



**PAGE 7
NATION**
Hydrogen train expansion depends on resource availability, operational needs, says Vaishnav



**PAGE 10
LAW & JUSTICE**
3 NTA subject experts primary sources of leak: CBI chargesheet

**PAGE 11:
BUSINESS**
India must build export-oriented medtech industry



**PAGE 13
GLOBAL**
Pope Leo to meet with clergy abuse survivors



**PAGE 15
SPORTS**
Praggnanandhaa wins St Louis Rapid & blitz



I am with you: PM to NDA MPs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

While 20 Lok Sabha members had left the TMC

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

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

House. The NCPI has joined the NDA and the Shiv Sena continues to be a constituent of the ruling alliance.

The Muslim MPs of the NCPI — Khalilur Rahaman, Yusuf Pathan and Abu Taher Khan — who skipped the NDA parlia-

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

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

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

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

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

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Chief Minister Hemant Soren presents a reward to forest workers during the 77th State Level Van Mahotsav at the Tana Bhagat Indoor Stadium in Ranchi on Friday. Gandey MLA Kalpana Soren was also present on the occasion. PNS

CM calls for public-led Green Movement at 77th Van Mahotsav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ RANCHI

Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Friday called for a balance between development and environmental conservation, describing climate change as one of the greatest challenges facing humanity.

Addressing the 77th State Van Mahotsav-2026 at Harivansh Tana Bhagat Indoor Stadium in Khelgaon, Ranchi, he urged every citizen to plant at least one tree and take responsibility for its protection.

Jharkhand. He stressed that rapid industrialisation, mining, urbanisation and unplanned development had placed immense pressure on natural resources, making it imperative to strike a balance between economic growth and ecological preservation.

"Development can be meaningful only when it progresses in harmony with nature," the Chief Minister said, adding that indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources had accelerated climate change and environmental degradation.

Highlighting the growing impact of climate change, Soren said its consequences were no longer confined to environmental concerns but were affecting agriculture, water resources, biodiversity and livelihoods. He pointed to increasing incidents of erratic rainfall, cloudbursts, prolonged droughts, heatwaves, lightning strikes and other natural disasters as evidence of changing climatic patterns. The CM noted that the adverse effects of climate change extended beyond humans to wildlife and biodiversity. Soren emphasised that environmental protection was not the sole responsibility of the government but a collective social and moral obligation.

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Santa Fe

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

In a ruling late on Thursday, Judge Bryan Biedscheid said the bulk of the money — \$420 million — will be used for treatment services for young people. The rest will go toward awareness and prevention, screening services and other costs over the next five years.

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

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

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

The ByStander

How CBI exposed NEET-UG 2026 paper leak plot

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

CONTINUED ON >> P4

RBI curbs coercive loan recovery practices

RAJESH KUMAR
■ New Delhi

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

Issuing this strict instruction, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has prohibited recovery agents from using abusive, threatening or intimidating language. Anonymous calls, repeated harassment, public humiliation or threats involving a borrower's family, assets or reputation are strictly forbidden.

Besides restricting the use of device-locking technology, the rules also lay down fresh standards for recovery agents, the handling of borrower information, and the use of technology during the recovery process.

The RBI has barred banks from turning

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

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

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

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

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

CONTINUED ON >> P4

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

PTI

Students set August 10 deadline after talks with Ministers

SURENDRA SOREN
■ Ranchi

The ongoing agitation over alleged irregularities in the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) and Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC) recruitment processes entered a crucial phase on Friday as a delegation of students held detailed talks with state ministers, while simultaneously setting August 10 as the deadline for the government to take concrete action on their demands.

Following the meeting, student representatives said the ministers listened

patiently to their concerns, acknowledged that the issues raised were genuine, and assured them that every demand and supporting document would be placed before Chief Minister Hemant Soren for serious consideration.

According to the delegation, the ministers observed that the matter was not confined to the interests of the current batch of aspirants

but was intrinsically linked to the future of coming generations, assuring them that the government would deal with the issue sensitively.

Despite welcoming the government's assurance, the protesting students maintained that verbal commitments alone would not be enough. They insisted that all major issues related to the JPSC and JSSC recruitment processes must be resolved through concrete decisions by August 10, warning that failure to do so would lead to their proposed Assembly gherao as scheduled.

The students reiterated that their protest would

remain peaceful and democratic but would witness large-scale participation. They also asserted that the agitation would continue until all their key demands—including cancellation of the 14th JPSC Combined Civil Services Examination, a CBI probe into the alleged recruitment irregularities, and comprehensive reforms in the state's recruitment system—are addressed.

The talks were held after the students reconstituted their negotiation panel in response to objections raised by the state government over the composition of the original delegation. The newly

formed 10-member delegation, comprising only student representatives, includes Rabindra Paswan, Piyush Kumar, Rajesh Prasad, Neetu Kujur, Ankit Raj, Kartik Soren, Shalu Kumari, Ravindra Kumar Ravi, Anand Kumar and Ankit Kumar.

The state government was represented during the discussions by ministers Sudivya Kumar, Chamra Linda, Deepika Pandey Singh and Sanjay Prasad, while Additional Chief Secretary Ajay Kumar facilitated the negotiations.

The restructuring of the delegation followed objections from Urban

Development Minister Sudivya Kumar, who had opposed the inclusion of the state's former Advocate General in the students' panel. During the Monsoon Session of the Jharkhand Assembly, the minister alleged that the agitation was being influenced by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the "coaching mafia," urging students to keep their movement free from political interference. He, however, reiterated the government's commitment to safeguarding the interests of genuine aspirants. With the first formal round of talks now concluded, attention has shifted to the government's next move.



NATIONAL HANDLOOM DAY GOVERNOR ADVOCATES DIGITAL MARKETING FOR HANDLOOM GROWTH

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

JAMSHEDPUR : Highlighting Jharkhand's vast handloom potential, Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar on Friday stressed the need to equip weavers with modern technology, innovative designs, branding, digital marketing, and stronger market linkages to help their products compete in national and international markets.

Addressing the 13th National Handloom Day celebrations at the Michael John Auditorium in Bistupur, the Governor said Jharkhand has a rich handloom and handicraft tradition rooted in its tribal and rural communities. He praised the state's globally recognised Tussar silk as a symbol of Jharkhand's craftsmanship and natural wealth.

The event, organised by the Weavers Development and Research Organisation (WDRO), brought together weavers, artisans, policy-makers, social activists, public representatives and handloom enthusiasts from across the country to celebrate



India's centuries-old weaving heritage. During the programme, Governor Gangwar felicitated outstanding weavers and artisans from various states with certificates and mementos in recognition of their contribution to preserving India's traditional weaving legacy.

Describing handloom as more than just an art form, the Governor said it represents India's civilisation, culture and traditions, with every handwoven fabric reflecting the country's diverse folk heritage. He urged society to collectively safeguard this legacy for future generations.

He also noted that National Handloom Day honours millions of weaving families whose skills and dedication support the country's economy. Calling the handloom sector one of the largest sources of rural employment, he said it plays a key role in advancing the vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat.

The event also featured exhibitions of handwoven textiles, silk products and handicrafts from different states, showcasing India's rich weaving traditions and indigenous techniques.

Former Member of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Anand Sahu, described the event as a historic occasion for Jamshedpur, saying it was the first time the city had hosted National Handloom Day celebrations on such a large scale with participation from artisans across several states. He said such initiatives would boost recognition for the handloom sector, encourage artisans to continue their craft and inspire younger generations to preserve India's weaving heritage.

Palamu launches real-time online monitoring of Govt schools

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

DALTONGANJ : In an effort to improve the functioning of government schools and enhance learning outcomes, the Palamu district education department has introduced a real-time online monitoring system covering primary, upper primary, secondary and Plus Two schools.

District Education Officer (DEO) Sandip Kumar said the initiative aims to check late opening of schools, teacher absenteeism, early closure, student attendance, mid-day meals, drinking water availability and classroom teaching. Schools are monitored through random phone and video calls conducted both before and after the lunch break.

The move comes after Deputy Commissioner con-

ducted surprise inspections at several schools, including residential institutions, and reviewed the attendance of teachers and students.

"Online monitoring gives us the actual physical count of teachers and students present in schools," Kumar said, adding that post-lunch monitoring is carried out carefully to curb the practice of teachers and students leaving before school hours end.

The monitoring system also tracks syllabus coverage and identifies subjects where students require additional support. During one such interaction with a government girls' school in Harihurganj, students reported difficulty in Mathematics. The concerned teacher was immediately connected online and advised to simpli-

fy classroom teaching.

Kumar said the initiative also helps assess Project RAIL (Regular Assessment for Improved Learning), which seeks to improve learning outcomes through continuous evaluation.

Students interacting with officials demanded better teaching of English, Mathematics and Science, with some remarking that "a teacher who does not teach in the classroom or even in tuition is a cheat."

The DEO acknowledged concerns over absenteeism in schools at Pipra and Pipra Tarn, saying both are under close watch. Officials also noted that attendance often declines during the monsoon, as many children accompany their families for agricultural work or cattle grazing.

Pakur Police solve double murder in 24 hours, accused arrested



KARTIK KUMAR : PAKUR

Pakur Police have arrested the accused in the brutal murder of a woman and her daughter in Jhena Gadia village under Littipara police station within 24 hours of the crime.

Addressing a press conference on Friday, Superintendent of Police Anudeep Singh said Abras Ansari alias Abras Momin (28), a resident of the same village, was arrested following a swift investigation by a Special Investigation Team (SIT). The murders took place on Thursday when the victims were allegedly killed by having their throats slit with a sharp-edged weapon. A case was registered at Littipara Police Station under Section 103(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Given the seriousness of the incident, an SIT was constituted under the supervision of the SDPO, Pakur. The team inspected the crime

scene, collected forensic evidence, sent the bodies for post-mortem examination and launched an intensive investigation using technical surveillance and human intelligence.

The SP said the accused was arrested within 12 hours of the investigation. During interrogation, he allegedly confessed to the crime.

Based on his statement, police recovered the blood-stained knife believed to have been used in the murders, along with the clothes and raincoat allegedly worn during the incident. The seized items have been sent for further examination.

The accused was produced before a court and remanded to judicial custody. Police said he also has a criminal history.

The SIT comprised officers from Pakur, Littipara and Hirapur police stations, along with personnel from the district's technical cell and armed police.

Special voter camps for addition of names on 08 and 09 August

SHATRUGHN PRASAD : DEOGHAR

District Election Officer Saurabh Kumar Bhuwania today urged eligible citizens to take advantage of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the Electoral Roll, 2026, by participating in special voter enrolment camps to be held across the district on August 8 and 9.

The camps will be organised at all polling stations from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. with the qualifying date fixed as October 1, 2026.

According to the DEO, citizens who will attain or have already attained the age of 18 years as on October 1, 2026, and are ordinary residents of any polling station area in Deoghar district, can apply for inclusion of their names in the electoral roll by submitting Form-6 along with the prescribed declaration. The camps will also facilitate family name transfers, enabling family members registered at different polling stations to shift their names to a single polling station for convenience. In addition, voters can submit Form-8 for correction of entries in the electoral roll, change of residence, issue of an Elector Photo Identity Card (EPIC) without corrections, or updating disability status and other electoral details.

Bhuwania appealed to all eligible citizens whose names are yet to be included in the electoral roll to visit their nearest polling station during the two-day special drive, complete the necessary formalities and ensure their registration.

Emphasising the importance of electoral participation, he said every vote is valuable in a democracy and urged residents not to miss the opportunity to enrol or update their voter details during the special camps.



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

DALTONGANJ : Just a day after concluding the month-long anti-narcotics Operation Prahar focused exclusively on narcotics, including cannabis, opium, poppy straw and brown sugar, whereas Operation Safaya is dedicated to tracing and curbing the circulation of illicit firearms.

Superintendent of Police Kapil Chaudhary said Operation Prahar focused exclusively on narcotics, including cannabis, opium, poppy straw and brown sugar, whereas Operation Safaya is dedicated to tracing and curbing the circulation of illicit firearms.

NML Talaipalli signs MoU with OP Jindal Community College for skill development

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

RAIGARH : NML Talaipalli Coal Mining Project signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with OP Jindal Community College (OPJCC), Punjipathra, Raigarh, to strengthen skill development initiatives for the youth of project-affected villages. The MoU was signed by Shri Anand Ji Agarwal, HoP I/C & General Manager (TS), NML Talaipalli, and Dr. R. D. Patidar, Vice Chancellor, OP Jindal University, in the presence of officials from both organisations.

Under the agreement, a three-month Skill Development Training Programme will be jointly implemented to equip project-affected youth with industry-oriented vocational skills. The programme aims to enhance their employability, improve livelihood opportunities, and prepare them for meaningful careers in various industrial sectors.



The collaboration supervised by Raigarh district administration reflects NML Talaipalli's continued commitment to community development, youth empowerment, and sustainable livelihood generation. By fostering industry-academia partnerships, the project seeks to create a skilled local workforce and contribute to the socio-economic development of the surrounding communities.

ESL Steel's key products earn GreenPro certification

PNS : BOKARO

ESL Steel Limited, a subsidiary of Vedanta Iron and Steel (VISL), has secured the prestigious CII GreenPro Ecolabel Certification for its V-WIRRO Wire Rod and V-DUCPIPE Ductile Iron Pipe, marking another milestone in its sustainability journey.

With this, the company's three flagship products-V-Xega TMT Bars, V-WIRRO Wire Rods and V-DUCPIPE Ductile Iron Pipes-are now GreenPro certified, reflecting its commitment to environmentally responsible manufacturing.

The GreenPro Ecolabel, developed by the Confederation of Indian



Industry (CII), recognises products that meet stringent life-cycle-based standards for carbon footprint, resource efficiency and environmental performance. Ravish Sharma, CEO and Whole-time Director of ESL Steel Limited, said the certification underscores the company's focus on responsible manufacturing and sus-

tainable growth. He added that ESL Steel remains committed to delivering high-quality, environmentally friendly steel solutions.

The company said it will continue to promote innovation, energy efficiency and green technologies to support sustainable industrial development.

Dumka Forest Division bags prestigious Water Management award

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

DUMKA : Setting a benchmark in ecological governance, the Dumka Forest Division has added a national feather to its cap by winning the Excellence in Water Management Award at the 3rd National Sustainable Agriculture Summit and Awards 2026 in New Delhi.

