a regular component of childhood architecture. AI is now taking things one step further.

India's experience is part of the global shift. In June 2026, a UNICEF analysis found that at least 20 million children had used AI across 10 countries. About 13 million used AI for studies and homework, while over 2 million used it for guidance on personal matters. AI has become part of childhood, offering opportunities such as personalised tutoring, one-to-one support and help in identifying learning gaps.

UNICEF's Guidance on AI and Children 3.0 acknowledges this potential but cautions that evidence on AI's impact on children remains limited. It urges 'child-centred' AI systems that safeguard children's rights, privacy, development and autonomy. The more personalised AI becomes, the more information it requires. An AI tutor can identify what a child struggles with, what interests them and which explanations work. This can make it an effective teaching aid, but also create an 'AI shadow'. If algorithms repeatedly predict what a child can or should do, those predictions may influence future choices.

Not all of these risks are equal. The first digital divide was in part access, coupled with access to a device and connection or electricity. The second was skills — who knew how to use technology effectively. The new polarisation may be one over the interpretation, who is interpreting them with tech-



nology. In a recent report, UNICEF stated that unequal access to and skills with digital technologies can exacerbate inequalities in childhood: 'Childhood in a Digital World'. It also has some more recent AI evidence, as children were more than three times more likely than their parents to say they had used AI across the 10 countries studied. In most of these countries, at least three-quarters of parents/caregivers were never users of AI, thus creating an AI usage divide within the family. If a parent is not familiar with the AI environment, it's difficult to guide a child through it. The disparity in AI use could thus not just be between children with access to AI and children without access to AI.

International law and the data-protection regime in India already acknowledge that children should be afforded special protection. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, Section 9, mandates, for the processing of a child's personal data, that their verifiable consent be obtained, and pro-

hibits tracking, behavioural monitoring and targeted advertising directed at children, except under narrow exceptions. The Rules were further modified in 2025 to include a few exceptions for the safety and welfare of children. These are key safeguards. However, AI poses a more challenging question than traditional data protection: How to protect information that is not directly disclosed?

UNICEF's new guidance is very clear about this. It calls for the storage of children's data for as long as necessary, to ensure that data gathered regarding a child does not accompany him/her when he/she grows up. It also requires transparency, accountability, fairness and child protection with regard to children's developing autonomy. It indicates a principle which India needs to take seriously: developmental data minimisation. Gather materials required for a child's learning and/or security. Keep it as short a time as possible. Don't let childhood behavioural profiles go undocumented. Then the 'algorithmic forgetfulness' principle should be in place. Children should be given the opportunity to develop beyond the machine's understanding of themselves. This is really a 'right to be wrong' thing. One of the greatest assets of AI is its ability to recognise patterns. Change is the strength of childhood. The risk is that a system designed on the basis of AI will end up categorising what the child is good at today as what he or she should be tomorrow. The impact of AI on children's cognitive development, emotional dependence and exposure to harm is still emerging, according to UNICEF. UNICEF explained this evidence was limited in scope and that the adoption of AI was quickening the pace. This is possibly one

of the key facts. There are more technologies being scaled up than there is evidence of consequences.

The agenda for change in India is progressing: India must not wait for the AI shadow to tag its children as a permanent reality of their lives to contemplate its meaning. There are four steps that are critical:

1. AI literacy in school beyond just prompting and fact-checking, empowering children to comprehend the functioning of systems and their ability to produce outputs and make predictions.
2. Support materials and advice for parents to help them navigate the AI environments their children use.
3. Regular and clear requirements for businesses to render the processing of children's data understandable, appropriate and traceable.
4. Restrictions on retention and inference that childhood data is not an implicit credential for a lifetime.

Most importantly, the information that is gathered during childhood should not be a secret credential for a lifetime. AI's promise is that it will be able to better understand learners. What risks do you face is that it might start to shape them. Gen Alpha might be the first generation to rise up with an AI shadow. The biggest danger is that AI will know too much, too soon and that it will confuse a moment in childhood for a lifetime map. Prior generations thought it was a given they would be able to become a person who their youths couldn't imagine. Gen Alpha deserves the same freedom.

The writer is Professor, Department of Commerce, CHRIST University

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Tata Power commissions solar project in Rajasthan



Tata Power Renewable Energy on Thursday announced the commissioning of a 72.5-megawatt solar project at Bikaner in Rajasthan.

The energy will be supplied to Tata Steel through TP Vardhman Surya, a subsidiary of Tata Power Renewable Energy Limited (TPREL), a statement said.

TPREL said the ground-mounted project is expected to generate 166 MUs of green energy annually, and offset 1,18,856 tonnes of carbon emissions annually. The project deploys 1,71,360 modules for the Tata Steel project that have been manufactured from TP Solar Limited. "The project is advancing Tata Steel's decarbonisation journey and strengthening TPREL's contribution to India's renewable energy capacity," it said.

With the addition of this project, TPREL's total renewable utility capacity has reached 12.3 GW.

Out of this, around 7 GW (5.7 GW of solar and 1.3 GW of wind) is operational, while close to 5.3 GW is under various stages of implementation, which includes 2.2 GW of solar and 3.1 GW of wind. Tata Power Renewable Energy is a subsidiary of Tata Power Company. (PTI)

SEBI mulls scrapping merchant banker rule for small-ticket debt



Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday proposed granting an exemption from mandatory appointment of a merchant banker for small-value debt issued through a private placement basis by listed entities.

The move is aimed at reducing compliance costs and boosting market development.

The current rule requires issuers to appoint at least one merchant banker for private placements of debt securities or non-convertible redeemable preference shares with a face value of ₹10,000.

This increases the cost of capital for issuers, eroding the economic viability of planned issuances, thereby discouraging frequent small-value debt issuances, Sebi said in its consultation paper.

Accordingly, Sebi has proposed to exempt "small-value debt" issues from the requirement to appoint merchant bankers.~ (PTI)

AM/NS India launches free digital skills training for youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India Private Limited (AM/NS India) has launched new batches of free, employment-oriented digital skills training for youth in Raipur and Dantewada under its CSR initiative 'Project Daksh', the company said. The new batches were inaugurated in Dantewada on August 19 and in Raipur on August 21, with the programme aimed at equipping local youth with technical skills aligned with emerging employment opportunities. Under Project Daksh, participants are being trained in trades such

as Domestic Data Entry Operator and Domestic IT Helpdesk Attendant. The programme focuses on practical training to help participants apply their skills in the workplace. Youth who successfully complete the training and meet the prescribed certification standards will also receive career guidance and placement assistance, the company said. In Raipur, the initiative is being implemented in collaboration with NASSCOM Foundation and GRASSTech, while NASSCOM Foundation and AISECT are partners in Dantewada. The Raipur programme was attended by representatives of AM/NS India and

partner organisations, while District Mission Coordinator Harish Gautam and District Trade and Industry Centre In-charge Ravi Shankar attended the Dantewada event. The participants were briefed on the importance of digital and technical skills and emerging employment opportunities in the digital sector. Education kits were also distributed to selected trainees at both locations. AM/NS India said Project Daksh was part of its broader CSR efforts in education, skill development and livelihood promotion and aimed at helping local youth become self-reliant and access better employment opportunities.

NABARD, NaBFID sign MoU for funding rural infra projects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development and the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development have signed an initial pact to strengthen collaboration in financing infrastructure projects with significant rural impact.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides a framework for joint financing, knowledge sharing and the development of innovative financing solutions, with a focus on expanding



access to long-term, competitively priced finance for projects that can strengthen rural infrastructure and value chains, a joint statement said on Thursday.

India's EV market to reach ₹20 lakh crore by 2030: Gadkari

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India's electric vehicle (EV) market is expected to grow to ₹20 lakh crore by 2030, with the potential to create five crore jobs, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Wednesday.

Addressing a summit organised by the CII-ITC Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development, Gadkari said that currently 57 lakh electric vehicles are registered in India, with 7 per cent market penetration.

"India's electric vehicle (EV) market will be worth ₹20 lakh crore by 2030. It will also create five crore jobs by 2030," he said.

The road transport and highways minister highlighted that India's two largest two-wheeler vehicle manu-



facturers, Bajaj Auto and Hero MotoCorp, export more than 50 per cent of vehicles they produce. Gadkari said there is demand for one lakh electric buses annually in India, but 'we are able to manufacture only 50,000-60,000 EV buses annually'.

He said the government aims to make India's automobile industry number

one in the world within five years. The future of the Indian automobile industry is very good as the country has trained manpower, Gadkari added. "Within five years, our target is to make India's automobile industry the number 1 in the world... it is difficult, but not impossible," the minister said. Gadkari pointed out that

the quality of vehicles manufactured in India is good and the cost is less, so all top automobile companies are present in the country.

"When I took charge as transport minister, the size of the Indian automobile industry was ₹14 lakh crore. The size of the Indian automobile industry is now ₹22 lakh crore," Gadkari said.

Presently, the size of the US automobile industry is ₹78 lakh crore, followed by China (₹47 lakh crore) and India (₹23 lakh crore).

Gadkari noted that India is spending ₹22 lakh crore on importing fossil fuels and because of the import of fossil fuels, "we are facing a problem of pollution".

"We are making good highways. Good roads with alternatives, and bio-fuel is the future," the minister said.

Bank unions protest in C'garh, demand five-day banking week

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Raipur

The United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), Chhattisgarh unit, on Thursday organised demonstrations across the state as part of its nationwide agitation programme over various demands, including a five-day banking week. Protests were held in Raipur, Bilaspur, Durg-Bhilai, Kanker, Jagdalpur, Ambikapur, Dhamtari and Balodabazar, with participation from employees and officers of various public sector banks, the UFBU said.