The prestigious honor acknowledges the division's pioneering efforts in harmonizing water conservation, forest protection, and sustainable rural livelihoods. Leveraging various initiatives of the Government of India and the Jharkhand Forest Department, the division meticulously executed large-scale afforestation drives alongside critical soil and water conservation works. Ground-level interventions such as check dams, gabion structures, and contour trenches have drastically improved groundwater table recharge, curbed soil erosion, and enriched local biodiversity. Crucially, the conservation model went beyond environmental protection to address rural economic resilience. By integrating sustainable forestry with alternative livelihood opportunities like poultry and duck rearing, the division fostered an inclu-



Officials of Dumka Forest Division receive the Excellence in Water Management Award at the 3rd National Sustainable Agriculture Summit 2026 in New Delhi. PNS

sive growth framework. This symbiotic approach-merging water security, ecological preservation, and active community participation-has provided a stellar blueprint for sustainable agriculture and resource management in the region.

JMM continues Service Camp for Kanwariyas in Deoghar



PNS : DEOGHAR

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha service camp for Kanwariyas is continuing uninterrupted. The camp was inaugurated on the 28th by

Minister Hafizul Hassan and MLA Uday Shankar Singh alias Chhunna Singh under the leadership of district president Sanjay Sharma. The service has been ongoing for the past 10 days.

Halwa and kheer are distributed at the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha service camp every Sunday. Medical facilities are also available at the camp. Kanwariyas rest at the camp during the night.

Those mainly present at the service camp included district president Sanjay Sharma, central committee member Parimal Singh, senior leader Suresh Shah, Manoj Das, Nandkishore Das, Tej Narayan Verma, Kedar Kumar Das, former candidate Sanjay Das, Dhanu Rawat, Parmeshwar Yadav, Pramod Choudhary and others.

SBPS hosts Art-Integrated Exhibition

PNS : RANCHI

Sarala Birla Public School (SBPS), Ranchi, organised Kalanjali - The Art Integrated Exhibition, offering Class X students a platform to showcase creativity, critical thinking and subject knowledge through innovative interdisciplinary projects.

Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the exhibition integrated art, experiential learning and computational thinking, enabling students to connect classroom concepts with real-world applications. The exhibits covered subjects including English, Hindi,



Sanskrit, Mathematics, Science, Social Science and Artificial Intelligence.

Some of the key projects included Nelson Mandela, A Triumph of Surgery, Reflection, Rhizonex, Rhizonex (AI Mobile App), Food Travels, Non-Cooperation Movement, Water Resource, Algebraic Identity Finder, Pop Sound Test for Hydrogen and

Subhashitani.

Students, teachers and visitors appreciated the originality, presentation skills and innovative approach reflected in the exhibits, which highlighted the integration of academic learning with research and technology.

Principal Manisha Sharma said Kalanjali reflects the vision of NEP 2020 by promoting experiential, multidisciplinary and competency-based learning. She added that such initiatives help nurture creativity, collaboration, innovation and critical thinking, preparing students to become confident and future-ready global citizens.

Operation Safaya launched to crack down on illegal arms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

DALTONGANJ : Just a day after concluding the month-long anti-narcotics Operation Prahar focused exclusively on narcotics, including cannabis, opium, poppy straw and brown sugar, whereas Operation Safaya is dedicated to tracing and curbing the circulation of illicit firearms.

Superintendent of Police Kapil Chaudhary said Operation Prahar focused exclusively on narcotics, including cannabis, opium, poppy straw and brown sugar, whereas Operation Safaya is dedicated to tracing and curbing the circulation of illicit firearms.

Clarifying that the new initiative will not replace the earlier campaign, the SP said both operations will continue simultaneously. "The launch of Operation Safaya does not mean Operation Prahar has taken a back seat. Police will continue both drives together," he said. According to

police sources, Palamu has a widespread "katta culture", with country-made firearms remaining common across the district. While licensed firearms continue to be viewed as a status symbol by affluent sections, locally made weapons, costing between Rs 6,000 and Rs 8,000, are

often purchased by those unable to obtain licensed arms. Highlighting the success of Operation Prahar, the SP said police seized over 375 kg of cannabis, more than 6 kg of opium, 48 kg of poppy straw, and 5.49 grams of brown sugar, while registering 11 FIRs against 19 accused.



Deputy Development Commissioner Aniket Sachan inspiring local artisans at the Jharcraft Dumka center. PNS

KUMAR PRABHAT : DUMKA

Dumka celebrated the 12th National Handloom Day with a programme organized by Jharcraft at the District Industry Centre premises to honour the region's rich handloom heritage and discuss measures for the welfare of local artisans.

Deputy Development Commissioner Aniket Sachan, the chief guest, said Dumka has a strong legacy in handlooms and handicrafts. He

announced that the district administration, Jharcraft, the Silk Board and the Ministry of Textiles would work together to provide weavers with design training, e-marketing support and better market access. He assured artisans that while they focus on production, the administration would help ensure market linkages for their products.

Special guest and Jharkhand State Minority Commission member Ikrarul Hasan described handlooms as a

symbol of self-reliance, cultural heritage and indigenous pride. He reaffirmed the commission's commitment to improving the socio-economic conditions of tribal and minority weavers and stressed the need to empower women artisans through modern design training and effective marketing. The programme was attended by experts from the Union Ministry of Textiles, the Silk Board, and Jharcraft, including Satyendra Kumar, Sabiha, Mousumi Saha, Bobby Devi, Namita Hansda and Ruby Devi. Discussions focused on preserving traditional crafts, enhancing skills, integrating contemporary designs and expanding market opportunities for authentic handloom products. Organised by the Jharcraft Dumka cluster under the supervision of Abdul Qadir, the event saw enthusiastic participation from weavers, artisans and government officials committed to strengthening the region's handloom sector.

200-yr-old house collapse in Hazaribagh reveals cache of silver coins

SURENDRA SOREN : HAZARIBAGH

A centuries-old mud house that collapsed due to heavy rain in Amanari village under Tatijharia block has revealed what villagers describe as a hidden treasure, with more than 300 old silver coins found buried inside one of its walls.

The coins spilled out after an earthen pot concealed within the wall broke apart when the structure collapsed.

According to Nand Kishore Prasad, son of homeowner Baiju Mahto, the coins belong to their family. He said the house is nearly 200 years old, while his father is about 91 years old, making it a property passed down through at least four generations.

Prasad said this was not the first time silver coins had been discovered in the

house. Similar coins had surfaced during an earlier wall collapse, but this time the quantity was significantly larger.

He also spoke of a long-held family belief that anyone who takes the coins home faces misfortune. "Because of this belief, not a single coin has been touched by anyone, even after more than 24 hours," he said.

Local officials have

reportedly visited the village after learning about the discovery. The family said they have informed authorities about how the coins were found and are awaiting further directions.

The discovery has drawn considerable attention in the area, with villagers gathering to catch a glimpse of the rare cache while leaving the coins undisturbed pending official action.



Opposition stalls House proceedings over job exam 'irregularities'

ROSHAN KUMAR : RANCHI

Protests intensified on the second day of the Jharkhand Assembly's Monsoon Session over alleged irregularities in competitive examinations conducted by the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) and the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC).

The NDA opposition MLAs-led by Leader of the Opposition Babul Marandi along with members from the BJP, AJSU, and LJP-staged a demonstration inside the assembly premises prior to the day's proceedings.

Stalling proceedings on the second day of the Monsoon Session, the Opposition MLAs trooped into the well of the House, raising slogans like "Hemant Soren quit office". Amid the ruckus created by the saffron party legislators, Speaker Rabindra Nath Mahato urged them to go back to their seats.

The NDA lawmakers raising slogans in support of the protesting students, accused the Hemant Soren-led government of ignoring student grievances.

Opposition leaders demanded the



Opposition leader Babul Marandi along with BJP MLAs wear protest jacket during a protest against Chief Minister Hemant Soren during the ongoing Monsoon Session of State Assembly in Ranchi on Friday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

immediate resignation of Chief Minister Hemant Soren and insisted on a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the 14th JPSC Civil Services exam and other competitive tests. Babul Marandi questioned the government's reluctance to engage in dialogue, stating that why is the government shying away from

holding talks with the students? The administration is intentionally avoiding dialogue out of sheer stubbornness.

Nirmal Mahato (AJSU) staged a unique protest and alleged that JPSC and JSSC exam seats are being sold, accusing the government of making excuses to avoid holding genuine

talks.

Naveen Jaiswal (BJP) called out the hypocrisy within the ruling coalition, pointing out that Rahul Gandhi speaks directly with students rather than taking up the matter with the Chief Minister, despite Congress being a coalition partner in the state government.

Another BJP MLA Neera Yadav termed the previous CID probe and government invitations to students a "propaganda stunt," emphasizing that opposition support for student agitation will continue until a CBI inquiry is ordered.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Dr. Irfan Ansari defended the government, stating that the state remains open to discussions despite errors found in the list of demands submitted by the students. He accused the BJP of playing political games from behind the scenes.

Minister Ansari noted that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had already interacted with the protesting students, assuring them that the government would review their demands and reach an amicable solution.



Brahma kumaris sister tie Raksha Bandhan to Chief Minister Hemant Soren at State Assembly in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

CID summons 3 JPSC members for questioning

SURENDRA SOREN : RANCHI

The Crime Investigation Department (CID) has summoned all three serving members of the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) for questioning as part of its ongoing investigation into alleged irregularities in the 14th Combined Civil Services Examination.

According to official sources, Dr Ajita Bhattacharya, Dr Anima Hansda and Dr Jamal Ahmad have been asked to appear before the investigating agency between August 10 and August 14. The three members will be questioned separately over the course of the week.

The three were appointed as JPSC members on September 2, 2021, following approval by the Jharkhand Cabinet in August 2021.

The latest development comes after former JPSC chairman and former Jharkhand Chief Secretary L Khiyangte, who resigned amid the



controversy, was questioned by the CID on four separate occasions in connection with the alleged examination irregularities.

So far, more than 14 people linked to the alleged recruitment scam have been arrested as the investigation continues. The CID has been examining allegations of irregularities in the conduct of the examination, evaluation process and recruitment procedure, with the probe expected to widen further in the coming days.

Ink attack on AISA leader during students' Assembly March



AISA national president Neha Bora after ink was thrown at her during an Assembly March in Ranchi on Friday. Pics by Vinay Murmu

MRITUANJAY KUMAR : RANCHI

The incident involving ink being thrown at AISA National President Neha Bora during a student march-organized to protest alleged irregularities in JPSC and JSSC examinations in Jharkhand-is escalating. Following the incident, Bora targeted BJP and RSS, questioning whether the attack was orchestrated at the behest of the Central Government to suppress the student movement.

A joint march was organized in Ranchi by the All India Students' Association (AISA) and the Inquilabi Naujawan Sabha to protest alleged irregularities in the JPSC and JSSC exams on Friday. She was leading the march. While the procession was moving from the Old Assembly building towards Karam Toli School, a young man allegedly threw ink at her face, hair, and clothes from behind.

After the incident, the AISA National Chief held a press conference at the residence of a CPI(M) MLA. She said that she would not be intimidated by such incidents and that the student-youth movement would not be weakened by them.

Bora alleged that the BJP and RSS are engaging in indirect politics to suppress the student movement. She asserted that students and the youth would not forget these events. She claimed that such attacks are being orchestrated to weaken the student movement-the very movement that had successfully forced the resignation of the Union Education Minister.

The Students' Leader remarked that since the student-youth movement has already withstood the use of tear gas and pellet guns, it cannot be suppressed by acts like ink-throwing. She added that the student movement would respond to the politics of hatred. She claimed that the youth who threw ink at her is Amarnath Pandey, aged 26. She further added that he is a resident of Hazaribagh and is pursuing Hindi Honours at Vinoba Bhawe University. Bora alleged that the youth is a member of the RSS and a supporter of the BJP. They demanded that the police investigate and disclose the young man's identity and his political-organizational affiliations.

A bizarre incident took place on Friday involving AISA National President Neha Bora, who had arrived in Ranchi to support the ongoing student protest. Ink was thrown at Neha Bora during the AISA march to the Legislative Assembly, and slogans of "Jai Shri Ram" were raised in her presence.

In a first in country, Assembly tables SLBC annual report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

RANCHI : The Jharkhand Legislative Assembly on Thursday tabled the Annual Report of the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) during the second day of the Monsoon Session, with the state government claiming that it is the first legislative assembly in the country to place the SLBC report before the House. Presenting the report, Finance Minister Radha Krishna Kishore informed the Assembly that the initiative reflects the government's commitment to greater transparency and legislative oversight in the banking and financial sector.

The minister said Jharkhand's Credit-Deposit (CD) Ratio has improved significantly, rising from 50.22% in 2024 to 54.97% in 2026, registering an increase of 4.75 percentage points over the past two years. He informed the House that 41 banks operating through 3,540 branches across the state have extended loans worth Rs 2,22,613 crore. Highlighting the performance of key financial inclusion schemes, Kishore said loans worth Rs 276 crore have



Finance Minister Radha Krishna Kishore tables the SLBC Annual Report for the first time in State Assembly on Friday. Pics JvsTV

been sanctioned to 3,030 beneficiaries under the Guruji Credit Card Scheme. Under the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme, loans amounting to Rs 9,240 crore have been approved for 13.58 lakh farmers. The minister also said that 2.61 lakh Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have received loans worth Rs 7,700 crore, while MSME lending in the state has reached 752,885 crore. In addition, he noted that around 43,000 beneficiaries are being linked to the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and supporting small businesses. The Finance Minister said the improving banking indicators reflect expanding access to institutional credit and the state's continued focus on financial inclusion, rural lending and enterprise development.

Heavy police deployment for students Assembly march

PNS : RANCHI

Security arrangements in the State Capital, Ranchi, have been tightened in view of the student protests regarding the alleged paper leak case on Friday. A huge number of security force personnel were deployed in the route of the assembly march to prevent any untoward incident during the protest.

The police made extensive preparations to handle the situation during the monsoon session of the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly. AISA organized a march to the Assembly, the march began from Birsah Chowk around 2 PM.

Meanwhile, the protesting students also announced plans to lay siege to the Assembly on August 10. In light of these events, the Ranchi Police implemented a three-tier security arrangement.

Security arrangements in the State Capital, Ranchi, have been tightened in view of the student protests regarding the alleged paper leak case.

Ranchi Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rakesh Ranjan is overseeing the security opera-

tions during the protest march. In addition to four IPS officers, two more IPS officers have been deployed to monitor the Assembly complex and the march route. Furthermore, 15 Dy SPs, 30 inspectors, 100 sub-inspectors, and approximately 1,000 police personnel have been assigned to security duties.

Police forces deployed along the entire route from Jagannathpur Temple to the Assembly complex to maintain law and order during the march.

A large number of CCTV cameras have been installed to monitor the Assembly complex and surrounding sensitive areas. The police have also arranged for additional forces and necessary resources to handle any emergency. A police official informed that all security preparations have been completed. The march and protest activities will be continuously monitored to prevent any untoward incidents, he added.

Student wings of Left-wing parties-including AISA-along with several social organizations, have called for a march to the Legislative Assembly in support of the movement.



Police personnel stand guard to avert any untoward incident during students' protest in Ranchi. PNS

Edelweiss MF launches Edelweiss Nifty REITs and Realty Index Fund, India's first REIT-based Index Fund

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

MUMBAI : Edelweiss Asset Management Company Ltd (Edelweiss MF/ EMF/ EAMC) today announced the launch of Edelweiss Nifty REITs & Realty Index Fund, India's first REIT-based Index Fund. The New Fund Offer (NFO) will be open for subscription from August 5, to 19, 2026.

The open-ended index scheme seeks to replicate the Nifty REITs & Realty Total Return Index (TRI), subject to tracking error. The fund provides investors with exposure to India's listed real estate ecosystem through a diversified passive investment strategy by investing in listed Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and listed real estate stocks. The underlying index currently maintains a minimum 60% allocation to listed REITs, with the



remaining allocation comprising listed real estate companies. The index methodology is constructed in such a way that the allocation to REITs can increase upto 100% as the eligible listed REIT universe expands.

Speaking on the launch of the fund, Radhika Gupta, MD & CEO, Edelweiss Asset Management Company Ltd, said, "Real estate has long been an important asset class for Indian investors, but access has often been limited by high capital requirements and operational complexities.

REITs have helped democratize access to quality, income-generating real estate assets through a regulated and transparent structure. With India's first REIT-based index fund, we are making it even simpler for investors to gain diversified exposure to this asset class through a low-cost and accessible investment solution. We believe this fund expands investment opportunities and helps investors build more diversified portfolios."

The scheme will be managed by Bharat Lahoti and Manasi Jalgaonkar.

CUJ ORGANISES WORKSHOP ON NEW LABOUR REGULATIONS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

RANCHI : The Central University of Jharkhand (CUJ) organized a one-day workshop on "Ensuring Compliance: Navigating the New Labour Regulations" at the Seminar Hall of the Vivekanand Central Library on Friday. The workshop aimed to familiarize university officials with the latest labour laws notified by the Government of India and to promote effective statutory compliance across various administrative sections.

The programme began with the inaugural address by Vice-Chancellor Prof. Sarang Medhekar. Addressing the

participants, he emphasized that the success of an educational institution depends not only on academic excellence but also on transparent, efficient, and legally compliant administration. He said that the new labour codes safeguard employees' rights while strengthening institutional accountability. He urged all officials to understand the new legal provisions thoroughly and implement them effectively in their day-to-day administrative work.

The Registrar, in his address, stated that the University is fully committed to protecting employees' welfare and ensuring strict



compliance with government regulations. He noted that regular capacity-building programmes help officials stay updated with changing laws and improve administrative efficiency. He encouraged

participants to apply the knowledge gained during the workshop in their respective departments for better governance and institutional effectiveness.

The workshop featured K.C.

Sahu, Deputy Chief Labour Commissioner (Central), Asansol, as the keynote resource person. He delivered detailed sessions on the Code on Wages, 2019 and the Code on Social Security, 2020, explaining their key provisions, statutory requirements, and practical implementation. He also interacted with the participants during an engaging question-and-answer session.

The second technical session was conducted by Dr. Pragyan Pushpanjali, Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, CUJ, who explained the important provisions of the Industrial

Relations Code, 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020. She highlighted the importance of ensuring a safe workplace and complying with labour laws in higher educational institutions.

Officials from the General Administration, Finance & Accounts, Office of DSW, Purchase, Engineering, Estate, Legal Cell, and Security Office actively participated in the workshop. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks, and participants described the workshop as highly informative, practical, and beneficial for strengthening statutory compliance within the University.

IN FOCUS



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

PTI

Karnataka Govt committed to caste census: Shivakumar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

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

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

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



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

PTI

among communities.

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

state Government on May 27, 2026.

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

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

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

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

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

Wrong-side driving cases up by 113% in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



strengthened citizen participation to boost local traffic management.

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

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

Manoj Dwivedi takes charge as NDMC chairperson

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

Shortly after taking charge,



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

Keshav Chandra had led NDMC from November 2024 to

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

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

Commerce and Industry.

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

Nipah survivor discharged after two months of treatment in Kerala

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Thiruvananthapuram

A 43-year-old man, who was critically ill after contracting the Nipah virus, was discharged from the Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode on Friday after making a full recovery, Kerala Health Minister K Muralaleedharan said.

The Farook native, who had been on ventilator support for nearly one-and-a-half months, walked out of the hospital without assistance and had regained normal cogni-



FROM PAGE - 1

I am with you: PM...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Centre directs Meta to curb deepfakes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RBI curbs coercive loan recovery practices

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How CBI exposed NEET-UG 2026 paper leak plot

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

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

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

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

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

and its effectiveness, the report said.

PM-Badal meet fuels reunion buzz

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

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

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

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

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

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

80th Independence Day to feature Vande

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

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

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

Meta acknowledges gaps in algorithms during talks with Indian Govt

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

form is not just a passive host.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rebel TMC MLAs meet Adhikari on SIR, loudspeaker in mosques

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

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

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

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

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



places as far as Cooch Behar in North Bengal.

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

The meeting took place at State secretariat Nabanna.

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

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

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

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

Pro-Mamata TMC slams NCPI MPs as they meet Modi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ranchi

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

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

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

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

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



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

PTI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nation Focus



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

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

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

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

(PTI)



India rejects criticism of FCRA bill by US lawmakers

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

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

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

(PTI)

Cross-border IED conspiracy on train: NIA chargesheets 2

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Uttarakhand Cabinet clears Ganga Expressway extension to Haridwar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Dehradun

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

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

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

The 594-km Ganga



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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

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

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

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

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

The protesting employees



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

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

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

Government fails to address their demands.

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

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

States Focus



VP RADHAKRISHNAN ON 2-DAY ANDAMAN VISIT FROM AUGUST 8

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

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

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



HARYANA WORKING TO PROTECT ARAVALLIS: BHUPENDER YADAV

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

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

Punjab DNT delegation seeks certificates, welfare support from Union Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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



Rajya Sabha MP Satnam Singh Sandhu



Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Dr Virendra Kumar

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

The meeting also focused on expanding access to the

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



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

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

Bhavan Cultural Centre.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his Government will keep supporting the handloom sector,

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

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

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

The prime minister also appealed to people to share their

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

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

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

Congress issues whip for MPs to ensure presence in Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Chairman CP Radhakrishnan had

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

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

mentary committees were tabled.

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

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

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

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

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

Jairam Ramesh hits back at Sitharaman on taxation bill

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

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

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



wallets before laundering it with contacts in Delhi.

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

for these fake services.

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

trail and send it out of the United States.

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

PM Modi to address IIT Delhi convocation, launch Param Pragya



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Saturday address the 57th convocation ceremony of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. Over 3,000 graduating students, including 587 PhD scholars, will be conferred their degrees during the ceremony.

Recognising outstanding academic excellence, the prime minister will present the institute's most prestigious honours, including the President's Gold Medal, Director's Gold Medal, Shankar Dayal Sharma Gold

Medal, and Perfect Ten Gold Medals to meritorious students, an official statement said on Friday.

Emphasising India's commitment to advancing cutting-edge research and artificial intelligence, Modi will inaugurate Param Pragya, an AI-powered high-performance supercomputing facility established at the Sonipat Campus of IIT Delhi.

The state-of-the-art facility is expected to significantly enhance the institute's capabilities in AI, data science, advanced computing and interdisciplinary research.

Assam floods: Toll rises to 97 and 1.68 lakh affected

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

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

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

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

More than 1.68 lakh people



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

PIONEER PHOTO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Railways runs first fuel train to Kashmir Valley via USBRL

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Senior first officers must join AI Express to become commanders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi/Mumbai

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Leh/Jammu

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

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

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

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

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

The lieutenant governor

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

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

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



ensure safer roads, uninterrupted connectivity and greater resilience against

natural hazards.

"The recent flash floods, landslides and rockfalls have

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

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

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

During the meeting, BRO

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

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

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

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

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



Editor's TAKE

Free UPI no longer guaranteed

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

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

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

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

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

The missing workforce in India's EV transition

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

JAYANTA MITRA

GATI KOCHAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIC TALK

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

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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CREAMY LAYER RULE SHOULD COVER SC, ST RESERVATIONS

Apropos "Creamy layer principle not applicable to quotas for SCs, STs: Govt's affidavit to SC," The Pioneer, August 7. The Central Government's decision to oppose the application of the creamy layer principle to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) is difficult to justify. Reservations were introduced to address the historic social discrimination and exclusion faced by these communities and to provide equal opportunities.

However, allowing economically and socially advanced families within these categories to continue enjoying reservation benefits generation after generation defeats the larger objective of affirmative action. Many families have already achieved financial stability, quality education, and professional success, yet they continue to

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

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

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

We hired a stranger and called It recruitment

RACHNA LAKHPATI

2ND OPINION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RBI keeps repo rate unchanged

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

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

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

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

Restore full statehood to Jammu & Kashmir

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

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

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

VANDANA | CHANDIGARH

Keep UPI payments free

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

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

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

VIJAYKUMAR HK | RAICHUR

The new axis and the battle for the next world order

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



BHAVNA SINGH

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

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

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

Two playbooks, one retreat

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

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

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

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



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

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

Whose order wins?

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

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

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

The writer is a Visiting Fellow at the Chintan Research Foundation

Immigration crisis: The open sky and the Guarded Gate



ACHARYA PRASHANT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Punjab Congress and the politics of parallel power



MONIKA MALIK

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

election after spending months fighting itself.

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

That disconnect has repeatedly produced an uneasy compromise: Delhi seeks balance, while Punjab demands clarity. The result has often been an unresolved succession rather than a settled leadership. As Punjab heads towards another Assembly election, the Congress faces a challenge that is bigger than choosing its next chief ministerial face or settling another internal dispute.

Punjab Congress has never lacked leaders. It has produced some of the state's tallest political figures. But it has repeatedly struggled to ensure smooth leadership transitions. Instead of one accepted leader, the party has often found itself divided between rival camps, each claiming to represent the real Congress. For any political party, healthy competition among leaders is natural. The problem begins when that competition overshadows the organisation itself. When leaders spend more time strengthening their own camps than strengthening the party, elections become harder to fight and victories become harder to sustain.

The writer is Chief Reporter with The Pioneer, Chandigarh

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Order Order

SC refuses to interfere in election plea against Baghel



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

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

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

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

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

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

TN CM Vijay's wife Sankgeetha withdraws divorce petition



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



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



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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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



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

"The prescribed manner of verification under the

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

The petition sought a

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



to her death. The bench asked Ghaziabad-based super speciality St Joseph (Mariam) Hospital and Khajan Singh Mannvi Health Care to pay ₹10 lakh and ₹2 lakh to the father of the girl within four weeks.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

office does not erase criminal liability for unaccounted money.

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

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

Upadhyay said there is no



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

immunity from prosecution," he submitted.

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

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

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

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

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

coercive police action.

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SC reserves verdict on TN quota for Muslim converts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

efits solely on account of conversion to Islam.

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

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

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

During the hearing, the state Government contend-



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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87 proposals received under BHAVYA scheme: Govt

Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada

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

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

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

RBI rejects Religare’s proposal for demerger

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

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

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

Odisha attracts ₹41,748 cr in food processing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

Speaking further, the chief minister noted that Odisha’s

The Pioneer

RANCHI | SATURDAY | AUGUST 8, 2026

India not in favour of separate BRICS currency: Piyush Goyal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

India must build export-oriented medtech industry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Build AI safeguards before adoption: CEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

“I don’t think we will have the luxury of time, particular-

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

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

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

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

Stock markets decline dragged by banks, elevated crude oil prices

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rupee settles on flat note, up 2 paise at 95.20

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

against the US dollar.

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

remain volatile over any decision over the weekend.

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

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

Private sector investment moving at steady pace: Economic Affairs Secretary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 per cent while preserving macroeconomic stability”.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM THE WORLD

SYRIA

14 wounded in bus blast

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

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

ITALY

Heat wave strikes Europe

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

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

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

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



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Colombo

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

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

Student kills 5 people at high school in Thailand

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Nonthaburi

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

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

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



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

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

gunshot wounds. Earlier reports gave conflicting casualty numbers.

A witness said students hid inside a classroom while they

Zelenskyy to make first visit to Russia-friendly Serbia

JOVANA GEC ■ Belgrade

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ahead of the visit, Vucic said he and Zelenskyy will



discuss cooperation in various fields and their countries' paths toward EU membership. Vucic said Serbia does not intend to change its position on Russia sanctions. "As far as sanctions are concerned, let me tell you directly: Serbia has established its policy," Vucic said on Friday. He added that Serbia's stand "has not changed and this will remain so for the time being."

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

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

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

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

Serbia has been told it could lose access to EU funds and cannot move ahead with its EU membership bid because of its Moscow ties and general democratic backsliding under Vucic, who has faced a year of youth-led protests following a train station disaster in November 2024 that killed 16 people.

Vucic and Zelenskyy have met on several occasions since the start of the Russian invasion. Vucic travelled to Ukraine twice to attend summits on strengthening European support for Kyiv's fight against Russian aggression, but each time he refused to sign a joint declaration calling for tougher sanctions against Moscow. (AP)

Iran deal nears: Trump faces pressure to compromise

BEN FINLEY/MATTHEW LEE
Washington

To reach a deal with Iran that reopens the economically vital Strait of Hormuz, President Donald Trump may need to do something out of character — compromise.

Any concession would be tough for the Republican president, who has insisted there is no truth to his sagging poll numbers, the sluggish economy and the US military's dwindling stockpiles of key weapons following the Iran war he launched with Israel more than five months ago.