In Raipur, around 600 bank employees and officers gathered at Motibagh Chowk and raised slogans demanding immediate implementation of a five-day banking week, withdrawal of the government's unilateral and discriminatory Performance Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and resolution of long-pending issues. The UFBU also demanded that any changes to the PLI scheme be made through bilateral discussions



with bank employees' unions. Women employees also participated in the demonstrations and raised concerns over the PLI policy and the delay in implementing a five-day work week. They said a five-day banking week would improve work-life balance and employee welfare. The union said the demonstrations were part of its nation-

wide agitation programme, which includes a one-day all-India strike on September 11, three-day strikes from September 28 to 30 and an indefinite strike from October 26. The UFBU warned that the agitation would be intensified if the government failed to address the demands and resolve the pending issues.

Rupee falls 11 paise to close at 95.55 against US dollar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

The rupee pared initial gains and settled for the day lower by 11 paise at 95.55 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, on a strong American currency and weak domestic markets.

Forex traders said the broad strength of the American currency in the overseas market negated the support from easing crude oil prices.

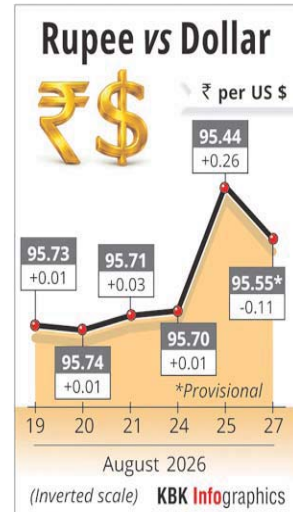
Brent prices fell below the \$90 mark for the first time in several sessions amid continuing discussions between Iran and Oman regarding a

temporary shipping corridor through the Strait.

While no final agreement has been reached, the fact that negotiations are continuing has reduced fears of a prolonged disruption to global oil supplies, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 95.50, then touched an intraday high of 95.40 and a low of 95.56 and finally settled for the day at 95.55 (provisional) against the greenback, lower by 11 paise from its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee settled for the day higher by 26 paise at 95.44 against



the US dollar. The Indian foreign exchange market was closed on Wednesday on account of Id-e-Milad.

According to forex traders, market participants will be closely monitoring US Fed Chair Kevin Warsh's speech at the Jackson Hole Symposium.

According to Anindya Banerjee, Head of Commodity and Currency Research, Kotak Securities, the rupee's story this month is really the story of the flows.

"The special swap facility has attracted total inflows of nearly \$73 billion as of August 21, over \$65 billion through

FCNR(B) deposits alone, roughly two-and-a-half times what the celebrated 2013 scheme raised, and with the final rush into the August 31 deposit deadline and the ECB window open until December, we estimate total flows under these schemes could touch \$85 to \$90 billion," Banerjee said.

The inflows have created a formidable war-chest, and it means the rupee's appreciation potential remains largely unspent, he said, adding, "We expect a 95 to 96 operational range, and a close below 95 would open a move towards 94. We remain bullish on the Indian

rupee." Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 99.21, higher by 0.05 per cent.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading higher by 0.61 per cent at \$88.38 per barrel in futures trade.

On the domestic market front, Sensex fell 539.35 points to settle at 76,933.59, while the Nifty dropped 116.90 points to 24,090.85.

Foreign institutional investors purchased equities worth \$502.63 crore on a net basis on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

BPCL says no decision to replace E20 with E10

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL), India's second largest fuel retailer, on Thursday said there is no decision to replace E20 petrol with E10, clarifying that the current debate is over whether older vehicles should have access to a lower-ethanol blend and how an additional grade of petrol could be supplied across India's vast fuel-distribution network. In a media call post the company's annual shareholder meeting, BPCL Chairman and Managing Director Sanjay Khanna, however, said he saw no operational or logistical challenge in switching from E20 petrol to E10 if the government decides to change the ethanol-blending policy. "I never said that E20 will be changed to E10," he said, adding that it was being debated in some circles whether older vehicles should have an option of lower-ethanol blend fuel.

NMDC Bachelu launches vigilance awareness campaign 2026

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

NMDC Limited's BIOM Bachelu complex has launched a three-month Vigilance Awareness Campaign 2026 in accordance with the guidelines of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), the company said. The campaign, being held from August 17 to November 16, is based on the theme "Probity for Prosperity" and focuses on five key areas identified by the CVC — disposal of pending complaints, disposal of pending cases, capacity building, digital initiatives and contract management. As part of the capacity-building component, a programme on new features and functionalities of the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) was organised at the Bachelu complex on August 19. Officials were briefed on the latest features and operational procedures of



the GeM portal, with the aim of improving procurement efficiency and strengthening transparency in government purchases, the company said. The Vigilance Department of the Bachelu complex said it was committed to promoting preventive vigilance, transparency, accountability and integrity in line with the objectives of the campaign.

GAIL plans major expansion in gas, petrochemicals and clean energy, says chairman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

State-run gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd plans to expand its natural gas pipeline network, diversify LNG sourcing and shipping, scale up petrochemicals and LPG infrastructure, and invest in clean-energy technologies as geopolitical disruptions underscore the need for greater energy security, the company's chairman said on Thursday.

Addressing GAIL's 42nd annual general meeting, Deepak Gupta said the year had highlighted the growing importance of bal-

ancing energy security with the global shift toward cleaner fuels.

"Energy security has become as important as energy transition," he said, pointing to geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and disruptions to LNG supply chains through the Strait of Hormuz that exposed vulnerabilities in global energy markets.

"The resulting volatility in LNG prices, freight rates and supply availability reinforced the need for diversified sourcing, resilient infrastructure and flexible supply chains," he said. "At the same time, the global transition



towards cleaner energy continued unabated, with sustained investments in renewable energy, nuclear power, energy storage and low-carbon technologies."

Natural gas, because of its flexibility and lower

carbon intensity, would continue to play a role in the energy transition, he said.

Gupta said the company's pipeline network, already India's largest natural gas transmission system, has expanded to more than

18,690 kilometres, with another 1,500 km under construction. Once those projects are completed, the network is expected to approach 20,000 km.

GAIL is simultaneously expanding its LPG transmission business. The company is doubling the capacity of its 1,427-km Jamnagar-Loni LPG pipeline to 6.5 MMTPA from 3.25 MMTPA.

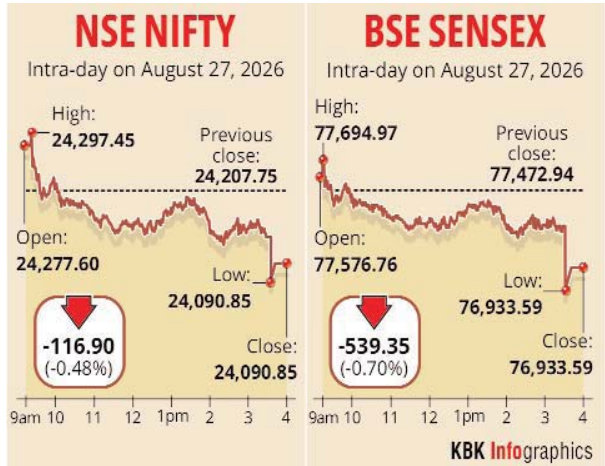
The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board has also authorised GAIL to develop three LPG pipelines with a combined length of about 1,775 km.

In petrochemicals, GAIL commissioned a 60,000-

tonne-a-year polypropylene unit at Pata, raising the integrated complex's capacity to 870,000 tonnes from 810,000 tonnes.

The company is also progressing with its 500,000-tonne-a-year propane dehydrogenation-polypropylene project at Usar, which Gupta described as India's first PDH-based polypropylene complex. The project entails an estimated investment of about ₹11,256 crore.

At Mangalore, work is progressing on a 1.25 MMTPA purified terephthalic acid (PTA) plant, giving GAIL an entry into another petrochemical value chain.



Sensex tanks 539 points, Nifty drops below 24,100 dragged by HDFC Bank

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Stock markets declined for the second consecutive day on Thursday, with the benchmark Sensex dropping by 539 points due to last-minute selling in blue-chip shares such as HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries amid persistent geopolitical uncertainty.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 539.35 points, or 0.70 per cent, to settle at the day's low of 76,933.59 on the monthly derivatives-expiry day. The index traded with a negative bias for most of the day and fell sharply in the last 15 minutes of the session.

Similarly, the 50-share NSE Nifty declined 116.90 points, or 0.48 per cent, to end at the day's low of 24,090.85.

HDFC Bank was the biggest loser among 30 Sensex firms, dropping by 2.08 per cent following news of a US class-action lawsuit. Index heavyweight Reliance Industries fell by 1 per cent, dragging the index down. Bharti Airtel, NTPC, Mahindra & Mahindra, HCL Tech and ITC were also among major laggards.

Kotak Mahindra Bank, ICICI Bank, Tech Mahindra and Bharat Electronics were among the winners.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, edged higher by 0.67 per cent to \$88.43 per barrel.

"Expiry-led volatility and the lack of a diplomatic breakthrough in the Middle East continue to keep markets range-bound in the near term," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

"Indian equity markets ended lower on Thursday as domestic headwinds outweighed supportive global cues, with broad-based selling across key sectors offsetting the relief from softer crude oil prices and easing concerns over the Strait of Hormuz," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

The Nifty remained under pressure through the session as weakness in heavyweight financial stocks and continued selling in PSU banks, FMCG, services and IT weighed on sentiment, he said.

PROSPECT

Patna Mind Fest ends; winners receive cash prizes



The two-day Patna Mind Fest (PMF) 2026 concluded on Thursday with winners taking away prizes and certificates in five events judged across three categories each – open, college, and school. The events included India quiz, general quiz, creative writing (in Hindi and English), cryptic crosswords, and word bee. The 8th edition of this annual event was conducted at the Chandragupt Institute of Management Patna (CIMP). It is organised by the Bihar IAS Officers' Association in partnership with extra-c, a civil society initiative at the forefront of promoting knowledge-based co-curricular activities. The objective is to showcase the intellectual legacy of the state and sustain it by holding regular events. The prizes and certificates were handed over to the winners by chief guests Harjot Kaur, president, Bihar IAS Association, and Girish Shankar, chief election officer. Also present on the occasion were Vivek Kumar Singh, Chairman, RERA Bihar; Rachana Patil, IAS, secretary, Department of Finance, Bihar; and Shreshtha Anupam, IAS, joint secretary, Department of Finance, Bihar.

On the final day of the event, Shreyas Sridhar won the first prize in the open category in creative writing (English). Abhinav Priyadarshi and Vidisha Garg came 2nd and 3rd, respectively. In Creative Writing (Hindi), Samrat Sameer won the 1st prize. Suman Kumar and Ranjana Kumari were 2nd and 3rd, respectively. In the word bee open category, the team of Gokul and Calvin won the first spot. While the team comprising Shashank, Tayaganthan, and Samanway won the 2nd prize, that of Saransh, Samiran, and Subhadeep won the 3rd prize. In the cryptic crossword open category, Shradha Shree clinched the 1st spot. Soham Sarthak and Dhairya Pandey were in 2nd and 3rd spots, respectively. The college category saw Naman Bhaskar, Adya Singh, and Saumya Shiwangi in the first three spots, respectively. Shubhi Srivastava, Hemang Chandra, and Nanya Dev Singh clinched the first three spots in that order in the School Category.

Rahul's performative feminism vs Modi's grassroots transformation



SMITA MISHRA

Rahul Gandhi is being hailed as a path breaker by the entire Congress ecosystem ever since he gave a call to 'Smash Patriarchy' during an event organised for young women in Pune. This event was part of the Chhatron ki Goonj, loosely translated as 'echo of students' through which the Leader of Opposition has been trying to connect with the Gen Z. During the interaction, he exhorted young women to reject (what he called) the Manusmriti mindset of seeing women as Bahu, Beti, Behen that is belonging either to the father, son or husband. You belong to no one but yourself, he said emphatically.

All this sounds perfect when seen from the standpoint of a young woman who is raring to fulfill her dreams in life. It got Mr Gandhi the kind of social media attention such comments will always get. But once the charm of the reels subsides, one must think where does Rahul Gandhi or his party leaders actually stand on the issue themselves?

Let us take the Manusmriti argument first. Many critics are looking at his Bahu, Beti, Behen comment as an attempt to run down the Indian family system and bonds while some have fished out his old remarks where he was seen projecting his sister in an election rally. But I would welcome a leader exhorting women to carve their own



identity beyond family relations. The problem lies in Rahul Gandhi slamming Manusmriti and asking Hindu women to shun it while completely forgetting to mention that all religions and scriptures prescribe do's and don'ts which are not commensurate with today's society. He did not even notice that women in Hijab standing on the stage with him could have been given the same mantra. His singling out of Manusmriti gave detractors the opportunity to allege that Rahul's target was more on Hindu traditions than patriarchy per se.

But let us leave that for the women to judge. How has the Congress party, and the Gandhi family fared on this front? While Mr Gandhi finds Manusmriti's depiction problematic, he forgets that the biggest factor for a woman's dependent status is financial. His late father and former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had a historic opportunity to make the lives of divorced Muslim women marginally better

mean any real change because they are both there by virtue of their bloodline.

Narendra Modi, whom Rahul Gandhi has been challenging politically for over twelve years now, has presented a different model altogether. Having his roots in a humble, poor Hindu family with limited means, Narendra Modi has had a much closer, first hand view of women's position in the society. Introducing his first path breaking initiative, Swachh Bharat, he focused on building toilets. Rahul Gandhi could perhaps ask his seniors in the party why barely forty percent women had access to something as basic as toilets till 2014? How does a woman smash patriarchy when she has to wait for darkness to relieve herself? Modi also understood that the power balance in families would not shift until women had some financial 'heft' in their name.

Bank accounts through Jan Dhan scheme, ensuring PM Awas Yojana houses were registered in the name of the woman, providing easy, collateral free loans through MUDRA, announcing a slew of maternity benefits so that young mothers did not suffer professional loss and a phenomenal push to self help group through various incentives in order to economically empower women at the grassroots level..... these are measures which have changed the power dynamics of families in rural areas in a way that was unthinkable some years ago.

This author is witness to the remarkable surge in self confidence of young women in the remotest corners of the country.

They no longer follow the menfolk. They have access to phones and internet data. They are informed and prefer to form their own opinions on current political and social issues. Their awareness level is far higher and they are keen to chart their own course.

Today, there is a bigger number of women aspirants compared to men raring to fight the local body/ Panchayat elections in villages which were considered extremely backward till recently.

One can refer to all the data related to these schemes and many others. The crux of the matter is women cannot smash patriarchy by simply wishing it away. Enabling legal structures, financial agency, professional opportunities and political platforms are essential to make it possible.

Catchy one-liners like the one made by Rahul Gandhi are good headline material and attractive content for a generation which spends a good amount of time on social media. But these one-liners must also be substantiated with solid ground work. Seen from that perspective, Rahul Gandhi and Congress party's record pales.

To smash patriarchy he could make a beginning by inducting a woman or two as minister in Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh. He could have admonished his colleague Sandeep Dikshit who recently made a crass, sexist comment on the Prime Minister of Italy in an open party event. Instead Rahul Gandhi chose to enjoy the 'joke'. He missed the bus there too.

The author is a journalist. She writes on politics, security and current issues

GMDA intensifies enforcement drive across city

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gurugram

The Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) has intensified its enforcement action against encroachments across Gurugram, with a continued focus on keeping roads and public spaces free from unauthorised occupation. Chief Executive Officer, GMDA, PC Meena has directed the enforcement teams to maintain sustained action against encroachments and ensure that areas freed from encroachment remain free from re-encroachment.

The latest enforcement drive, led by DTP GMDA RS Batth on Thursday, addressed



around 15 kilometres of road stretches across various parts of Gurugram. Multiple enforcement teams were deployed at different locations to undertake action against encroachments and

restore public spaces for their intended use.

On the Basai Road (9B/10) and Sector 37C/10 stretches, covering around 3 kilometres, action was taken against several types of encroach-

ments. Approximately 65 tin sheds, ramps and 10 carts were removed from the Basai Road stretch. On the combined stretches of Sector 37C/9B, Sector 37C/37D and Sector 37D/9B, around 3.7 kilometres of road were taken up for enforcement action.

The enforcement drive was further extended to the Sector 102/102A stretch, where around 1.5 kilometres were addressed, and approximately 20 carts and three nursery-related encroachments were removed.

PC Meena said that GMDA will continue its strict enforcement action against unauthorised encroachments across the city.

HDFC Bank mulling appeal against NCLT ruling in Subhash Chandra case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Leading private lender HDFC Bank is mulling an appeal against the bankruptcy court NCLT's order in the case involving Subhash Chandra, the bank said on Thursday.

The bank said only 3.2 per cent of the total claim amount has been admitted under the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) order in the matter. HDFC Bank's total claim was ₹680 crore.



"HDFC Bank had opposed and voted against this resolution, which was approved by the majority. The Bank is exploring filing an appeal at the NCLAT (National Company Law Appellate Tribunal)," HDFC Bank said in a statement.

HDFC Bank said it had inherited the loan facility from its parent, HDFC, before the bank's merger.

The bank's response comes a day after an NCLT ruling in the matter triggered controversy, as lenders had to take steep haircuts and are seen to be getting a negligible sum against their claims.

In an order on Wednesday, the NCLT approved a repayment plan

under which media baron Chandra will pay just ₹6.5 crore to settle admitted creditor claims of over ₹22,000 crore, resulting in a haircut of 99.97 per cent for lenders.

NCLT Member (Judicial) Nilesh Sharma, ruling as a third member, on Tuesday approved the plan under Section 114 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), rejecting objections by lenders that the recovery was too meagre to merit approval.

The matter stems from the default of an entity called Vivek Infracon on a ₹170 crore loan taken by the then Indiabulls Housing Finance, which turned sour.

Chandra had given a personal guarantee on the

loan and the lender's move to NCLT to kickstart bankruptcy proceedings led to claims of over ₹22,000 crore from peers who also owed money.

Two members of the National Company Law Tribunal had given a split verdict, after which the president of the forum appointed member (judicial) Nilesh Sharma as the third member amid the difference of opinion.

Sharma rejected the claims of the dissenting creditors led by LIC Housing Finance, which had argued that the payout was "unviable and unlawful." It had contended that against admitted claims of approximately ₹22,006.57 crore, the

repayment plan proposed the payment of only ₹6.25 crore to creditors and ₹25 lakhs towards process costs.

Sharma, in its 144-page-long order, said the resolution professional's valuation showed Chandra's personal estate was worth significantly less than the amount offered under the plan, and that dissenting creditors were unlikely to recover more by rejecting it, since he would then face bankruptcy rather than being able to pay from a position of financial recovery.

"If the plan is approved and the debtor's insolvency is resolved, putting him back on his feet, the objectors would ultimately stand a better chance of recovering their debts directly from the Principal Debtors," the NCLT observed.

The tribunal held that its role was not to substitute its own commercial wisdom for that of the creditors or to assess whether the settlement amount was adequate.

It also noted that "the commercial decision of the creditors operates within, and not outside, the statutory framework".

DAILY SUDOKU

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

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.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★☆

SOLUTION (27.8.26)

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

DOUBLE CROSSWORD

FRIDAY | AUGUST 28, 2026

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35
36	37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48	49

ACROSS

8 Argued the cricketer must be seen in action (7)
9 When you're being formal, do (9)
13 Turn the small mug round (5)
14 Am to blame for bringing back from N. Italy (5)
15 Make up for having overcharged? (7)
16 Say to the chaps to turn it over (7)
17 Gets level with and produces the gun (5)
18 The police break it open (5)
20 A bit quiet; embarrassed (5)
22 Give way and shut up (6)
23 To show in, I even produced a key (6)
25 Old soldier his superior officers discharge? (7)
27 Don't stop to make a fuss about (5,2)

DOWN

1 Get out of calling (6)
2 It was shivering in the end. That's what made it cold (4,4)
3 Not revealing that one's slowing the progress of (7,4)
4 Book in a restaurant that's accessible (3-2-4)
5 Are rearranging the roster - he's not imagining it (7)
6 What makes you so hot on acting? (5,5)
7 Thunder "Run away!" (4)
10 Gets out the remnants left standing (6)
11 Make a coloured holster for the gun (7)
12 That blessed thing! (6)

ACROSS

4, Du-ti-es
7, Victoria
8, Tru-MPS
10, Cr-O-QK
13, Je-er
14, Tars
15, Bust
17, Cr-i-n
19, Espad

DOWN

21, P-articles
23, Car-t
24, Pa-LM
26, Boy
27, H-O-e'd
29, Moo-D
32, Pu-rr
33, Barge
34, Record
35, Edge-in-ill
36, Stoker

ACROSS

18, Art-Hur
20, Gem-ma
21, Pa-y
22, Cad
23, Ge-gen-t
25, D-og
28, Order
30, Orbit
31, Dealt
32, Perk
33, Bees

Swiggy expands food on train service to 201 stations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Swiggy on Thursday said its Food on Train service has currently expanded to 201 railway stations from 66 stations in 2024.