"He divides the world into winners and losers, and this would make him a loser," said Eliot Cohen, who served as counselor of the State Department in the George W Bush administration. "And the image of being a loser, I think, would be intolerable for him." The sticking point



has been over control of the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of the world's oil normally flows. While both sides say a deal is close, the Trump administration has ruled out any arrangement that would cement Iran's grip over the Persian Gulf waterway, includ-

ing Tehran charging fees. But Iran has insisted on some measure of control, saying the strait will not go back to being an open international waterway as it was before the war. Despite thousands of US strikes, Iran can still fire drones and missiles at vessels, giving it a chokehold over commercial shipping.

Cohen said yielding ground to Iran would be difficult for the president, even if the conflict keeps gasoline prices elevated and poses problems for Republicans in November's midterm elections.

But David Schenker, a former State Department official in the first Trump administration, said the increasing economic pressure may actually prompt Trump to compromise on the strait, even if it's likely to have profound implications on global trade. "There will be a lot of spin both ways, but my guess is that

the president has tipped his hand as to the urgency for him of resolving the crisis," said Schenker, now a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "This is a concession he may very well be willing to make."

weapons stockpiles are a little bit tighter: Trump

He posted on social media Thursday that the US military still has "massive amounts" of weapons and that large amounts are being manufactured. He threatened jail time for the alleged "leakers" of information on the nation's weapons stockpiles.

Trump was referencing a Washington Post story that reported his frustration with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth over the shrinking inventories of advanced weapons, as the Cabinet had gathered at Camp David last week. (AP)

Russian retail depot burns after long-range drone strike

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Moscow

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

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



than four years ago.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHIRISH B PRADHAN ■ Kathmandu

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

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

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



Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal

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

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

Climber Yukta killed in Broad Peak avalanche cremated in Kathmandu

SHIRISH B PRADHAN
Kathmandu

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

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

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

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



US President signs new orders to limit birthright citizenship

SAGAR KULKARNI ■ Washington

US President Donald Trump has signed two executive orders to crack down on birth tourism and limit the number of people eligible for birthright citizenship, weeks after the Supreme Court struck down his directive in this regard.

One order signed by Trump on Thursday targets people who engage in commercial "birth tourism" by seeking to deny them access to the country.

The other expands the definitions of people that it States are ineligible for birthright citizenship, such as children of foreign citizens who lobby on behalf of foreign governments. On June 30, the US Supreme Court struck down Trump's executive order seeking to end birthright



President Donald Trump holding a signed proclamation regarding polysilicon imports in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington

citizenship, reaffirming the more than 100-year-old understanding that nearly all of those born in the United States are citizens.

Talking to reporters at the Oval Office after signing the executive orders, Trump lashed out at the Supreme Court for its June 30 order and asserted that the fresh move was aimed at "making adjustments". "We had a very unfortunate decision in the Supreme Court concerning birthright, it was close, but a very, very unfortunate decision. So we're making adjustments," the president said.

He was flanked by White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and White House Staff Secretary Will Scharf.

Ratified on July 9, 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution granted citizenship to all persons born or naturalised in the US, including former slaves.

"This was done right after the Civil War. This was for the babies of slaves, and what's happening now? People are building businesses around it," Trump said.

Miller, considered the architect of Trump's anti-immigration agenda, said people come to the US pretending to be a tourist, but the real reason they're here is to have a child, to make that child an automatic citizen. "It gives them access, under this broken system, to welfare benefits, ultimately to the voting booth, and all the other rights and privileges that belong solely to Americans," Miller said. (PTI)

Saudi, Pak, Turkey forge Mecca Pact

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Amid growing uncertainty in West Asia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey on Friday signed a tri-lateral defence agreement, informally echoed the 'Mecca Pact', committing themselves to closer military cooperation and a collective security framework.

The agreement was finalised after a high-level summit in the holy city of Mecca attended by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who was visiting the Kingdom after performing the Umrah pilgrimage.

According to a joint declaration issued after the summit, the three countries agreed to institutionalise defence cooperation through enhanced military coordination, strategic consultations and joint security mechanisms. A key feature of the pact is a mutual defence clause that treats an armed attack against any one of the three signatories as an attack against all, signalling a significant step towards formalised collective security among the partners.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry described the agreement as a natural progression of the countries' longstanding political, strategic and defence ties. It said the framework reflects their shared commitment to promoting regional peace and stability while strengthening cooperation based on common security interests. "The agreement is intended to enhance collective deterrence and deepen defence collaboration in response to emerging regional security challenges," the ministry said.

India on Friday said it was closely monitoring the newly announced tri-lateral defence agreement between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey, signalling that New Delhi is assessing the strategic implications of the emerging security framework amid an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment in West



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif posing after signing agreement in Mecca

PTI

Asia. Responding to media queries, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the government was carefully following developments related to the agreement and would assess its implications as further details emerge. The measured response underscores India's watchful approach towards changing strategic equations in its extended neighbourhood, particularly at a time when regional security dynamics remain fluid.

The announcement comes against the backdrop of continuing instability across West Asia, where the conflict involving Iran has intensified geopolitical uncertainty. Repeated missile attacks, disruptions to maritime trade routes and concerns over global energy supplies have prompted several regional powers to reassess their defence and security partnerships.

The security environment has become increasingly volatile following military exchanges involving Iran, Israel and the United States earlier this year, raising fears of a wider regional confrontation with broader geopolitical consequences. Turkish officials sought to allay

concerns by describing the new arrangement as a purely defensive initiative. They maintained that the pact is not directed against any particular country, does not replace existing bilateral or multilateral security arrangements and remains open to broader regional cooperation should other countries choose to participate.

Strategic observers see the initiative as a notable attempt by three influential Muslim-majority nations to deepen policy coordination at a time when traditional security architectures are being tested by multiple regional crises.

Analysts argue that beyond its military dimension, the agreement carries considerable diplomatic significance by signalling a greater willingness among regional powers to develop indigenous security frameworks rather than relying exclusively on external alliances. If backed by sustained political commitment and institutional mechanisms, they believe the partnership could enhance the three countries' collective influence on regional security issues.

Each member contributes distinct strategic strengths to the new

framework. Turkey possesses one of NATO's largest and most capable armed forces alongside a rapidly expanding domestic defence industry. Saudi Arabia combines significant financial resources, global energy influence and its status as the custodian of Islam's two holiest mosques. Pakistan brings extensive operational military experience and remains the only Muslim-majority nation with declared nuclear capabilities.

The pact also builds on decades of defence cooperation among the three countries. Pakistan has long maintained military training and advisory programmes in Saudi Arabia, while Ankara and Islamabad have expanded collaboration in defence production, military technology and joint training. Saudi Arabia has also emerged as a major buyer of Turkish defence equipment, including advanced unmanned aerial systems.

Security experts believe the agreement could pave the way for closer cooperation in defence manufacturing, intelligence sharing, joint military exercises and technology transfer. At the same time, analysts point out that Pakistan's nuclear doctrine remains focused on its security calculus vis-à-vis India, making any nuclear component to the new partnership unlikely.

Pakistan has also expanded military engagement with Gulf countries in recent months through additional deployments and broader security cooperation, while simultaneously exploring defence partnerships linked to investment and energy security across the region.

Although the three governments have presented the Mecca Pact as a defensive arrangement aimed at strengthening regional stability, its long-term strategic implications are expected to be closely watched by major regional stakeholders, including India, as West Asia undergoes one of its most consequential geopolitical transitions in recent years.

Pakistan forces kill 10 terrorists in KPK province

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Peshawar

Pakistan security forces have killed 10 terrorists in two separate incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military's media wing said on Friday. The incidents occurred on Thursday in South Waziristan and Upper Dir districts against Fitna al Khawarij, a term the Government uses for the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) of Pakistan's military, a group of terrorists attempted to attack checkpoints of security forces in the Azam Warsak area of South Waziristan.

The troops responded effectively to the attack, killing eight terrorists, it said. In the second incident in Dir district, security forces killed two more terrorists. Weapons and ammunition were also recovered during the operation.

The ISPR said the slain terrorists were involved in several terrorist activities in the area. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif praised the security forces for eliminating 10 terrorists.

PM Sharif reaffirmed that operations against terrorism would continue with full resolve until the complete eradication of the menace.



16 elephants die after eating poisoned tomatoes in Kenya



EVELYNE MUSAMBI ■ Kimana

The carcass of one elephant lies on a dusty road, while another has been almost completely eaten by scavengers, leaving just the skull. They are among 16 elephants that died last month in Kenya's Amboseli National Park from suspected cyanide poisoning after eating tomatoes in nearby farms.

Investigations are ongoing into how cyanide found its way into an ecosystem where wild and domestic animals coexist. Growers have disputed claims that cyanide from their tomatoes killed the elephants. The elephant deaths and disputes about the cause have intensified concerns over growing human-wildlife conflict in the region due to expanding agricultural activities near

Amboseli park. Kenya has until recently been widely recognised for rebuilding its elephant population from historic lows to more than 36,000 individuals by reducing poaching.

Kenya's Wildlife Service said last month that 15 elephants had died in the Amboseli ecosystem in a span of a month. The service updated the numbers to 16 on Friday. Preliminary laboratory tests detected cyanide, while postmortem examinations found tomatoes in the animals' stomachs. The wildlife service on Friday said it requested the Pest Control Products Board to establish a team to investigate whether the chemical "may have been improperly used, stored, or disposed, and whether water, soil, or grass may have been contaminated."

(AP)

Typhoon Dolphin heads to Okinawa, airport closed



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tokyo

The slow-moving Typhoon Dolphin approached Japan's southern remote islands on Friday, causing a main airport on Okinawa to close and grounding all flights in and out of the island, while sending hundreds of people to take shelter at evacuation centres. The typhoon was near Yoron Island and heading west toward the main island of Okinawa with maximum winds of 144 kph (89 mph) as of late morning Friday, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency.

Three men in their 70s were slightly injured - two of them were caught in the wind

and a third one fell from a stool, apparently blown off by the wind while preparing for the storm, the Okinawa prefecture said.

The Naha Airport on Okinawa Island said it closed Friday and all domestic and international flights in and out of Naha have been cancelled. As of midday Friday, 240 people had taken shelter at evacuation centres across Okinawa, the prefecture said. With Dolphin expected to affect part of Japan's southern main island of Kyushu, residents whose houses were damaged by last week's deadly earthquake were placing blue tarps on roofs and walls to prevent water damage.

Pope Leo to meet with clergy abuse survivors

COLLEEN BARRY ■ Milan

Pope Leo XIV will meet with survivors of clergy abuse during a four-day trip to France next month that will include a visit to UNESCO headquarters, a meeting with French bishops in Lourdes and an interreligious meeting in the border city of Metz, the Vatican announced on Friday.

The Vatican issued a brief separate statement highlighting the meeting with several abuse survivors and noting that the victims themselves will be involved in preparations for the meeting. The timing and location will be provided at a later date.

Leo met with six abuse survivors during his recent trip to Spain, where the Catholic hierarchy has only recently begun reckoning with its legacy of abuse and cover-up after long dismissing the severity of the scandal. In France, a 2021 report estimated 330,000 children had been sexually abused over 70 years by church personnel.

The pontiff last month signalled commitment to continuing the fight against clergy sexual abuse by appointing French Bishop Thibault Verny to head the Vatican's child protection advisory commission.

The September 25-28



France trip, which was confirmed in May, will be Leo's fourth foreign voyage of the year. Leo made a day trip to Monaco in March, visited four African nations in April and Spain and the Canary Islands in June. The Vatican also confirmed this week that he will make his first trip to Latin America as pontiff in November, with visits to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru, where he served for over three decades.

Leo will start his visit September 25 in Paris, meeting with President Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee Palace where he will address authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps before giving a speech at headquarters of the UN culture agency, UNESCO. He will later celebrate vespers at Notre-Dame Cathedral and end the day with a prayer vigil with young people at the national stadium. (AP)

NASA astronauts conclude spacewalk outside ISS

SAGAR KULKARNI ■ Washington

NASA astronauts Anil Menon and Jessica Meir on Friday concluded their spacewalk outside the International Space Station (ISS) to assemble a modification kit for its power channel, which would allow the addition of solar arrays.

The spacewalk - the 281st in support of the space station - sixth for Meir and first for Menon began at 8:33 am EDT (6:03 pm IST) on Thursday and concluded at 3:00 pm EDT (12:30 am IST Friday). Menon and Meir exited the Quest airlock and carried out structural upgrades on the exterior of the orbital laboratory during the six-hour, 27-minute spacewalk.

Their primary objective centred on installing mounting hardware on the



station's 3B power channel, located on the Starboard 6 truss segment.

"This work will enable the future installation of roll-out solar arrays, called IROSA, to provide additional power for the orbiting laboratory, supporting critical systems and the safe, controlled deorbit of the space station," NASA said in a statement.

Since 2021, astronauts on prior

spacewalks have deployed six of the International Space Station Roll-Out Solar Array (IROSA) assemblies, leaving now just two awaiting delivery to the station later this year.

Menon was positioned on an articulating portable foot restraint atop a worksite interface, providing a stable angle to work from the truss.

The two astronauts later routed cabling that will carry electricity from the future IROSA into the 3B power channel and then covered the struts with multi-layer insulation.

"Anil, you can see the moon to the - well, I am not sure what way you're facing, but..." said Meir, taking a short break during the spacewalk.

"To my right. Yeah, I see it - thanks for the heads-up. I can see a future moon base there," Menon said. (PTI)

Police officers bitten during anti-migrant protests in UK town

ADITI KHANNA ■ London

A UK police force said on Friday that its officers have been tackling serious violence, including being bitten and spat at by protesters, over days of anti-migrant clashes at a town in eastern England.

Norfolk Constabulary condemned the violence over three nights of disorder at Thetford as protesters targeted properties they believed were housing asylum seekers. Four people were arrested and a 68-year-old man has been charged with possession of an offensive



weapon, namely a wooden bat, since the protests turned violent on Tuesday night.

"As police intervened, members of the group became physically aggres-

sive towards officers - two were taken to hospital after a male officer was struck with a rock and a female officer was seriously bitten, breaking the skin. A third officer was also spat at," Norfolk Police said.

Properties have been damaged in the protests, including windows being smashed and fences broken, as people attempted to break into residential properties. Asylum seekers were forced to flee some of these accommodations amid the disorder, which entered its third consecutive night on Thursday.

"We will always facilitate and support the right to peaceful protest, and we recognise that people may hold strong views and feelings about issues.

However, no matter how strongly those views are held, there is no place for violence, intimidation or criminal behaviour," said Assistant Chief Constable Julie Dean, overseeing the response to the disorder for the Norfolk Constabulary.