The Food on Train network now includes Kolhapur, Wardha, Shahdol, Kakinada, Bharatpur, Chittoor, Thanjavur, Raigarh, Jamnagar, Indore and Tundla stations, among others, Swiggy said.

Sidharth Bhakoo, Chief Business Officer, Swiggy Food Marketplace, said, "Food on Train has seen multifold growth since its launch in March 2024 and has witnessed widespread adoption across various consumer cohorts, including Gen Z. We are also seeing a huge opportunity for our affordability offerings."

The online food delivery firm also shared interesting trends around the evolving food habits of train travellers. In just over a year, passengers have switched from fast food

and carbonated drinks to healthier, refreshing options, it stated.

Compared to last year, travellers are preferring traditional and refreshing drinks like lassi (up 60 per cent), buttermilk (up 40 per cent), and mojitos (up 90 per cent), while orders for standard fizzy drinks have dropped considerably. ?

Moreover, the Food on Train service is seeing a return to traditional and regional comfort foods, with full meals like ThalIs comprising over 65 per cent of all train orders.

Additionally, orders for sweets have more than doubled, led by rasgullas.

ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund raises stake in SBI Card to 7.3%

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund has increased its stake in SBI Card to 7.3 per cent by acquiring additional shares from the open market, the credit card firm said on Thursday. The fund house has carried out the acquisition of 21,60,916 shares on August 25 through the open market, SBI Card said in a regulatory filing.

As a result, the shareholding of the fund house has increased by 2.12 per cent from the earlier level of 5.18 per cent, the credit card subsidiary of SBI added. With the acquisition, total sharehold-

ing in the card company rose to 7.3 per cent.

US firm GE was the initial promoter of SBI Credit Card when launched in 1998. There were criticism on State Bank of India, allowing US firm GE to sell its credit cards. GE exited in 2017 and another multinational company Carlyle Group ventured with SBI in promoting credit card.

DIRECTORATE

Uttarakhand Agriculture Produce Marketing Board

Mandi Bhowan, Rudrapur (U.S.Nagar) Ph:05944-250056 Fax: 05944-50059

Ref: U.K.A.P.M.B./2026/1407

Date: 27.08.2026

Public Information

Uttarakhand Agriculture Produce Marketing Board, Rudrapur is Inviting Auction of land & Floriculture Mandi in Bhurarani Rudrapur and to be given on lease rent.

Applying process and other related information and conditions may be seen on <https://www.procfox.com> from 29.08.2026 on 12:00 noon to 15.09.2026 till 5:00 pm.

Interested persons and firms may visit at <https://www.procfox.com> for further necessary action.

General Manager (Finance)

Meta platforms reaches \$18b settlement with 48 US States

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Oakland

Kids under 18 will soon see a host of changes to their Instagram and Facebook experiences thanks to a historic \$18 billion settlement Meta Platforms reached Wednesday with 48 US states.

Besides the money, which will be paid out over a decade, Meta has agreed to strengthen its age estimates to keep kids under 13 off its platforms and teens in age-appropriate accounts, enact a hard limit of two hours a day for users under 18, block kids from the apps from midnight to 6 am, and hide "like" counts, among other changes.

While acknowledging the changes go further than Meta has ever gone when it comes to child safety, critics and children's advocates cautioned it will not solve its myriad problems overnight.

Arturo Bejar, a former Meta



Colorado Solicitor General Shannon Stevenson hugs a colleague outside of court after tech giant Meta reached a settlement to end a landmark trial over teen social media addiction in Oakland, Calif

engineering director, said the settlement is a "significant milestone," but parents should not see Instagram as suddenly safe for children.

"The agreement has a big problem in that it allows Meta to define harm," Bejar said in an interview

Wednesday. "It's one thing to say, Yeah, you only get like two hours of alcohol or two hours of cigarettes a day," but it's still as bad for you because of what's getting delivered."

Bejar, the first witness to testify during the federal trial cut short by the settlement,

would like to see Meta address the effect of content recommendations to teens, which he says can prove addictive. While teens might put their phone down when they hit the two-hour limit, they can be distressed about it because the way the plat-

form is designed leaves them craving more.

Meta said people over 18 also can adopt versions of the new controls individually, such as daily time-limit reminders, but there will not be an option for them to opt into the overall settings for what teens experience on the platform.

Stronger age checks

To protect kids, first Meta has to know who they are. While the company has already been using artificial intelligence to determine if kids are lying about their age - either to sign up if they are under 13, which is not allowed, or to use adult accounts when they are 13 to 17 - it did not always work. Under the proposed settlement, Meta agreed to strengthen its technology to check kids' ages, using its own as well as third-party tools, with regular outside audits on how well it is

working. The agreement also includes specific goals around false positive rates - that is, minors who are identified as over 18. And if a user is identified as under 13 and kicked off the platforms, Meta will check the ages of their friends, too.

"The age assurance section is reasonably good because it has measurement, has independent testing, has goals," Bejar said. "Because I think Meta should be measured on effectiveness, not effort." Meta requires users to be at least 13 years old to create an account, in line with federal child privacy law. In his testimony last week, Bejar said Meta took a "don't ask, don't tell" approach on kids under 13 on its platforms. "Meta has one of the most sophisticated infrastructures in the world to detect fake accounts," he said. But despite that, he added, there were "no goals, no metrics" to detect and

check kids' ages who were suspected to be under 13.

Some safety features will be on by default

Critics have faulted Meta over many of its safety features that users have to manually turn on, or opt into themselves. Of the host of safeguards listed in the settlement, many are on as a default. This includes the two-hour time limit, which can only be turned off with a parent's permission, as well as the night mode that blocks use between midnight and 6 am.

Still, under the agreement other features, such as turning off video autoplay or showing posts in chronological order rather than having algorithms decide what to show kids scrolling through their feeds, will be opt-in.

Josh Golin, executive director of online safety nonprofit Fairplay, said the deal appeared to be too focused

on offering tools to parents rather than restricting harmful features altogether.

"We are disappointed that the settlement does not turn off by default recommendation algorithms that connect kids to predators and send young people down dangerous rabbit holes," Golin said.

Questions around default settings came up at the trial earlier this week when a lawyer for the states suing Meta pressed Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram, on the low adoption rate among teens for the "take a break" feature, which prompts users to step away if they have been scrolling a while.

Very few teens used the feature when Instagram first introduced it, but since launching separate teen accounts in 2024, Meta has made it the default setting for teenage users. Still, if a teen didn't want to take a break, they could simply swipe away the notification.

Russia bombards Ukrainian cities in escalated night strikes

HANNA ARHIROVA Kyiv

Russia bombarded cities across Ukraine with missiles and drones in an onslaught that began after nightfall Wednesday and continued into daylight hours Thursday, when explosions echoed around the Capital Kyiv through the morning.

Ukraine is desperately short of US-made Patriot air defence missiles that can counter Russia's ballistic missiles, and Moscow's fast-flying jet-powered drones have brought another challenge in the fifth year since the Russian army's invasion. Ukrainian officials say Russia

builds up missile stocks and launches major attacks every few days, hoping to exhaust Ukrainian defences through the sheer weight of numbers.

In response, Ukraine has hit high-profile targets on Russian soil as the countries inflict mutual destruction.

The Russian Defence Ministry said its forces carried out a "massive" overnight strike on targets in nine Ukrainian cities. It described the targets as military-related, including industrial facilities, oil refineries, logistics hubs and port infrastructure. Civilian areas including apartment blocks suffered damage. The barrage killed



a 78-year-old woman in the southern Zaporizhzhia region, with at least nine people reported wounded elsewhere, Ukrainian officials said.

"Russia continues to invest in missiles and in expanding its war, and that means more countermeasures are needed," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on social media, noting promises earlier this week by European countries to provide more air defence help. "It is important that these (measures) are also supplemented by additional ballistic missile defence packages" through European

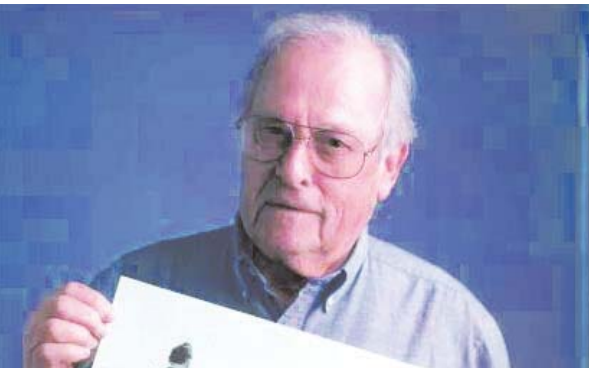
purchases of weapons from the United States, he said.

Zelenskyy was due to visit neighbouring Moldova on Thursday to mark its national day commemorating its 1991 declaration of independence from the Soviet Union. Ukraine announced its independence the same year.

Russia's neighbours in Eastern Europe are concerned its invasion of Ukraine could trigger a wider conflict, and drones flying into its airspace have fueled jitters.