"Our role is to keep people safe. We have a duty to protect everyone in our communities, maintain public order and prevent harm. We

will not stand by and allow violence to take place, whether that is directed towards members of the public, local residents or police officers carrying out their duties.

"Where criminal offences are committed, we will take robust action. Our focus remains on maintaining public safety and ensuring people can go about their lives without fear of violence or disorder," she said.

Her officers made arrests for offences including public order, harassment and possession of an offensive weapon, with some still in

custody while others have been released on bail.

Extra policing measures were enforced until Friday, which gave officers the power to order anyone committing anti-social behaviour, or likely to do so, to leave the area. According to Norfolk Police, several asylum seekers had to be escorted from homes as a result of the unrest this week.

"The ugly scenes in Thetford over the past few days have been difficult to watch and are deeply concerning," said Terry Jermy, the Labour member of Parliament for the area. (PTI)

Life in Cuba revolves around brief sparks of electricity

ANDREA RODRIGUEZ ■ Havana

A 20-minute burst of electricity is a small miracle in Havana nowadays - a miracle that sometimes comes at 3 am. That's when 72-year-old Leidis Rodriguez frantically cooked beans after the lights switched on this week following hours of uninterrupted blackouts. "The power has come back on, everyone go!" Rodriguez shouted. In the wake of sometimes dayslong blackouts in Cuba - fuelled by the oil blockade imposed by the Trump administration in January - Cubans are planning their lives around the lights turning back on.

Those small bursts of relief last a few minutes or a few hours. They come at any time, day or night. Increasingly, electricity flicks on when Rodriguez and her



41-year-old daughter, Yaimara Matos, would normally be asleep.

When the power comes on, the family stops everything they're doing. "You

want to do everything at the same time - wash clothes, iron, cook, tidy the rooms, because it's impossible in the dark, and even get a little relief from the heat," Matos

said. "What we used to do in 10 hours, we now have to do in two." That's the case for Cubans across the island, whose lives have been transformed by one of the worst

crises the island has seen since the Cuban revolution. Daily life has turned into a tangle of compounding crises families have to unravel.

Public transportation and cultural events have come to a standstill. So has tourism, the country's economic engine, especially as tourism companies have withdrawn, leaving 25,000 hospitality jobs vacant.

Flights to the island are regularly cancelled and work-days have been shortened to adjust to the new reality of a Cuba without power. Medicine shortages have worsened and food rots in fridges without power.

"If there's no electricity, there's no water because it doesn't get pumped to the tank. When there's water, there's no electricity," Rodriguez lamented. (AP)

SpaceX to build \$16.8b chip plant in Texas, create over 3,000 jobs

SEEMA HAKHU KACHRU ■ Houston

Aerospace major SpaceX and electric vehicle maker Tesla are investing \$16.8 billion to build 'Terafab', an advanced AI semiconductor complex in Texas, designed to narrow a looming gap in global chip supply, according to official statements.

The first phase of the vertically integrated, 100-million-square-foot facility in Grimes County, Texas, will create at least 3,000 high-paying jobs for engineers, technicians, and plant operators, with future expansion phases expected to push total investment significantly higher, SpaceX said in a statement on its website on Thursday.

"The Terafab is bringing cutting-edge manufacturing to America, creating thousands of high-paying jobs in the Lone Star State, and enabling us to produce AI chips at scale for use on Earth and in space," SpaceX Founder and CEO Elon Musk said in the statement. The mega facility aims to meet an anticipated requirement of over one terawatt of computing power for



Musk's ventures. The plant will make, package, and test advanced logic and memory chips under a single roof to power Tesla's Optimus humanoid robots and Cybercabs, as well as high-performance processors for SpaceX's planned orbital data centres.

The expansion comes as Musk tightens the integration of artificial intelligence efforts across his enterprises following SpaceX's acquisition of AI startup xAI earlier this year. (PTI)



STUDENT'S CORNER

Uninvited Companion



Almost a decade has passed and you have decided to stay for good Am I ok with your presence? I ask It's a bittersweet answer, veiled in a mask.

The world today is living with fear succumbing to the thought of death seemingly near preparing to fight the unknown in the best way possible hoping that the eventuality balances itself - betting on the impossible

When I met you for the first time it was a meeting of an unusual kind I did not know who you were

yet, you stood strong, powerful and full of airs. You pounced on me, like I was the chosen one pierced through my skin, numbed my heart spread all over with meticulous planning and care as I lay motionless, dumbfounded and bare.

Not too long ago, I was leading a happy life without any care working hard, living my dreams & building castles in the air in the blink of an eye, however everything changed my dreams shattered.. leaving me hopeless and battered

I struggled in pain, writhed in despair as you chose to lie low for the suffering to disappear Could it?

you knew better it wouldn't!

As I intently watch this world around me battling this elusive enemy. I feel composed and fairly prepared

with my decade old companion - my frenemy! Who has pushed my limits tested my mettle to bits made me stronger, given me strength to never buckle down, even in the face of deatho

Although we started on a different note my life today would not be what it is - without you "Mr. Anxiety" choosing me on that fateful day of my life and reminding me implicitly everyday that each day lived by is a boonbecause uncertainty has always been the constant with it clearly being my life's antiozonant.

-Tanay Kumar Class X-I DPS, RANCHI

Life: My Eternal Suitcase

My life is an eternal suitcase, Collecting memories at every stage. Giggles from my infancy, Mischief from my toddler days. Dreams that I spun on the ground, With friends all around. Teachings from my family and teachers, That will make me a better person. My suitcase has more space to fill, As I journey through the stages of life, climbing my future's hill.

The more I grow and learn to cope, The more I will fill my suitcase with happiness, Memories, love, and hope.

ARYAVEER (Class V), DPS, Ranchi



The Silent Star

Once, there was a garrulous girl named Tulip who loved talking and making everyone laugh. One day, she met a taciturn girl named Lavender. Although Lavender was quiet, she was kind and hardworking. Soon, the two became good friends. One day, their school announced a castle drama competition.

Tulip was chosen to play a dynamic queen, while Lavender played a brave knight. They practised every day. Whenever Lavender found a scene difficult, she persevered and kept trying until she performed it perfectly.

As the competition day came closer, Tulip became pompous. She thought she would surely win because she was confident and acted very well. Lavender, however, stayed humble and focused on her practice. On the day of the competition, both girls performed wonderfully. The judges were especially impressed by Lavender's confidence, hard work, and determination.

Lavender won the competition. Tulip felt a little disappointed, but she congratulated her friend. Lavender was happy but never became smug. Instead, she thanked everyone who had helped her, including Tulip. Moral: True friendship is more valuable than winning, and humility makes every victory meaningful.

SHANAYA GOYENKA (Class V), DPS, Ranchi

The Animals

The animals, oh wow, are so wonderful! The lion, the king of the jungle, The majestic tiger, The naughty monkey, And the cute little birds.

Oh, what wonderful animals they are! The dancing peacock, The zebra with its black and white stripes, The cuckoo, who sings so beautifully, And the tall giraffe. Some are carnivores, Some are herbivores, And some fly high in the sky.

Oh, what wonderful creatures they are! The butterflies are sipping nectar, While the honeybee is buzzing around me.

MRINAL (Class IV), DPS, Ranchi



The Unseen Horizon

At your doors, opportunities knocked, But out of fear, at them you balked. You could fly up high in the sky, Yet in trepidation, you didn't even try. Shadowed by tomorrow, And for yesterday you cry And amidst the chaos, You let your 'today' die.

Smothering your passion With angst of disrepute And the loss of yourself- to the society you impute. Pervading your surroundings, Bright buoyancy rained. Then why within your heart Is the dusk yet contained? Throw the gloom in trash And with solace you glow. For dealing with the past, You just have to let go!

Go deaf to the whispers; Each desire you enshrine. For it's time to ascend, Every choice redefined. It's not circumstances; it's not your age -Your mind is your ultimate cage.



SOUMYA SWASTI XI 'C', DPS, Ranchi

THE MUSEUM OF SELF

■ By Malak Hassan Khan, 12 'R', DPS, Ranchi

"No matter how much time passes, no matter what takes place in the interim, there are some things we can never assign to oblivion, memories we can never rub away."

~Haruki Murakami

In the museum of madness and delusion, there stood 4 women:

THE ARTIST

Music was her source of joy. Theatre her source of imagination. Painting was a source of serenity and dance an engine of motion.

She knew nothing of despair; and at the same time everything. She knew nothing of beauty, and at the same time saw it everywhere.

She stared incredulously at the ones who remained captives against the beauty of art rather than within it. It was a messiah, it saved her, for she knew not what hell was, nor did she know of heaven's existence. She created without a care in the world; nothing was to be determined. She loved art, for she was not known, and art helped her know herself. But yet again, she had no knowledge; she was barely born to it. Is anyone ever born to it?

THE FAILURE CHILD

Her mother was her guide; she was her solace. She sang with her melodious voice, but what pain laced her music, she did not know.

Nor was she aware that she saw the same pain drowning in her father's eyes whenever she caught a reflection of amber and gold. He knew nothing; they knew more than actions could speak, and words could result. It dawned on her that he had a fear of flaw. Intricacies amused her



father, and his notice of fault was impeccable, they knew much of what flaw was, and were the

masters of it. They looked at her with alien expressions, but were they new-found after all? She did not know. She winced in pain when her father ignored her.

Why did he do that? She did not know. Why was her mother silent? Where were her melodies of snow? Why did she sing to her no more? Both her nurturers were victims of the

world, confined to identities they never created, identities they never accepted. Yet somehow they expected the same of her

because that is all they learnt. Today she suffers at the thought of being a failure to her parents, tonight she suffers at the thought of being a failure to herself.

THE DREAMER

The sound of her breath echoing around her is what keeps her sane at night. She knew it's a bit peculiar, but that's what keeps her going at times. Especially when she has nightmares again, especially when she dreams again.

They say once you wake, all dreams and mares blur into eternity, but It's not a blur; in fact, all of it is very clear. For she dreams at night what she dreams at day- expectations of helping people she does not know today, making the world a better place. Sometimes the lack of hope spills it all into darkness, birthing nightmares; but faith in the magnitude of her

cause brings it alive and makes it radiate like the rays of the sun.

THE EMPATH

She cannot tolerate the misery of else the way she tolerates her own.

Today she knows. Yesterday she was not aware, but today she knows. She knows the misery when a child is orphaned, when a child is lost; she knows the misery when a friend betrays. She knows every single misery, without experiencing it herself.

And she did not know them before for she was entrenched in the bliss of ignorance. But today she stands as a sum of every pain she has experienced and witnessed others experience. Today she speaks no more. Words of her heard by others say nothing. She wears clothes as an armour to shield her mind and soul. Today she knows not whether she wants to live or drown in her sorrows. But what she does know is that she would rather choose mortality than hurt an innocent soul.

All 4 women stare at each other incredulously, knowing their differences place them in conflict but also knowing that a link connects them like the pieces of a puzzle. They look at each other, 'Oh, so different'; they look in the mirror, 'Oh so same?'. The mirror shattered, and the shards of glass amalgamate again like the 4

women unite to become the whole they always were.

Today she knows she tries to move ahead for she once desired to live as an artist, an empath, a failure of a daughter and a daughter,

but in the present she often finds himself gazing into the rose fields of her past, and hoping that the thorns don't draw blood from his heart. "Some rise by sin and some by virtue fall, some run from brakes of ice and answer none, and some are condemned for a fault alone"

~William Shakespeare

I ASKED THE GODS

■ By: Malak Hassan Khan, 12 'R', DPS, Ranchi



In the heart of ancient Greece, where myths and legends intertwined with the fabric of reality, a mere mortal dared to ask a question that had been whispered in hushed tones but never openly spoken: "How to kill a God?"

"How to kill a God?" I asked Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love. Her laughter echoed through the heavens as she regarded the audacious mortal. "YOU cannot kill us, you imbecile of a mortal," she chided, her voice dripping with divine amusement. "Betraying their love, however, is a major blow to the heart."

"How to kill a God?" I asked Ares, the God of War, seeking his wisdom. Ares, clad in his imposing armor and brandishing a fearsome sword, offered a simple yet enigmatic answer. "We don't," he declared. With a quizzical look, I pressed further, "But can war truly kill a god?"

"A war is an answer to many things," Ares replied,

"However, does it kill a god? That I do not know." I continued my quest for knowledge, seeking counsel from Hera, the Queen of the Gods.

"How to kill a God?" I asked, Hera's response carried a sinister edge, "You twist

their love and make it yours, and if they don't let you, you take away what they hold closest to their heart."

"How to kill a God?"... I asked Poseidon, the God of the Sea, who spoke of natural forces as the key to challenging divine beings. "A storm, a thunder, a quake in the sea," Famished curiosity led me to Dionysus, the God of Wine and Revelry,

"How to kill a God?" I asked, "Now, why would you care about this when you can enjoy the little time you have left with debauchery and wine?" Dionysus pondered. I, a seeker of knowledge was undeterred and sought wisdom from Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom.

"How to kill a God?" I asked, Athena's response was both cryptic and profound: "It matters on your wit, for an intelligent foe never loses."

"How to kill a God?" I asked Demeter, the Goddess of the Harvest, who spoke with a more subtle approach. "Starve them of their precious harvest," she advised, emphasizing the importance of manipulating the source of divine sustenance.

"How to kill a God?" I asked, Artemis, the Goddess

of the Hunt, who emphasized the concept of purity. "Deprive them of their purity," she said, hinting at the vulnerability of gods when their essence is tainted.

"How to kill a God?" I asked Hephaestus, the God of Fire and Craftsmanship, and he had a fiery suggestion. "Burn their arrogance," he declared, implying that hubris might be the Achilles' heel of the divine.

"How to kill a God?" I asked Apollo, the God of Archery and Light, who advocated for distancing gods from their divine nature. "Distance them from their divine," he replied, suggesting that isolation could weaken the divine.

"How to kill a God?" I asked Hermes, the God of Dreams and Messengers, and he provided a chilling response. "Crush their dreams, stop their messages," he intoned, hinting at the importance of thwarting divine communication. Finally, I approached Zeus, the King of the Olympian Gods, seeking the ultimate answer.

"How to kill a God?" I asked, With a knowing smile, Zeus responded, "Strike them down with the lightning of the power of all my Olympians." However, I am still curious to know if you can kill a God.

That was then and this is now. The now holds the message of hubris: The answer to it all. Hubris is the undoing of all living creature. That is how you kill a God.

BE THE REASON SOMEONE SMILES

Every day, two children walked to school.

On their way, they saw a poor family living by the roadside. The family did not have enough food to eat and often searched for food in dustbins. At first, no one noticed them. But once the children realised their situation, they told their parents and teachers. Together, they came up with a thoughtful idea.

From the very next day, every student brought one extra fruit, sandwich, or snack.

They collected all the food in a "Sharing Basket" and kept it where the poor family lived.

The poor family smiled with joy when they saw the basket. They did not just receive food—they also received kindness, love, and respect. The class learned that sometimes the greatest act of kindness is helping others in a way that protects their dignity. Moral: A small act of kindness can bring a big smile to someone's face.



AMAIIRA (Class IV)

At the Regal, the Cards Have Found a Home

On Saturday afternoon, 1 August 2026, around 16 people gathered on the newly renovated upper floor of the Regal Bar in Esplanade to play bridge. It was the first afternoon of a new bridge group, but it felt like the beginning of something larger: a new space where Calcutta's bridge lovers could come together without the usual barriers.

Bridge has long been closely associated with Calcutta's club culture. The Calcutta Swimming Club, Tollygunge Club, Royal Calcutta Golf Club and other institutions have wonderful bridge communities and have kept the game alive for generations. But these are membership clubs. If you are not a member, or do not know someone who is, entering that world is not always easy.

The idea behind starting bridge at the Regal was to change that. The intention is simple. The Regal is to become a new home for bridge in Calcutta, where anyone who loves the game can come and play.

There is no entrance fee and no club membership required. No introduction is needed. Just a love for bridge. Before play began, a small speech explained how it would work. Binod, a member of the Regal's staff, will keep the bridge equipment, including cards, boards and bidding boxes.

Anyone who wants to play can post in the WhatsApp group saying they are interested and asking who would like to join. Once four people have got together, they can come to the Regal, collect the equipment from Binod, take a table and start playing. The WhatsApp group itself has no barrier to entry.

Members can add friends and other bridge players as they see fit, allowing the group to grow naturally. Someone can simply say, "I want to play. Who's joining me?" and hopefully, three others will soon be ready to sit across the table. It is a simple idea, but perhaps that is what makes it special. On the first afternoon, people seemed genuinely happy to be there.

They played, chatted, laughed and took photographs. Many commented on the atmosphere and the newly renovated space. The upper floor has been freshly painted and redone, with globe lights adding warmth and a Madhubala poster



bringing a touch of nostalgia.

The music added to it. Yeh Shaam Mastani played alongside beloved Bengali classics, creating a setting that felt distinctly Calcutta: familiar, warm and a little nostalgic, but also new. The Regal's staff were excited too.

New faces were coming through the doors, discovering the renovated upper floor and bringing a fresh energy into the bar. For a place that has itself been given a new lease of life, seeing the space filled with conversation and laughter was especially heartening.

The initiative works both ways. Bridge players get a place to play without membership or access barriers, while the Regal gets to welcome a community that may never otherwise have stepped through its doors. But the larger hope is to bring Calcutta's bridge lovers together.

The seasoned player and the newcomer. The club member and the person who has never belonged to a club. People who might otherwise never meet, sitting around the same table. Because bridge is ultimately about more than cards. It is about partnership, conversation, patience, laughter and the friendships that can begin over a game.

The Regal has been part of Calcutta for generations. Now, its doors are opening a little wider. The cards are ready. The equipment is there. The group is growing. At the Regal, the cards have found a home. And when the Regal deals the cards, Calcutta comes together.

Cool or Cruel?

■ By Anita Shekhar

Assistant Professor of English , Amity University Jharkhand



smartphone, an internet connection, and a few careless words are all it takes to create a storm on the digital platform. Every day, endless posts, reels, and remarks flood digital platforms. While many inspire meaningful discussions, others thrive on ridicule, insults, and personal attacks. Increasingly, abusive remarks aimed at political leaders, public institutions, and even the country's armed forces are being shared, liked, and celebrated not because they contribute to a discussion, but because they attract attention. For many young audience, especially those eager to build an online identity, going viral has become more important than being responsible. The louder the statement, the greater the engagement. The harsher the language, the more reactions it receives. In this Web culture, courtesy is often mistaken for weakness, while aggression is seen as confidence. Teachers and parents have begun noticing a striking contrast. The same students who participate respectfully in classrooms sometimes adopt an entirely different personality online. Behind the safety of a screen, they say things they would never dare to say face-to-face. Likes and shares become a measure of accep-



stance, encouraging some to post content that is offensive rather than thoughtful. The concern is not that young people express political opinions. In fact, questioning leaders, discussing national issues, and debating government policies are signs of a healthy democracy. The real concern arises when meaningful criticism gives way to personal abuse. Democracy encourages dialogue, not humiliation. It values reason over ridicule and facts over foul language. Social media algorithms unintentionally fuel this behaviour. Content that provokes anger or outrage often reaches more people than calm, balanced conversations.

As a result, some users begin to believe that offensive language is the quickest path to visibility. The pressure to fit in with online trends further pushes many into repeating harmful content without pausing to consider its impact. This is not a problem confined to any one section of society.

Young people from varied backgrounds can be influenced by the same online culture. Many simply imitate what they see popular influencers or anonymous accounts doing, unaware that every post leaves behind a permanent digital footprint

and reflects their own values. Respecting the Indian Armed Forces does not mean giving up the right to question decisions made by governments or institutions. Likewise, holding elected representatives accountable is an essential part of democracy. However, criticism becomes meaningful only when it is supported by facts, logic, and civility. Personal insults may generate applause online, but they rarely create understanding. The remedy lies in building stronger internet citizenship. Families, educational institutions, and society must help young people understand that freedom of expression carries responsibility.

They should learn that every opinion deserves evidence, every disagreement deserves dignity, and every public conversation deserves respect. The future belongs to a generation capable of thinking independently without becoming insensitive.

Real courage is not found in abusive comments or viral controversies. It is found in the ability to disagree with grace, challenge ideas with knowledge, and prove that respect and intelligence can exist side by side. In a world chasing instant attention, that is the kind of influence truly worth having..

BRIEFLY

Anmol Ekka to lead Indian hockey team in Junior Asia Cup



Defender Anmol Ekka will lead an 18-member Indian men's hockey team at the AHF Junior Asia Cup to be held in Moqi, China from August 30 to September 13. The Hockey India selectors also named two alternate players for the tournament in Arjun Santosh Hargude and Ritik Lakra. The squad is currently training at the Sports Authority of India centre in Bengaluru under the guidance of newly-appointed coach Frederic Soyeze.

As part of their build-up to the tournament, the team recently completed a productive exposure tour of Belgium, where they competed against strong international opposition. The tour offered the players valuable match experience and key takeaways, enabling the squad to assess their progress, refine their combinations and further strengthen their preparations ahead of the AHF Junior Asia Cup.

The team is gaining further competitive exposure through friendly matches against the Malaysian U-21 team at the SAI centre in Bengaluru.

"We are pleased with the balance and depth of the squad selected for the Junior Asia Cup. The players have worked hard over the past few months, showing commitment, discipline and a strong desire to improve. Selection was based on consistent performances, attitude and the ability to execute our game plan under pressure," coach Soyeze said in a release.

Neeraj becomes co-owner of UBS Athletics Kids Cup



Two-time Indian Olympic medallist javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra on Friday became the co-owner of the UBS Athletics Kids Cup having already served as the programme's Ambassador for the past two seasons.

The UBS Athletics Kids Cup is one of a grassroots initiatives, designed to introduce children to sports through fun, inclusive and accessible competition. It has engaged more than 250,000 children across 2,500 plus schools in five cities.

"Over the last two seasons, I have seen the impact that UBS Athletics Kids Cup has created for children across schools," said Chopra, who added a Commonwealth Games silver to his crowded cabinet last month, in a release. "Every child deserves an opportunity to discover and showcase their talent, and becoming Co-owner felt like the natural next step because I truly believe in the vision we're building together," the release said. "Our ambition is to reach one million children and inspire many more youngsters to embrace sport. I look forward to sharing my own experiences with the kids, teachers and schools, because the more children play, the greater the chance of creating future champions."

With Chopra joining the initiative as co-owner, the programme now enters its next phase of growth with an ambition to reach one million children across India. Beyond introducing young people to sports, the initiative aims to encourage confidence, discipline and lifelong participation in sport, helping build a stronger sporting culture from the grassroots up.

Para-sports delivering despite comparatively less investment, says Sharad Kumar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Paris Paralympics silver-winning high-jumper Sharad Kumar on Friday said the country's para-athletes are delivering path-breaking results despite comparatively less funding as he lauded their best ever Commonwealth Games performance in Glasgow recently.

India's para-sports contingent secured seven medals (three gold, two silver, and two bronze) for the country's most successful para campaign in the history of the Commonwealth Games.

"The amount of money being put into para sports is comparatively less than other sports, and yet we are delivering tremendous results. When para-athletes perform, sports show that anybody can win," Kumar said on the sidelines of the Indo-French initiative 'Para Elan - Sab Ka Maidan' — a student outreach programme to promote the French language in the national Capital.

"This is the first time that para sports have won gold medals at the Commonwealth Games. Because of that, our ranking went from 23rd to fourth. You realise the last two gold medals were what helped us break into the top four," he said of India's final standing after winning 39 medals overall.

Kumar said India's para-athletes have consistently punched above their weight despite comparatively lower investment in the sector. Para-sports has been a part of

the country's flagship Target Olympic Podium Scheme since its inception in 2014, but the number of athletes on the TOPS roster has increased substantially in recent years. "The amount of money being put into para sports is comparatively less than other sports, and yet we are delivering tremendous results. When para-athletes perform, sports show that anybody can win," said the former world number one, who also has a bronze from the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. French Ambassador to India Thierry Mathou, who was also present at Friday's event, said para sport is a powerful tool for social change.

The French Institute in India (IFI), under the Embassy of France, in collaboration with the Paralympic Committee of India (PCI), inaugurated the initiative at Thyagaraj Stadium, bringing together students from schools across Delhi for adaptive sports demonstrations and interactive sessions with para-athletes. The programme is part of the three-year initiative, inaugurated in April, which aims to reach more than 10,000 students across India through awareness campaigns and school engagement programmes centred on inclusion and para sports.

Mathou said the initiative was built around promoting diversity through both language and sport. "Sport is an exceptional way to communicate, exchange views and interact, and the Paralympics are a way to learn from others.

Mandaviya urges open selection trials, fewer foreign coaches

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Friday stressed on the need for on-camera selection trials before major international events such as the upcoming Asian Games and reduced dependence on foreign coaches as he took stock of the National Sports Federations' operations at a conclave in New Delhi.

The conclave was also attended by Minister of State for Sports Raksha Khadse, Sports Secretary Hari Ranjan Rao, and senior officials of the Sports Authority of India (SAI).

"Open selection trials should be recorded on camera in the presence of observers. There should be absolutely no compromise on transparency in the selection process," Mandaviya stated.

He said India urgently needs a strong indigenous coaching ecosystem to



counter the reliance on foreign coaches, who have got high-profile positions in sports such as shooting and boxing.

"We need to build a repository of quality Indian coaches. Along with training athletes, we must invest equally in training our coaches by providing them the best opportunities and international exposure. A

well-trained coach will ultimately create world-class athletes for the country," Mandaviya said.

The conclave focused on discussing issues related to sports governance, enhancing athlete welfare, and reviewing India's preparedness for the upcoming major international sporting events.

Detailed presentations on

the NSFs' compliance status with the National Sports Federations under the National Sports Governance Act, and preparations for the Asian Games in September-October, the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad were also made.

"It is our responsibility to ensure that no athlete is ever subjected to injustice. Injustice can take many forms, and wherever such a situation arises, the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 empowers us to take preventive and corrective measures," Mandaviya said in his address.

"The Prime Minister has consistently emphasised the need to keep athletes on the playing field and develop a strong league culture in the country. Every National Sports Federation must work towards creating greater competitive opportunities for athletes throughout the year," he added.

Khalin Joshi wins J&K Open



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Srinagar

Khalin Joshi carded a solid five-under 66 to complete a commanding nine-shot victory at the ₹1 crore J&K Open at the picturesque Royal Springs Golf Course on Friday.

The 33-year-old Bengaluru golfer (63-66-65-66) finished with a tournament total of 24-under 260 to claim his eighth professional title and second victory of the 2026 DP World PGTI season. Joshi collected the

winner's cheque of ₹15 lakh and climbed five places from 13th to eighth in the DP World PGTI Rankings, taking his season's earnings to ₹34,85,575. Delhi's Rashid Khan (68-68-64-69), a two-time Asian Tour winner, finished runner-up at 15-under 269. Panipat's Shubham Jaglan (70-68-66-66), a University of South Florida graduate, produced his best result of the season by finishing third at 14-under 270.

Joshi began the final round with a six-shot cushion but admitted to feeling nervous after missing the opening fairway.

Ashfaq breaks U20 national record in 400m

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Eugene (USA)

Mohammed Ashfaq broke the U20 national record to qualify for the men's 400m semifinals while Amanat Kamboj finished sixth in women's discus throw finals with a personal best effort on the second day of the World Athletics U20 Championships in Eugene, USA. The 19-year-old Ashfaq clocked 45.81 seconds to finish second behind USA's Jayden DeLeon (45.63s) in the first round heat 5 and fourth overall to make it to the semifinals.

Ashfaq bettered his own previous national record of 46.05 seconds, set earlier this

season in April. Compatriot Piyush Raj, however, failed to proceed after finishing fifth in Heat 6 and 35th overall with a time of 47.78 seconds.

In the women's discus final, the 18-year-old



Kamboj's first round throw of 53.24m, her lifetime best, was good enough for a sixth-place finish.

Su Yixin of China won the gold with 61.06m, while Jaslene Massey (58.41m) of USA and Marina Hadjicosta (54.88m) of Cyprus took the silver and bronze respectively. In men's high jump, Basant qualified for the finals after finishing fifth in the qualification round Group A and 11th overall with a best clearance of 2.14m. Compatriot K Ambriesh, however, bowed out as he managed to clear just 2.05m for a 12th place finish in the qualification

round Group B and 24th overall. He failed to clear 2.10m in all three of his attempts.

Meanwhile, Anshu missed out on a place in the women's shot put final after finishing ninth in her qualification group and 14th overall with a throw of 15.24m.