Moldova's Ministry of Defence said on Thursday that five drones breached its airspace overnight. (AP)

Veder, Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer, dies at age 99



ASSOCIATED PRESS
Sacramento

Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Slava Sal Veder, best known for his picture of a US Air Force lieutenant colonel joyfully reuniting with his family after five years in a prisoner of war camp in Vietnam, died August 22.

He was 99. Veder's family on Wednesday confirmed that the retired Associated Press photojournalist died in his sleep, just eight days shy of his 100th birthday, at his home in El Dorado County, California, outside of Sacramento.

The San Francisco Bay Area native was 46 years old in March 1973 when he was sent to Travis Air Force Base for the arrival of Lt Col Robert L Stim and other war prisoners returning from Vietnam. Veder was in a crowded

bullpen jockeying for pictures with dozens of other photographers when, out of the corner of his eye, he spotted Stim's four children begin to gallop toward their father. "You could tell, even at a distance, what they were feeling. It was all over them, their faces, the way they all broke into a run. There was a surge of emotion from the crowd, too," Veder said.

Using a makeshift darkroom set up in a women's bathroom on base, Veder cranked out six images, including "Burst of Joy," which won the 1974 Pulitzer in feature photography. Veder noted that in the photograph, Stim has his back to the camera, rendering him an everyman soldier returning to the undeniable joy and excitement on the faces of his children.

Pakistan Hospital fire: Parliamentary committee doubts AC spark cause

SAJJAD HUSSAIN Islamabad

A parliamentary health committee on Thursday expressed doubts that a spark from an air-conditioner was the cause of a fire at a state-run hospital in Islamabad that killed 14 newborn babies.

The incident occurred on Wednesday in the gynaecology ward of the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), sparking anger over the failure of authorities to save the newborns.

The National Assembly's health committee, led by its chairman Mahesh Kumar, made an unofficial visit to PIMS to ascertain the cause of the tragedy.

Kumar told reporters that CCTV footage did not establish that the AC was the source of the fire, while possible faults in the oxygen pipeline and electrical wiring were being examined, The Express Tribune reported.

Kumar said committee members were told that a spark from an old AC had triggered the fire, but the unit had not been working for a long time. They were also told that the two other ACs in the nursery were portable.

More importantly, he said, neither the staff present at the time nor the CCTV footage



could establish where the spark had originated.

"We have reached the conclusion that the source of the fire was not known to anyone," Kumar said.

He said the committee had asked the PIMS executive director whether CCTV footage showed the fire starting from the old AC, but the answer was no.

The committee therefore wanted to establish whether the fire could instead have originated in the electrical wiring or oxygen pipeline.

Kumar said the speed with which the fire spread made the oxygen supply an important part of the investigation. "The fire spread within one minute, so oxygen could have been a catalyst," he said. "Either there was a fault in the oxygen pipe, or there was something wrong with the wiring." (PTI)

Zelenskyy meets US lawmakers to outline war strategy

LISA MASCARO Washington

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived at the US Capitol hours after Lindsey Graham's funeral to an unusually attentive audience.

Half the Senate gathered for the closed-door meeting. Senators set their mobile phones down and focused their attention. Along with representatives from the House, they listened as Zelenskyy fielded questions about his country's strategy in the long war against Russia.

Zelenskyy told them how Ukraine was repelling the Russian invasion, taking the fight to Moscow, but in need of US help with Patriot interceptor missiles and licensing agreements, expanded access to Elon Musk's Starlink internet - and most immedi-



ately ahead of a Senate vote that July night - a punishing Russia sanctions package to deprive President Vladimir Putin of the oil and gas revenue fueling the war machine. "He said, We need this legislation," recalled Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, the top Democrat on

the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in an interview. "Both the troops and the Ukrainian people need this for morale."

"You could feel palpably in the room a sense that - Zelenskyy's confidence of their ability to hold and to persevere," said Rep Steny Hoyer of Maryland, a former Democratic leader. "There was a sense in the room that, look, we can be successful."

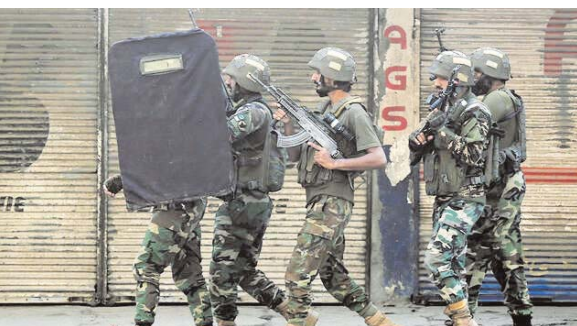
The massive Russian sanctions package from the late Sen Graham represented the most ambitious effort to support Ukraine since President Donald Trump returned to the White House. After two years of legislative inaction, it would be one of the few moves from Congress since lawmakers sent supplemental aid funding to Ukraine in 2024. (AP)

11 terrorists eliminated in joint operations across Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Karachi

Security forces have eliminated 11 terrorists in multiple intelligence-based operations in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, state media reported on Thursday.

According to State-owned Radio Pakistan, the operations were conducted at different locations across these two provinces targeting Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and various other terror groups. It didn't give an exact time frame for the operations but said the terrorists



were killed in the last few days. Four terrorists were killed in the Sasool area in Balochistan province, the Pakistan Radio said in a report, adding that two ter-

rorists were killed in the Bannu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and another five TTP terrorists were gunned down in the South Waziristan district.

Terrorists were targeted in the Sasool area using a drone, the report said, quoting the security forces.

President Asif Ali Zardari paid tribute to the security forces for their successful operation, according to the President's Office.

"The elimination of terrorist elements active with foreign support is essential for national security and lasting peace," Zardari said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also appreciated the security forces and said the entire nation stands by the security personnel in the fight against terrorism, Radio

Pakistan said. Last week, Pakistan military's media wing, Inter-Services Public Relations, said the security forces killed 49 terrorists in separate intelligence-based operations in these two provinces.

Pakistan has witnessed a surge in terror activities, particularly in its Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces in the past few years.

The monthly report of the Islamabad-based think tank, the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), said on July 31 that the security situation deteri-

orated most significantly in Balochistan last month.

The overall death toll increased by 241 per cent in Balochistan, from 109 in June to 372 in July, the PICSS said.

It also said that 62 security personnel were killed in different incidents and operations in Balochistan in July, compared to six killed in June. Security forces, including the military, have been carrying out clean-up operations in Balochistan since last month after a spate of attacks by insurgent groups, especially one incident which saw 27 policemen killed in Ziarat on July 6. (PTI)

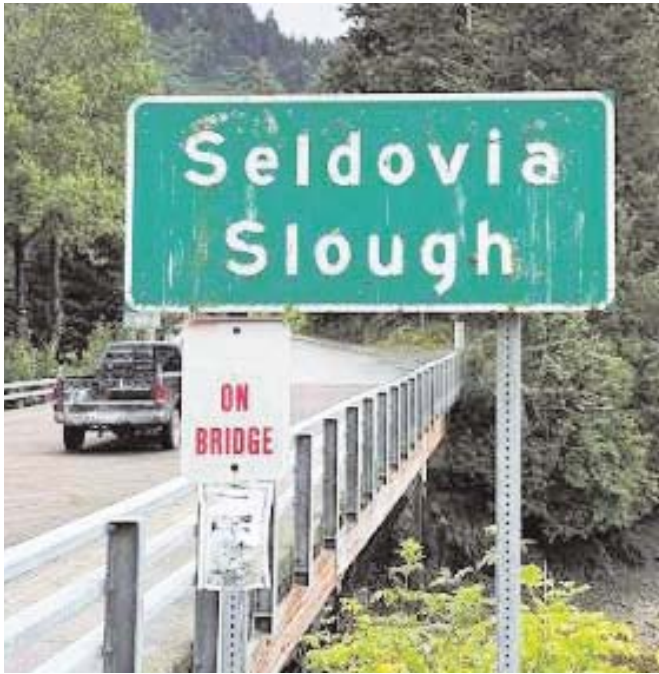
Plane crash near Seldovia, Alaska kills four on board

HALLIE GOLDEN Alaska

A small plane carrying four people crashed into shallow waters next to a remote coastal town in Alaska, killing everyone on board, according to officials.

The Piper PA-24 was heading for the airport in the small town of Seldovia after taking off from Anchorage, according to a statement from the Alaska Department of Public Safety. Seldovia's airport is about 219 kilometres southwest of Anchorage.

After it crashed, it was submerged in about 15 feet of water in the Seldovia Slough near the shore, said Clint Johnson, the National Transportation Safety Board's Alaska region chief. Troopers had to wait until the tide went out in order to reach it. Troopers were able to get the bodies of the four adults out of the plane. They're being sent to the medical examiner's office



and their names will not be released until next of kin are notified, according to the Department of Public Safety. It was not immediately clear what may have caused the crash.

The NTSB is investigating. US Sen Dan Sullivan, of Alaska, said he'll be getting a briefing from the NTSB and Federal Aviation Administration as they work to figure out what went wrong.

"These tragedies are heart-breaking and unacceptable, which is why aviation safety and infrastructure in Alaska continue to be a top focus of mine," he said in a post on Facebook.

Less than a week earlier, another plane crashed at a remote military site in western Alaska, killing all eight people on board. The aircraft had been making its second runway approach in heavy fog and its pilots could not see the gravel airstrip, authorities said. (AP)

China urges US to overcome obstacles ahead of President Xi-Trump summit

HUIZHONG WU Bangkok

China's foreign minister said his country and the United States should overcome obstacles between the Nations ahead of an expected summit next month between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Wang Yi met with US ambassador to China David Perdue on Wednesday and called on both sides to "focus on the positive agenda, properly manage differences, remove interference and overcome obstacles to high-level exchanges between the two countries," Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported Thursday.

China-US relations "still face various risks and challenges," he acknowledged in a statement



China's foreign minister Wang Yi

released by CCTV. Trump and Xi met in May in Beijing and pledged to keep the relationship stable and maintain the fragile trade truce.