Tanu Chaudhary failed to make it to the women's 400m hurdles semifinals after finishing fifth in her heat and 33rd overall, clocking 1:00.03s.

Amit Kumar finished eighth and last in his heat in the men's 400m hurdles, clocking 54.01 seconds.

AITA votes for 70-year age cap, aligns constitution with NSG Act



AMANPREET SINGH ■ New Delhi

The All India Tennis Association (AITA) has voted to cap the age for eligibility to its Executive Committee at 70 years, bringing its constitution in line with the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, with the provision clearing by a narrow 25-22 margin at its Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM).

Of the 47 members who voted on the contentious age provision, 25 favoured an upper age limit of 70 years while 22 voted for retaining 75 years. The amended provision stipulates that a candidate must be below 70 years

on the date of filing nomination but, if elected, can complete the full four-year term even if he or she crosses 70 during the tenure.

"The voting results are out from the EGM observers. All the modified amendments suggested by AITA EC are approved by the EGM with almost more than 95 per cent majority. The age eligibility to become an Executive Committee member is now less than 70 years on the date of filing the nomination, and if elected, the candidate can complete the whole term of four years," AITA Interim President Chintan Parikh said.

Praggnanandhaa wins St Louis Rapid & blitz

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ St Louis (USA)

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa clinched his maiden Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz title in emphatic fashion, sealing the championship with a round to spare in St Louis, USA.

The 20-year-old finished with 23.5 points, comfortably ahead of Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan, one of the contenders for the world championship cycle.

Not losing any games on the final day of the last rapid and blitz in the Grand Chess Tour, Praggnanandhaa jumped to second spot in the GCT, which almost guarantees a place in the grand finale scheduled later this year.

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

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

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



AFFIDAVIT

I, MANASARAM TUDU, S/o Rasu Majhi, Resident of Vill-Upar Lodapath, P.O. Jobhipath, P.S.- Bishunpur Gumla Jharkhand 835218 do hereby solemnly affirm and declare as follows:-

1. That I am an Indian Citizen and residing at my aforesaid address.

2. That MANASARAM TUDU, holder of an Adhar Card being Adhar No. 2638 8553 0647.

3. That in said Adhar Card by mistake my name MANASARAM TUDU, has been mentioned in my Adhar Card.

4. That my name MANASARAM MAJHI needed correction in Adhar Card of my which shall be published in newspaper & Gazette too for further Identification.

5. That above statements are true & genuine if any found wrong I shall be responsible.

SL No.-118, Date-03.08.2026

AFFIDAVIT

I, Manoj Asur, S/o Manga Asur, Resident of Vill-Upar Lodapath, P.O. Jobhipath, P.S.- Bishunpur Gumla Jharkhand 835218 do hereby solemnly affirmed declare as under:

1. That I am an Indian Citizen and residing at my aforesaid address.

2. That MANOJ ASUR, holder of an Adhar Card being Adhar No. 6966 3811 1019.

3. That in said Adhar Card by mistake my name MANOJ ASUR has been mentioned in my Adhar Card.

4. That my name MANO ASUR needed correction in Adhar Card of my which shall be published in newspaper & Gazette too for further Identification.

5. That above statements are true & genuine if any found wrong I shall be responsible.

SL No.-117, Date-03.08.2026

AFFIDAVIT

I, Govind Singh, S/o Mithu Singh, by faith Hindu, by occupation Student, resident of village Banipur, P.O. and P.S. Narayanpur, Dist. Jamarata (Jharkhand) Do hereby solemnly affirm and declare as follows:-

1. That I am permanent resident of above mentioned address.

2. That my actual name is Govind Singh as my all matriculation and Intermediate certificate but my name wrongly mentioned in the my Adhar Card bearing no. 2934 1873 1460 as Govin Singh.

3. That my actual date of birth is 15.11.2008 in my all matriculation and Intermediate certificate but my date of birth is wrongly mentioned in my Adhar Card bearing no. 2934 1873 1460 as 19.11.2008.

4. That my actual name is Govind Singh and my date of birth is 15.11.2008 which is true and correct.

5. That I am declare that Govind Singh and Govin Singh is one and same identical person i.e. myself.

6. That I am swearing this affidavit to rectify my date of birth and my name in my Adhar Card to the concerning authority.

7. That the statements made above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

SL No.-79, Date-01.07.2026

कार्यपालक अभियन्ता का कार्यालय, ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग, कार्य प्रमण्डल, हजारीबाग

शुद्धि पत्र

इस कार्यालय द्वारा आमंत्रित ई-निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना सं०-05/2026-27 /RWD/EE/HAZARIBAG, दिनांक-15.07.2026, जिसका PR No-385134 Rural Work Department (26-27).D से प्रकाशित निविदा में निम्नवत् संशोधन की जाती है—

1. वेबसाइट में निविदा प्रकाशन की तिथि :- 11.08.2026

2. ई-निविदा प्राप्ति की अंतिम तिथि एवं समय :-20.08.2026 अपराह्न 5:00 बजे तक।

3. निविदा खोलने की, तिथि, एवं समय-21.08.2026 अपराह्न 5:30 बजे।

शेष सभी शर्तें यथावत रहेगी। विस्तृत जानकारी के लिए वेबसाइट jharkhandtenders.gov.in में देखा जा सकता है।

कार्यपालक अभियंता, ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग, कार्य प्रमण्डल, हजारीबाग।

PR 386857 (Rural Work Department) 26-27 (D)

AFFIDAVIT

I, Kumari Nisam Sinha, W/o-Rajeev Kumar Sinha, aged about 31 years, by faith Hindu, Nationality Indian, resident of Village - Bachra, P.O. - Bachra, P.S. - Piparwar, District - Chota (Jharkhand), do hereby solemnly affirm and declare as follows:-

1. That I am resident of the aforesaid address.

2. That my name is recorded as "Nisam Sinha (निसम सिन्हा)" in my Adhar Card bearing No.- 6050 1682 2097.

3. That my correct and full name is "Kumari Nisam Sinha (कुमारी निसम सिन्हा)", which is duly recorded in all my educational certificates and other documents.

4. That "Nisam Sinha (निसम सिन्हा)" to "Kumari Nisam Sinha (कुमारी निसम सिन्हा)" to maintain uniformity in all my official records.

5. That this Affidavit is executed for the purpose of correction/updation of my name in my Adhar Card and for all other legal and official purposes.

SL No.-621, Date-24.07.2026

कार्यपालक अभियन्ता का कार्यालय भवन निर्माण विभाग, भवन प्रमण्डल, रामगढ़।

:- शुद्धि पत्र :-

एतद द्वारा सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि अतिश्रुत्यकालीन पुनर्निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना सं०-22/2026-27 जिसका PR No. 386810 (Building) 26-27*D है। निविदा प्राप्ति की तिथि एवं समय दिनांक 15.08.2026 को अपराह्न 3.00 बजे के स्थान पर निविदा प्राप्ति की तिथि एवं समय दिनांक 17.08.2026 को अपराह्न 3.00 बजे एवं निविदा खोलने की तिथि 17.08.2026 को अपराह्न 3.30 बजे माह पढ़ा जाय। निविदा के अन्य शर्तें एवं सूचनाएँ यथावत् रहेगा।

कार्यपालक अभियन्ता भवन प्रमण्डल, रामगढ़।

PR 386909 (Building) 26-27 (D)

कार्यपालक अभियन्ता का कार्यालय भवन निर्माण विभाग, भवन प्रमण्डल, रामगढ़

:- शुद्धि पत्र :-

एतद द्वारा सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि अल्पकालीन ई-प्रोक्योरमेंट नोटिस सं०- BCD/EE/RAMGARH/ 24 /2026-27 है, जिसका PR No. 386813 Building (26-27).D के क्रमांक -01 में कार्य पूर्ण करने अवधि 06 माह के स्थान पर 04 माह, क्रमांक -02 में 06 माह के स्थान पर 03 माह, क्रमांक -03 में 09 माह के स्थान पर 04 माह एवं क्रमांक -04 में 06 माह के स्थान पर 03 माह पढ़ा जाय। निविदा के अन्य शर्तें एवं सूचनाएँ यथावत् रहेगा।

कार्यपालक अभियन्ता भवन प्रमण्डल, रामगढ़

PR 386908 Building(26-27)#D



India batters must be proactive in SL: Rahane

G UNNIKRISHNAN ■ Bengaluru

Former skipper Ajinkya Rahane advised the Indian batters to be "proactive" against Sri Lankan spinners in the upcoming two-match Test series, beginning at Galle from August 15.

Rahane had played a stellar role in India's 3-0 series sweep during the 2017 tour to the Island nation, scoring over 200 runs with a hundred and a fifty. "I think in Sri Lanka, the first day wicket generally is very good. But being top of the bowler as a batsman is very important. That's what I have learned in Sri Lanka. You cannot be too defensive," Rahane, who recently announced his retirement, told PTI in an interview facilitated by ETPL.

Rahane said the presence of

quality spinners in the Sri Lanka lineup makes it imperative for Indian batters to be in their dominant self.

"You have to probably be more proactive because they will have spinners friendly wickets, and Sri Lanka do have decent spinners in their side. And again, a home team is always a tough team to beat. Whatever I've learned playing cricket for so many years, you can't take anyone for lightly. "So it's all about, I think, having your own game plan as an individual and being proactive. Even in Test cricket, it's going to be the key," he added.

Rahane, once an all-format player for India, said the batting dynamics of Test cricket have changed completely in recent years, especially with the T20 format gaining more popularity.

"The game has evolved massively. Talking about Test cricket, you see now a lot many T20 players do play in Test cricket as well. The scoop, the laps, switch hit, reverse sweep are being played and that too consistently. I think it is a very good thing," he said.

For Rahane, adaptation holds key in modern day cricket.

"The players need to adapt to different formats very quickly because that's the mindset you want now.

As soon as the Test gets over, probably within a week, you're playing T20, you're playing ODIs or after T20, you are straight away going into Test cricket. "So having that mindset, the adaptability is really, really important. So in the last two, three years, the game has gone up immensely," he noted.

Similarly, Rahane also

noted an improvisational streak in bowlers to keep up with the competition. "We have seen several variations in bowling, as we have seen seam-up and wobble seam probably. Bowlers are now probably looking to bowl yorkers in Test cricket as well. Previously, we have not seen fast bowlers bowling yorkers that regularly in Test cricket, except a few bowlers. "But now, that's the demand and probably the variation everyone wants. And still as a cricketer, you have to keep on evolving skill-wise every single time," he added.

He might have retired from top-flight cricket, but it has not doused his desire to contribute to the game that gave him so much.

"I still have a few years. I still want to play cricket. I don't want to put any number, but I can still play cricket for, you know, how much a year I want because I try to keep myself really fit and that's what I

आरखण्ड सरकार

श्रम, नियोजन, प्रशिक्षण एवं कौशल विकास विभाग

अवर प्रादेशिक नियोजनालय, हजारीबाग

" अप्रेंटिसशिप मेला" दिनांक- 10.08.2026

आवश्यक सूचना

DGT, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Govt. of India के निर्देशानुसार MSDE भारत सरकार द्वारा सरकारी औद्योगिक प्रशिक्षण संस्थान, हजारीबाग परिसर में दिनांक- 10.08.2026 को "PM NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP MELA- PMNAM" का आयोजन किया जा रहा है।

अतः सभी इच्छुक प्रशिक्षणार्थी अपने सभी शैक्षणिक प्रमाण पत्रों एवं फोटोग्राफ के साथ स-समय पूर्वाह्न 10 बजे उपरोक्त वर्णित स्थल पर आयोजित अप्रेंटिसशिप मेला में भाग लेना सूचित करें।

उपरोक्त संदर्भ में राज्य अवस्थित सभी औद्योगिक ईकाईयों से अनुरोध है कि अपनी प्रविष्टि अवर प्रादेशिक नियोजनालय, हजारीबाग अथवा (<https://www.apprenticeshipindia.gov.in>) में दर्ज करते हुए उक्त आयोजित मेला में भाग लेने की कृपा करें।

अवर प्रादेशिक नियोजनालय, हजारीबाग

PR 386846 Labour Employment and Traning (26-27)_D

Office of Civil Surgeon Cum Chief Medical Officer, Ranchi (Department of Health and Family Welfare)

Letter No

EXPRESSON OF INTEREST (E.O.I)

Date -

Sadar Hospital, Ranchi is one of the premier govt. hospital in the state and India. The institute provides free medical services under AB-MMJAY and other govt. schemes. Expression of Interest (E.O.I) is invited for Specialist Medical officer's for providing specialized services at Sadar Hospital Ranchi.

Sl. No	Name of Post	Min Qualification	No. of Posts	Emoluments
1	Onco-Pathologist	1. Postgraduate medical degree in MD/DNB (Pathology) 2. Minimum experience of 1 year in Onco-Pathologist/ 3years Senior Residency in pathology till the date of joining.	1	Negotiable

Terms and Conditions

Relevant documents and information can be seen and downloaded from www.sadarhospitalranchi.org

The desirous candidates having requisite qualifications and fulfilling other eligibility conditions may come for appearing in **walk-in-interview** along with filled application on prescribed format and all the certificates in original in support of their qualification, experience in office of **Civil Surgeon, Administrative Building, Sadar Hospital Campus, Puruliya Road Ranchi - 834 001 at 10th Aug 2026 11AM.**

No TA/DA will be paid to candidates attending the interview.

Chairman, Hospital Management Society, Sadar Hospital Ranchi will have the sole authority to accept or reject any application, if he is satisfied with the cause to do so, without assigning any reason thereof.

Maximum age of applicant will be not more than 45 yrs as on 31-07-2026.

Candidate with higher qualification will be given preference for the post.

The above mentioned post can be increased or decreased.

This is a contractual position under Ayushman Bharat - Hospital Management Society, Sadar Hospital Ranchi initially for the period of 1 year. Extension post expiry of initial period will be the sole discretion of the Ayushman Bharat - Hospital Management Society, Sadar Hospital, Ranchi.

Civil Surgeon Cum Chief Medical Officer Ranchi

PR 386899 Health Med Edu and Family Welfare(26-27)#D

STATE HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY OF JHARKHAND

Government of Jharkhand

(Deendayal Nagar, Near N. H. Division, Booty Road, Ranchi, Pin-834008)

E-mail: membertechnical.shaj3@gmail.com

Letter no. : SHAJ/Proc/CW/Sahajanand Chowk - Judge Colony/2024/626 Ranchi, Date: 07.08.2026

CORRIDGUM-3 FOR

Name of Work: Construction of Four Lane Elevated Road near Sahajanand Chowk to Near Judge Colony, Ranchi in the State of Jharkhand.