Trump invited Xi to meet Sept. 24 in the US but the exact date of the Chinese leader's visit has not been confirmed. Since then,

however, the US and China have continued to take targeted economic action against each other including the US banning Chinese-made robots and China banning American entities engaging in trade and other activities in China. (AP)

PM Modi urges youth to expand Olympic participation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A sports enthusiast, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Thursday, urged the youth to take up games quipping “Screens se zyada, Sports centres ki ahmiyat hai. Play station se zyada, Playgrounds ki ahmiyat hai”(Sports centres are more essential than screens and playgrounds are more essential than play stations.)

He also said his vision for sports is not merely about winning medals but making it an integral part of the nation-building process. PM Modi rued India’s lack of participation in “half of the competitions on the Olympic

Games roster”, saying the country’s medal tally can improve only if previously unrepresented events like surfing and sport climbing find contenders. The Prime Minister’s remarks came days after he said receiving national sportspersons at his official residence here has been a regular and cherished tradition throughout his 12 to 13-year tenure.

Addressing hundreds of athletes, students and volunteers virtually on Thursday who gathered at various locations for the Khelo India Dialogue ahead of National Sports Day on Saturday, the Prime Minister said “In the Olympics, there are so many different sports... Indian

teams don’t even participate in half of them, which means that we are not competing for a major chunk of the medal tally.” He called it a “bitter truth”.

“And this has been going on for decades. In 2012, we competed in only 13 sports. We were not even there in over 20 events and not many in the country even knew about some of these competitions.” “Other countries win medals in those sports, and we don’t even participate. To increase our medals, we have to improve in these sports,” he pointed out. In the 2024 Paris Olympics, India participated in 16 of the 32 sports which were on the Games roster.



However, no Indian has ever competed in the surfing and sport climbing competitions of the Olympic Games. Both these events are part of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics schedule. “For example surfing and sport climbing...We have such

a vast coastline, we have such a vast hilly region where there could be a natural affinity for sports like these. From water sports to winter sports, we have the required demography as well as geography,” he asserted. “Despite this, we are not seen in these

sports anywhere in the world. That’s why we have to find opportunities of growing these sports in different regions. To increase our medal tally, we will have to master these sports as well,” he added. In his Independence Day speech on August 15, Modi had announced a nationwide talent hunt for children in the age group of 5 to 15 to ensure that India’s participation improves at the Olympics.

“On 15th August, I presented India’s sports vision from the ramparts of the Red Fort. When I talk about sports... it is not merely about winning medals. “It is a campaign to integrate India’s sporting power and youth power

together in the construction of a developed India,” he said. Describing sport as essential to building character in youngsters, Modi said it also has a massive role in ensuring that the youth stays away from the menace of drug abuse which has become a major challenge for the country. “Sports doesn’t just teach us to become champions, it also teaches us to become better competitors. Rising, falling, and then rising again... Sports brings this spirit within us,” he said.

The Prime Minister also paid tributes to hockey wizard Major Dhyan Chand, whose birth anniversary is celebrated as the National Sports Day on August 29.

“In another two days, on August 29, there is National Sports Day...This day is also to remember Major Dhyan Chand. A 100 years ago, an Indian hockey team went on a tour of New Zealand, and in that team, Dhyan Chand was there...That tour is the foundation of the centenary celebration of India-New Zealand sporting ties,” he said. “Few days back when I went to New Zealand, I had remembered him.”

Drawing inspiration from Para-athletes, Modi said they are the prime example of how sport can change lives of not just individuals but also their families, their immediate surroundings and even their cities.

Centurion Dinusha’s dogged effort helps SL draw second Test; India win series 1-0

G UNNIKRISHNAN
■ Colombo

Centurion Sonal Dinusha’s unbending will en route an epic unbeaten 133 helped Sri Lanka enact a great jail break, battling persistent Indian bowlers, a fifth-day track and the weariness of following-on to eke out a memorable draw in second and final Test on Thursday. India won the two-match series 1-0, riding on their 165-run victory in the first Test at Galle, but Lanka can be proud of the way they fought back at SSC ground.

Dinusha, who faced 264 balls, was Lanka’s Superman with an invisible cape around him, registering his third hundred of series which was also his fourth 50-plus score in as many innings this series.

Dinusha faced as many as 722 balls and batted 1139 minutes over the course of the two-match series.

The 25-year-old also became the only third batter to score twin hundreds in a Test match where his team followed-on, joining India’s Vijay Hazare and Zimbabwe’s Andy Flower in an elite club.

This statistical marvel enabled Lanka to end their second innings at 429 for nine declared for an overall lead of 216 runs, and at that point the players shook their hands, signalling the stalemate. But the situation was way different when Sri Lanka resumed the day at 229 for six, a mere 16 runs ahead.

It seemed just a matter of time before the home side caved in. But the opposite happened as the Indians bowed to the spirit of the Lankan batters — Dinusha, who reached hundred in 196 balls, and Keshara Nuwantha (46, 150b). The two milked 112 runs for the seventh wicket in 246 balls, which saw Lanka safely treading the first



session without even losing a wicket. But India enjoyed a rare moment of delight in the initial part of the post-lunch passage, as Manav Suthar dislodged Nuwantha, whose edge was taken safely by Dhruv Jurel in the slip.

Sri Lanka then mounted a mini fightback through Dinusha and Prabath Jayasuriya (2, 28b). The eighth wicket pair added only 25 runs but took 74 balls for it, pushing the clock further. Ravindra Jadeja fetched another breakthrough as he

jettisoned Jayasuriya, inducing an edge from the batter for Jurel in the second slip.

But they ran into another obdurate Lankan - Lahiru Kumara, with whom Dinusha added 47 runs but consumed 170 balls to wipe out hopes of a victory from Indians’ hearts.

Kumara fell to Jadeja, but Asitha Fernando (0 not out, 24 balls) stayed with Dinusha till the end, ensuring that draw was the only possible result. Dinusha was the chief catalyst of that eventuality. How this young cricketer,

who is playing only his fifth Test, managed to rise above the situational pressure and cramping on his legs to bat the whole day will be a study material for several coaches and players in the years to come. There is this innate elegance to Dinusha’s batting especially while driving and pulling.

But today he was ready to play ugly, trusting his defensive game. He smothered spinners’ turn from the back foot and moved well behind the ball against the quicker bowlers. The Indians tried gamely even in patches, employing short-pitch balls and down leg side delivery tactics to deprive Dinusha of strike, and get the late order batters in line against spinners. It worked reasonably but just that the likes of Nuwantha and Kumara did not indulge in the expected slogging. They should be given truckload of credit for that. The tourists were also

not helped by the fact that lead pacer Mohammad Siraj was not at his best.

Gill’s captaincy too left a lot to be desired when the going was not smooth in the first session, and went to dressing room for a possible conversation with the coaching staff. But all that came to nothing, as Dinusha and the tailenders blunted the waves of attack. India, of course, will take solace from the fact that this was their first overseas Test series win since beating the West Indies in July 2023. Gill also registered his first Test series triumph away from home. But amidst all these notes, their failure to pluck four Lankan wickets in time to force a favourable result will irk them.

They might use bowling in successive innings as a shield for lack of bite on a wearing down fifth day pitch but deep down India will know that weak link persists. It’s an age-old problem too. (PTI)

Pakistan reduces England to 80-4 at lunch as Abbas takes three at Lord’s



FOSTER NIUMATA
■ London

Pakistan reduced England to 80-4 at lunch on the first morning of the Lord’s test on Thursday. New ball bowler Mohammad Abbas removed the opening batters and captain Joe Root in the first hour but England’s Jordan Cox survived to lunch as the hosts seek a series-clinching second win with a match to spare.

Heavy morning rain delayed the start for 80 minutes and returning Pakistan captain Babar Azam had no hesitation in muggy conditions forcing England to bat first on a green-tinged pitch. The decision paid off.

In the fifth over, Emilio Gay glanced Abbas down the leg side but wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan flung out his right glove in a dive and took a stunning catch.

Two overs later, the other opener, Ben Duckett, was out, leg before on 17 at 26-2. Pakistan had to overturn a not out decision to give Abbas his 900th first-class wicket.

Pakistan’s determination to get the prize wicket of Root

wasted a review before he scored. Then Imam-ul-Haq at third slip failed to catch out Root on 1 in Mohammad Ali’s first over.

The damage was minimal. Root was pinned on his back leg in the crease by Abbas on 4 and walked. Abbas had 3-17 in 33 deliveries and finished his first spell after eight overs without further success.

But Ali, the most expensive bowler in the morning, surprisingly claimed Brook seven minutes before lunch. Brook, the highest scorer in the first test win last week, left his gate open and Ali bowled him with a nip-backer on 15.

Cox was 27 not out at lunch with Dan Lawrence for company. England has the same the lineup which won the first test in Leeds last Friday by an innings in three days. Babar was Pakistan’s only change, replacing Salman Ali Agha, who led the team in Babar’s absence at Headingley. Babar missed the first test because of a finger injury. Pakistan has a good test record at Lord’s, winning its last two matches there in 2016 and 2018. (AP)

India tour of New Zealand drives record early ticket sales

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Wellington

India’s upcoming multi-format tour of New Zealand has driven record early demand, with 26,000 tickets sold in the first 48 hours of the host board’s pre-sale.

The 12-match tour, beginning in October, has emerged as the biggest draw in New Zealand Cricket’s Cricket Nation members’ pre-sale, which went live on Monday.

The white-ball matches at Auckland’s Eden Park have led the way in terms of



tickets sold, while strong demand has also been reported from Christchurch and Wellington.

Hagley Oval, which has a capacity of 9,000, is expected to sell out for the first two T20 Internationals on October 22 and 24 as well as the second and final Test from November 27 to December 1.

Early sales have also been strong for matches in Wellington, which will host the third T20I and second ODI, while the Basin Reserve will stage the opening Test from November 19.

New Zealand Cricket chief marketing and commercial officer Glenn Critchley said fans had responded to the call to secure tickets early.

“Our message to fans from the start has been to get organised to avoid missing out - and the record sales in the first two days proves many have listened,” Critchley was quoted as saying by NZC.

“This is a rare chance for Kiwis to experience the incredible buzz of a game of cricket involving India and watch some of the biggest sport stars on the planet

compete.

“We’ve deliberately kept the ticket prices the same as the previous season, and at under \$30 a ticket using our Cricket Nation access code,

“We’re delighted fans are getting in early to secure their seats and with the general public sale still 11 days away, our message remains the same - get organised and don’t miss out.” The general public sale will begin on September 7, but NZC said fans can access the pre-sale and receive a 15 per cent discount by signing up for Cricket Nation.

UAE batter Asif gets 15-month ban by ICC for failing dope test

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

UAE’s Pakistan-born batter Asif Khan has been handed a 15-month ban after testing positive for a banned anabolic steroid during an out-of-competition test conducted last year.

Asif tested positive for a metabolite of mesterolone, which is used to improve testosterone levels in a test conducted on September 8, 2025. “The 36-year-old admitted to a violation of Article 2.1 of the ICC Anti-Doping Code and accepted the sanction through a Case Resolution Agreement with



the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the International Cricket Council (ICC),” read a statement from cricket’s world governing body. The period of ineligibility has been backdated to

September 8, 2025 and will run until December 7 this year. “Asif will be permitted to return to training with a team or use the facilities of a club or other ICC Member organisation from October 8, but will only be eligible to return to competitive cricket from December 8,” the ICC statement said.

Asif’s individual results from September 8, 2025 until the start of his provisional suspension on December 29, 2025 have been disqualified. “This includes all resulting consequences, such as the loss of any medals, points, prize money or prizes.”

Pakistan may struggle to get bilateral series with top teams: Moin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Karachi

Former Test captain Moin Khan fears that Pakistan may struggle to arrange bilateral series with top teams in the world if the national team continues to perform poorly.

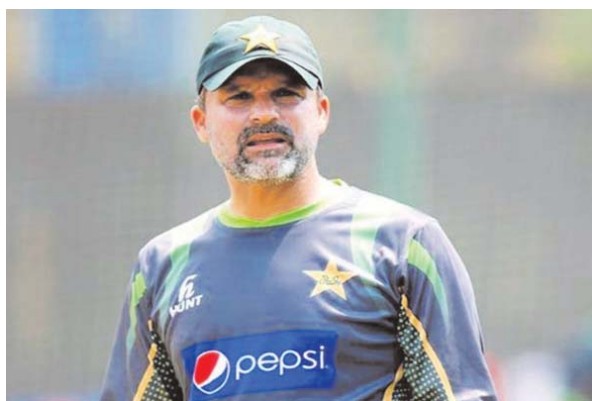
The wicketkeeper-batsman, who competed in 69 Tests and 219 ODIs for Pakistan, minced no words in blaming the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and its selectors for the current state of affairs.

“We have been struggling in all formats but notably in test matches and if this trend continues I am afraid people will lose interest in Pakistan cricket,” Moin said on a podcast. “We might find ourselves relegated to the

bottom half of the cricket world finding it difficult to get bilateral series with top teams. “I blame the frequent changes being made by the board in the cricket system including appointments/removal of captains, coaches, players and the inexplicable calls made by the national selectors.

“Unless you don’t have continuity, stability and faith in a captain, coach or players, how can you expect to achieve good results,” he said. Moin said in the last few years the frequent changes in domestic cricket and the national team had hit Pakistan cricket hard and players were losing confidence in the system.

Moin who earned a reputa-



tion as being a fighting cricketer and a man of crisis also noted that the PCB took decisions not as an institution but as per the personnel wishes of those who are in positions of power in the board at a

given time. “Whenever a chairman and management team is changed you see things change in our cricket system which are not necessarily productive. So where is the stability?,” he asked. Moin

also didn’t spare the players and expressed disappointment at the attitude of some players.

“I don’t want to harp on the past but to me it seems most players nowadays don’t give enough time to developing their skills and cricket temperament. It is more about how much money we can make in leagues rather than setting and reaching personal goals of excellence as a cricketer.”

Moin said when a player was successful money followed automatically. “When I played we earned in lakhs. Nowadays players earn in crores but players must also remember nothing is greater than playing for your country with success.” (PTI)

Aiming to pursue elite women’s cricket in Australia from March 2027: Anaya Bangar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Set to resume her cricketing journey in faraway Australia after being cleared to play at the community level, trans-athlete Anaya Bangar says she does not have a team yet but is confident of making the breakthroughs that would open up the Women’s Big Bash League for her next year.

Anaya, who is the daughter of former India cricketer Sanjay Bangar, played age-group men’s cricket for Mumbai before undergoing a gender-affirming surgery in March this year, completing a transition process that began in 2022.

“Today is an important day for me because after several

years away from competitive cricket, I can finally speak about a pathway back to the sport that has been such a significant part of my life,” the 25-year-old told reporters in a press conference in Mumbai on Wednesday night.

“I am preparing to return to women’s cricket in Australia with the aim of pursuing elite cricket from March 2027. I am not claiming that I have made a team. I am saying that I have been given the opportunity to compete for one, and I intend to work for it,” she added.

Anaya expressed gratitude towards Cricket Australia, saying the body has a framework designed to “balance fairness, competitive integrity and inclusion in women’s

sport”. “My understanding is that Cricket Australia’s review considered a comprehensive body of information relating to my circumstances, including my medical history, surgical history, hormone and testosterone levels, my cricketing background and training footage as well, and the scientific and athletic performance work undertaken with Manchester Metropolitan University’s Institute of Sport,” she said.

Anaya had previously appealed to the BCCI to allow her to participate in women’s cricket events but did not get a response from the Indian Board. The ICC banned transgender athletes from women’s competition in 2023. Anaya said her recent



examination suggests she could maintain similar testosterone levels when she undergoes another test in March next year, which would eventually pave the way for her joining elite women’s cricket.

“I have also undergone gender affirming surgery...which means my previous primary source of testosterone is no longer present. My most recent blood test in July recorded total testosterone at 0.6 nanomoles,” she said.

“If that March 2027 test confirms that I continue to meet the required testosterone criteria, I will be eligible to pursue selection for elite women’s cricket, including the Women’s Big Bash

League pathway,” she explained. Anaya said she wants to train and compete like any other athlete and does not want past history to have any impact. “Eligibility is not selection. Cricket Australia has given me a pathway, which does not mean that I have been given a place in a team,” she said.

“I still have to train, compete, perform and earn that opportunity. That’s exactly how I want it. I don’t expect my history or my identity to earn me a place on a cricket team. “I know there will be scrutiny, questions and different opinions. I respect that women’s sport has legitimate considerations about fairness and competitive integrity.” Anaya said

inclusion and fairness do not have to be treated as mutually exclusive principles.

“Good sporting policy should be capable of considering both.” Anaya said she knew getting back to cricket would be tough after undergoing the gender-affirming surgery. “For me personally, this is about more than a policy decision. I began playing cricket because I love the sport. I competed because I wanted to become better.” “When I transitioned, one of the most difficult possibilities I had to confront was that cricket might no longer have a place for me. I spent years trying to find a way back,” she said.

“Today, I finally have a pathway to try.”

FROM THE WORLD

MALAYSIA Former PM faces charges

Malaysian former Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob was charged Thursday with failing to declare his assets, making him the nation's third leader to face criminal charges after leaving office.

Ismail, 66, pleaded not guilty to a charge under the anti-graft law that alleged he failed to provide a complete declaration of assets following a notice from the anti-corruption agency in January 225. The charge sheet lists large amounts of cash in Malaysian and foreign currencies, as well as gold and silver.

If convicted, Ismail faces up to five years' imprisonment and a fine. Ismail, the country's ninth leader, unexpectedly became prime minister without a general election after emerging as a consensus figure during a turbulent political period. (AP)

NORWAY King Harald critically ill

Norwegian King Harald was in "very serious condition" as his health deteriorated, palace officials said on Thursday, prompting the queen and Crown Prince Haakon to cancel their engagements.

The 89-year-old monarch, who has hemolytic anemia and has been on sick leave for several weeks, was admitted to the National Hospital in Oslo earlier this month. His condition had previously stabilised following a bacterial blood infection but the royal palace on Thursday said it had worsened.

Haakon, his son, has been serving as regent during the king's time in the hospital.

Harald, who has been monarch since 1991, has been in and out of the hospital several times in recent years. In February, he was admitted to a hospital in Spain's Canary Islands during a winter vacation for treatment for a skin infection. (AP)

Regional powers seek off-ramp from West Asia war

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Jerusalem

Qatar and other regional powers sought an off-ramp from the war with Iran as another tanker attack was reported in the Strait of Hormuz, and the Iranian Government dismissed the Trump administration's latest sanctions.

Elsewhere in the West Asia, a Jerusalem court acquitted a man accused of beating a Catholic nun, but ordered him to undergo years of psychiatric hospitalisation over the attack, which drew global condemnation.

Israel's strikes in Gaza drew a sharp rebuke from the top diplomat overseeing the US-brokered ceasefire in the territory. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani was in Tehran on Thursday as part of Qatar's ongoing efforts



A pro-Govt demonstrator chants slogan during a gathering in a square in Tehran

AP

to resolve the conflict between the United States and Iran.

Qatar's foreign ministry said in a post on X that the meeting with

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi included talks on "the efforts being made to reduce escalation," as well as a proposed plan

between Iran and Oman to allow ships safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz and clear the vital commercial waterway of dangerous mines. Al Thani's office said the prime minister emphasised the "necessity of respecting the sovereignty of neighbouring countries and the freedom of navigation" on the strait.

Pakistan said on Thursday that it was also continuing diplomatic efforts to help resolve the crisis. Field Marshal Asim Munir visited Tehran recently with the aim of reviving the June memorandum of understanding to reopen the strait, the country's foreign ministry said.

US President Donald Trump told Al Jazeera on Wednesday that he has "no time schedule" to wrap up the conflict that will reach the six-month mark on Friday. He said he

believes his country is "winning very big."