Tender Ref. no. - SHAJ/Proc/CW/Sahajanand Chowk - Judge Colony/2024

Tender Id. No. - 2026 SHAJ 115861

PR No. - 383212 State Highway Authority of Jharkhand

The following modification is being made hereby in the bidding documents due to unavoidable reason:

Previous Schedule	Extended Schedule
Last date of Request for BID	10.08.2026 upto 12:30 PM
Document	17.08.2026 upto 12:30 PM
BID Due Date	10.08.2026, upto 12:30PM
Opening of Technical BIDs at venue	11.08.2026 at 12:30 PM
18.08.2026 at 12:30 PM	

The rest Terms & Conditions will remain unchanged.

Sd/-Member (Technical)

PR 386918 (State Highway Authority of Jharkhand)26-27*D State Highways Authority of Jharkhand

कार्यालय, जिला परिषद्, कोडरमा

अति अत्यकालीन निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना संख्या - 04 / 2026-27

जिला परिषद् के स्व-आय में वृद्धि के दृष्टिगत जिला परिषद् के स्व आय मद BOQ से प्राप्त राशि से परिसंपत्ति निर्माण के तहत स्वीकृत क्रमांक- 7 में वर्णित कार्य के लिए आरखण्ड सरकार के समुचित श्रेणी में निविदा की शर्त-1 के अनुसार निबंधित संवेदकों से F₂ प्रपत्र पर मुहर बंद निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है।

1.विज्ञापन दाता का नाम

2.परिमाण विपत्र विक्री की तिथि

3.निविदा प्राप्त करने की तिथि

4.निविदा खोलने की तिथि

5.परिमाण विपत्र विक्री का स्थान

6.निविदा प्राप्ति एवं खोलने का स्थान

7.कार्य की विस्तृत विवरणी ->

युप संख्या	प्रखण्ड का नाम	कार्य का नाम	प्राक्कलित राशि (रुपये में)	अग्रघन की राशि (रुपये में)	परिमाण विपत्र का मूल्य (रुपये में)	कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि
01	डोमचौच	जिला परिषद् कोडरमा के अंतर्गत प्रखण्ड डोमचौच में दक्षिणी पंचायत विवाह भवन का उन्नयन कार्य	1563800.00	31500.00	5000.00	3 माह
02	कोडरमा	सी० एच० स्कूल रोड में जिला परिषद् के शेष जमीन पर भू-तल एवं प्रथम तल पर दुकान का निर्माण	1030000.00	21000.00	2500.00	3 माह

निविदा की शर्तें www.koderma.nic.in एवं कार्यालय के सूचना पट्ट पर देखें।

PR 386926 (Panchayati Raj)26-27*D जिला अभियंता, जिला परिषद्, कोडरमा

कार्यपालक अभियंता का कार्यालय

ग्रामीण विकास विशेष प्रमण्डल, लातेहार।

Email- rsdsd.latehar@rediffmail.com

निविदा रद्द करने संबंधी सूचना

इस कार्यालय द्वारा आमंत्रित अति अत्यकालिन निविदा सं०. EE/RDSD/LATEHAR/09/2026-27 जिसका PR NO- 382212 दिनांक-13.10.2026 को प्रकाशित हुई थी। इस निविदा को अपरिहार्य कारणों से रद्द किया जाता है।

कार्यपालक अभियंता

ग्रामीण विकास विशेष प्रमण्डल, लातेहार।

PR 386870 (Rural Development) 26-27 (D)

BEFORE THE EXECUTIVE MAGISTRATE, DHANBAD AFFIDAVIT

K.KOLO DEVI, W/o Late Shora Manjhi, aged about 61 years, by faith-Hindu, by occupation-Housewife, resident of Vill. Pakerbera, P.O. Tantri, P.S. Topchanchi, Dist. Dhanbad (Jharkhand)-828402 do hereby solemnly affirm on oath and declare as follows:-

1. That, My name is mentioned in my Husband's Service record as Nominee SADHMANI MANJHAN in BCL. But in my Aadhar No.7465 1808 8589 my name is by mistake written as KOLO DEVI.

2. That, I want to correct my name in my Aadhar Card as SADHMANI MANJHAN in place of KOLO DEVI.

3. That, I want to register my name as Sadhmani Manjhan in my Aadhar

4. That, I am affixing my recent Photographs on this affidavit for my proper identification.

5. That, my above contents are true to the best of my knowledge, belief & information and I have concealed nothing.

6. That, I am swearing this affidavit to produce it before the authority concerned for issuing for needful purpose.

SL. NO. 32790 Date: 26/06/2026

न्यायालय : कार्यपालक दण्डाधिकारी, रांची।

शपथ-पत्र

मैं, प्रकाश साह, आधार सं०- 3534 2237 1003, पिता स्व० संजय साह, निवासी ग्राम ए.जी. मोड, स्टाफ कार्टर नं०-14, डोरंडा, पो०-डोरंडा, थाना- डोरंडा, जिला- रांची, झारखण्ड - 834002 शपथ पत्रक निम्न घोषणा करता हूँ कि:-

1. यह कि मैं उपरोक्त पते का निवासी हूँ।

2. यह कि मेरा सही नाम " प्रकाश साह " है जो मेरे शैक्षणिक प्रमाण पत्र दर्ज है।

3. यह कि मेरे नाम से निर्गत आधार कार्ड मैं मेरा नाम "अशु कुमार " दर्ज है जो गलत है आधार सं०- 3534 2237 1003 है।

4. यह कि यह शपथ पत्र मैं अपने नाम से निर्गत आधार कार्ड मैं "अशु कुमार" के स्थान पर " प्रकाश साह " सुधार हेतु समादिता कर रहा हूँ।

5. यह कि उक्त वर्णित सारी बातें सही एवं सत्य है गलत पाये जाने पर सारी जिम्मेवारी मेरी होगी।

SI. NO.- 5501, Date-21.07.2026

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER

MINOR IRRIGATION DIVISION, CHATRA

Very short e-Procurement Tender Notice

3rd Call

Tender Reference No. SWD/MID/CHATRA/F2-10/2026-27 Date:- 07.08.2026

1

Date of publication of Tender on website

13.08.2026 at 2.00 pm

2

Last date/Time for submission of Bids

20.08.2026 at 5.00 pm

3

Date of opening of e-Tender

22.08.2026 at 12.00 pm

4

Name & address of office Inviting tender

Executive Engineer, Minor Irrigation Division, Chatra.

5

Contact noof Procurement officer

06541-223672

6

E-mail of e-procurement Officer

eemidchat -cemfjhr@nic.in

7

Helpline number of e - Procurement cell

06541-223672

8

Last Date of submission of Bid online/Time for receipt of bids

20.08.2026 Up to 5.00 pm

Sl No.	Gr. No.	Name of Scheme	Estimated Cost (in Lakh)	Time of Completion
1	1	Construction of Anganbari Kendra in Uchla, GP- Nawadih, Block-Hunterganj, Dist.-Chatra.	1108200.00	04 Months
2	2	Construction of Anganbari Kendra in Nawadih Miya Tola GP- Nawadih, Block-Hunterganj, Dist.-Chatra.	1108200.00	04 Months
3	3	Construction of Anganbari Kendra in Dumri Kala, GP- Dumri Kala, Block-Hunterganj, Dist.-Chatra.	1108200.00	04 Months

Note:-

1. Only e-Tenders will be accepted.

2. Tender Fee and EMD will be received through online mode only. Bidders can use internet banking facility for faster processing of Tender Fee and EMD. Alternatively, Bidders can use NEFT/RTGS challan generated for the tender from <https://jharkhandtenders.gov.in> portal.

3. Refund will only be issued to originated bank account used for the payment of Tender Fee and EMD, so, Bidder are advised NOT to close Bank Account used for online payment (NEFT/RTGS) of tender fee and EMD.

4. No Hard copy/Physical copy is required to be submitted for tender opening/valuation. However, Department may ask original document for verification before award of contract.

5. Estimated value may change.

6. Further details can be seen on website <https://jharkhandtenders.gov.in>.

Executive Engineer,

Minor Irrigation Division, Chatra.

PR 386869 Minor Irrigation(26-27)D

कार्यालय जिला परिषद्, हजारीबाग।

प्रेस विज्ञप्ति

इस प्रेस विज्ञप्ति के माध्यम से सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि ग्रामीण विकास विभाग (पंचायती राज), झारखण्ड सरकार के संकल्प संख्या 3428 दिनांक 10.10.17 के द्वारा झारखण्ड पंचायत भूमि विकास (नक्शा एवं भवन निर्माण) नियमावली, 2017 के तहत झारखण्ड Building byelaws 2016 को संशोधित करते हुए पंचायती राज संस्थाओं के क्षेत्र में भी अंगीकृत किया गया है। इसके तहत पंचायती राज संस्थाओं के क्षेत्र (ग्रामीण क्षेत्र) में 5000 वर्ग फीट से अधिक के क्षेत्रफल के भवन निर्माण हेतु भवन का नक्शा स्वीकृत कराना अनिवार्य है। ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में 5000 वर्ग फीट से अधिक के क्षेत्रफल के भवन निर्माण हेतु भवन का नक्शा पारित करने की शक्ति जिला परिषद को प्रदान की गई है। नक्शा पारित करने की पुरी प्रक्रिया ऑन-लाइन है, जिसके तहत संबंधित व्यक्ति जिला परिषद, हजारीबाग में निबंधित वास्तुविद (Architect) के माध्यम से नक्शा पारित कराने हेतु वेबसाइट <https://jhbpams.jharkhand.gov.in> पर आवेदन कर सकते हैं। वर्ष 2017 के बाद बिना नक्शा पारित कराया भवन निर्माण अवैध माना जायेगा एवं उनके विरुद्ध विधि सम्मत कार्रवाई की जाएगी।

हजारीबाग शहरी क्षेत्र के किनारे बसे हुए गांव जो अब शहरी क्षेत्र में तबदिल हो रही है, उसमें प्रायः देखा जा रहा है कि 5000 वर्ग फीट से अधिक क्षेत्रफल के भवन का निर्माण कार्य किया जा रहा है, जो बिना नक्शा स्वीकृति के तैयार किया गया है या तैयार हो रहा है।

इस प्रेस विज्ञप्ति के माध्यम से सूचित किया जाता है कि ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में 5000 वर्ग फीट से अधिक क्षेत्रफल के भवन यथा मकान, दुकान, अस्पताल, बैंक, मार्केट, विद्यालय आदि निर्माण हेतु जिला परिषद, हजारीबाग में 15 दिनों के अन्दर आवेदन कर नक्शा पारित कराने के पश्चात् ही भवन का निर्माण कराया जाय, अन्यथा बाध्य होकर झारखण्ड Building bye-laws 2016 का उल्लंघन मानते हुए विधि सम्मत कार्रवाई की जायेगी।

उप विकास आयुक्त

—सह-मुख्य कार्यपालक पदाधिकारी, जिला परिषद, हजारीबाग।

PR 386950 (District) 26-27 (D)

उपायुक्त-सह-जिला दण्डाधिकारी का कार्यालय, रामगढ़ (जिला भू-अर्जन शाखा)

--: भारतमाला परियोजना अंतर्गत अधिग्रहित भूमि के अज्ञात रैयतों से दावा प्रस्तुत करने हेतु सार्वजनिक सूचना :-

भारतमाला परियोजना के अन्तर्गत राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग अधिनियम, 1956 की धारा 3D के तहत अधिसूचित भूमि के संबंध में जिला भू-अर्जन कार्यालय, रामगढ़ द्वारा तैयार अवार्ड में मौजा चोपादारु, चक्रवाली, मागपुर, सोसोखुर्द, घमनाटांड, हेमतपुर, कुम्हरदगा, रायपुरा, बरडीहा, बरियातु, कमती एवं कुल्ही के कुछ भूमि में 'अज्ञात' के नाम से दर्ज है। उपर्युक्त मौजाओं के वास्तविक रैयतों अथवा भू-स्वामियों को सूचित किया जाता है कि वे इस विज्ञप्ति के प्रकाशन की तिथि से 30 (तीस) दिनों के भीतर जिला भू-अर्जन कार्यालय, रामगढ़ में उपस्थित होकर अधिग्रहित भूमि से संबंधित सभी आवश्यक दस्तावेज प्रस्तुत करें, ताकि अभिलेखों के सत्यापन के उपरान्त नियमानुसार मुआवजा राशि का भुगतान किया जा सके।

--: अज्ञात पंचायतियों की विवरणी -->

क्र०	मौजा	पंचायती का नाम	पंचाट सं०	खाता न०	प्लॉट न०	रकबा (ए०)
01	चोपादारु	अज्ञात	22		417	0.04001
02	चक्रवाली	अज्ञात	29		44	0.01421
03	मागपुर	अज्ञात	97		250	0.00141
04			119		437	0.01759
05	सोसोखुर्द	अज्ञात	19		31	0.01002
06			7		133	0.01139
07			16		30	0.02301
08			33	15	58	0.01181
09			34		59	0.16044
10			11	19	28	0.00499
11	घमनाटांड	अज्ञात	57	03	453	0.09
12	हेमतपुर	अज्ञात	12	67	788	0.005
13	कुम्हरदगा	अज्ञात	07	47	43	0.48692
14	रायपुरा	अज्ञात	12	10	314	0.03030
15	बरडीहा	अज्ञात	50		48	0.00950
16			126		492	0.1499
17			141		581	0.00150
18			1		1158	0.0084
19			7		1171	0.01989
20			29		1255	0.04001
21	बरियातु	अज्ञात	34	1261	0.04001	
22			42		1272	0.03
23			93		194	0.00591
24			109		391	0.00499
25			121		485	0.00730
26			144		679	0.05960
27	कमती	अज्ञात	63		71	0.01150
28	कुल्ही	अज्ञात	63	36	997	0.00499

सभी संबंधित व्यक्तियों को सूचित किया जाता है कि यदि निर्धारित अवधि के भीतर कोई दावा अथवा आवश्यक अभिलेख प्रस्तुत नहीं किये जाने के संदर्भ में विधि सम्मत अग्रतर कार्रवाई की जाएगी।

ह/—

जिला भू-अर्जन पदाधिकारी, —सह—रक्षम पदाधिकारी, रामगढ़

PR 386840 Land Reforms (26-27)_D

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