Oil tanker attacked in Strait of Hormuz

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Organisation said on Thursday that it had received a report of an oil tanker hit in the Strait of Hormuz.

The monitoring agency, run by the British military, said that local authorities reported that the vessel was hit by an unknown projectile on Tuesday in the waters between Oman and Iran, causing it to catch fire. The crew was reported to be safe and there have been no reports of environmental damage, the UKMTO said.

Esmail Baghaei, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, wrote late Wednesday in a social media post

that the US had made a coalition with Bahrain, calling it a country with "virtually no meaningful economic exchange with Iran."

In another social media post on Wednesday, Iran's top negotiator and parliamentary speaker Bagher Ghalibaf thanked China for rejecting the US "economic D-Day" policies against Iran.

"We welcome China's principled statement rejecting illegal sanctions against Iran," Ghalibaf said. Earlier this week, Tehran had warned that it would respond harshly to expanded US sanctions, including measures against countries it sees as cooperating with Washington. Iran has repeatedly targeted Bahrain and other Gulf countries with missiles and drones since the US and Israel launched the war on February 28.

UK offers £5 million funds, emergency responders to Nepal

ADITI KHANNA ■ London

The UK on Thursday offered 5 million pounds and emergency responders to Nepal after flash floods in the country claimed hundreds of lives and left over a thousand missing, including around 33 British Nationals.

British Prime Minister Andy Burnham described the scenes emerging from the region as "devastating" and urged British Nationals caught up in the crisis to follow guidance from the local authorities.

He said immediate action already taken by the UK includes deploying consular support staff to the impacted area to facilitate round-the-clock support for British nationals. "It's a devastating picture that is emerging from what has happened in Nepal," Burnham told reporters during a visit to South Wales.

"An offer has been made of emergency responders to head to the region, but that's obviously a matter for the Nepalese Government. But also we've offered 5 million pounds to help with that response effort.

"Obviously, there are a number of British nationals who currently are thought to be missing and we'll be providing all the support we can to their families in what is a very distressing and devastating situation," he said.

The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) said it is looking to provide humanitarian support following a request by the Nepali Government for food, shelter



British PM Andy Burnham

and health services.

However, it indicated that comprehensive humanitarian assessments are likely to take some time due to the scale of the damage. "I spoke to the Nepali Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal this morning [Thursday] and expressed Britain's solidarity and deepest condolences for the disaster that has occurred," said Foreign Secretary Ed Milliband.

"I thanked him for the efforts of the Nepali Government in support of British nationals in the area. I also offered financial, search and rescue and other help to aid the disaster response. Above all, I told him we will do everything we can to help Nepal in its hour of need," he said.

The Foreign Office said it is engaging with development partners, donors and international allies on a coordinated response activity in the region following the natural disaster, which caused massive landslides. Global funds, to which the UK contributes, are said to be already disbursing funds to support the humanitarian response, such as the IFRC Disaster Relief Emergency Fund. (PTT)

Chinese premier Li visits flood-affected area in Tibet

KJM VARMA ■ Beijing

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Thursday visited the Gyirong Township near the Nepal border post in Tibet, where 36 people were reported missing after a massive flash flood that caused heavy casualties.

The flash flood struck the Gyirong Township in the Tibet Autonomous Region on Wednesday morning. It swept through villages and towns near the China-Nepal border area killing three in Tibet and 27 in Nepal, and leaving hundreds others missing. Li led a group of senior officials from relevant departments to the disaster-hit area, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The officials will supervise rescue and relief operations, and visit those affected by the disaster.

A directing group of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Western Theatre Command, which looks



after the India-China border in Tibet, was dispatched to the affected area on Thursday to coordinate joint rescue operations by military personnel in Gyirong County.

Meanwhile, preliminary information released by local authorities showed that 26 foreign nationals were currently missing in the area,

while further details were still being verified, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a media briefing.

Nearly 1 Chinese nationals were also missing in the affected area on the Nepalese side, he said, adding that the Chinese Embassy in Nepal is further verifying the information

Heavy rain, flooding in Japan strands people, vehicles

MARI YAMAGUCHI ■ Tokyo

Torrential rain struck Japan's north-central prefectures of Ishikawa and Toyama on Thursday, triggering flooding and landslides, closing roads and stranding people in flooded homes and vehicles.

The Japan Meteorological Agency issued the Level 5 heavy rain warning for parts of the Ishikawa and Toyama prefectures, urging residents in the affected areas to take precautionary measures against possible flooding and landslides.

The rain subsided later Thursday and the agency downgraded the heavy rain warning to medium, but cautioned residents that more rain and landslides are possible through Friday



morning. The agency predicted up to 2 centimetres (7.8 inches) of rain in the Kaga and Noto areas through Friday morning. The two prefectures advised more than 38, people to take shelter on safer grounds.

Footage on NHK public television showed several

stranded residents in Himi city in the Toyama prefecture being rescued on a rubber boat by relief workers who waded through knee-high waters. A number of vehicles that had stalled in flooded roads were abandoned.

In neighbouring Ishikawa

prefecture, west of Toyama, 27 homes in three municipalities were isolated due to flooding, though officials said there were no reports of injuries among the stranded residents. Heavy rain also triggered landslides and closed roads in Ishikawa.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara said several rivers overflowed in the two prefectures, flooding many homes without reported injuries. The severe weather caused power outages at more than 1, homes in Toyama and Ishikawa, according to the Hokuriku Electric Power Co.

Heavy rain and widespread flooding earlier this month in the Chiba prefecture, east of Tokyo, left 13 people dead. (AP)

SOUTH KOREA POLICE SEEK INDICTMENT OF 7 OVER JEJU AIR CRASH



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Seoul

South Korea's police said Thursday they were seeking indictments of seven transport ministry officials over the 224 Jeju Air crash that killed all but two of the 181 people on board.

The Boeing 737-8 operated by Jeju Air skidded off the runway at Muan International Airport in southern South Korea after its landing gear failed to deploy, slamming into a concrete structure and bursting into flames. Authorities have found traces of bird strike in the plane's engines and the plane's two black boxes stopped recording about four minutes before the crash. Many experts say the concrete structure, which housed a set of antennas called a localizer that guides aircraft during landings, must be blamed for the crash as well, as they should have been built with more easily breakable materials.

PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif nominates Barrister Iftikhar Gillani as PoK PM

M ZULQERNAIN ■ Lahore

Pakistan's ruling PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif has nominated Barrister Iftikhar Gillani for the so-called post of prime minister of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), a senior party leader said on Thursday.

The polls in the region's so-called legislative assembly were held in three phases on July 27, August 2 and August 3 and were marred by violent protests and massive rigging allegations.

The legislative assembly is likely to elect the prime minister on Friday.

Gillani, who was defeated from a seat he contested but later elected to the legislative assembly on a technocrat seat, has been finalised for the post on Nawaz Sharif's recommendation, a senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader said.



There are 53 seats in the PoK legislative assembly, 45 are directly elected, while eight are reserved for women, technocrats and clerics.

Gillani was defeated by Pakistan Peoples Party candidate Sardar Mukhtar Ahmed Khan Abbasi in a Muzaffarabad constituency. "Despite losing on a

direct seat, Gillani was awarded a reserved seat for technocrats and professionals on the recommendation of Nawaz Sharif," the PML-N leader said.

He added that three-time prime minister took the decision in consultation with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the PML-N's regional president Shah Ghulam Qadir, the region's former prime minister Raja Farooq Haider and others.

Nawaz Sharif and his daughter, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, had campaigned for Gillani during elections to garner support for him.

The assembly will elect the new prime minister without its full strength of 53. Elections to seven of the 45 directly elected seats — five in Poonch district and two in Sudhnoti district - could not be held due to what authorities described as a law and order situation. (PTT)

Republicans face midterm verdict as West Asia crisis drags on months longer than Trump promised

MIKE CATALINI/STEVEN SLOAN ■ Bethlehem

Mike Gibbons sat out the presidential election two years ago, frustrated that Democrat Kamala Harris did not take a stronger stand against Israel's war in Gaza and unable to bring himself to cast a vote for Republican Donald Trump. The 33-year-old restaurant server in this eastern Pennsylvania town that once housed one of the world's largest steelmakers is eager to vote for any Democrat he can in November. As the war with Iran that Trump initially said would last weeks surpasses six months on Friday, Gibbons is feeling the fallout



every time he fills his tank at nearly USD 1 per gallon more than last year. "The price of gas affects the price of everything's up and my pay hasn't gone up," he said. "I'm doing blue no matter who this time." The Iran war has

reshaped the rapidly approaching midterm elections, undermining Trump's campaign pledge to steer clear of foreign conflicts and challenging Republicans who would rather focus on their tax cuts as they cling to narrow majorities in

Congress. While the president's supporters are under-terred, the war's unpopularity and economic ripple effects could tilt the scales in tightly contested US House districts like the one in Bethlehem, where Republican Rep. Ryan Mackenzie is one of this year's most vulnerable incumbents. Midterm elections are always difficult for the party in power in Washington. But interviews with voters around the country show how a war that Trump expected to end with a swift victory could undermine the final years of his presidency. About two-thirds of US adults say the war with Iran has not been worth fight-

ing, according to a July poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That includes the vast majority of Democrats and independents, as well as more than one-third of Republicans. Although Trump has long criticised Iran's leadership, he did little to prepare Americans or allies for such a lengthy conflict. Republican President George W. Bush, for instance, spent more than a year making a case for launching a war in Iraq through speeches and attempts to build an international coalition. Trump did none of that. Trump has refused to acknowledge the war's cost, saying this month he would "never apol-

ogise" for higher prices stemming from it and insisting he did "the right thing" to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. His administration announced new sanctions this week in an attempt to further isolate Tehran. In Congress, Republicans have shifted from initially cheerleading Trump's moves in Iran to expressing concern about the toll of the war. But the party has largely unified to block measures that would curb Trump's war powers and leaders have shown no interest in cutting off money for the war, preferring to portray Democrats as extremists who cannot be trusted to govern.

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