

CJI REBUKES BCI OVER NALSAR ROW

It's between students and me

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday took a stern view of a Bar Council of India (BCI) circular directing all state bar councils not to enrol any 2026 batch graduate of NALSAR University of Law as advocates, saying students have a right to protest.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant said the BCI has nothing to do in the matter as it was a dialogue between him and the students.

"They (students) have a right to protest. Who can stop them," the CJI, who was heading a bench which also comprised Justices Joydalya Bagchi and V Mohana, said.

"It's a dialogue between students and me. Who are they (BCI) to interfere," the CJI said. The observations came after a plea challenging the BCI circular was mentioned for urgent listing.

The bench issued notice to the BCI seeking its response on the plea and directed that no punitive action be taken against the students or faculty of the NALSAR at the instance of the BCI or any other state bar councils.

The counsel appearing for the BCI told the bench that the circular has been withdrawn. The bench posted the matter for hearing after two weeks.

On August 13, the BCI had directed all state bar councils



Chief Justice Surya Kant

not to enrol any 2026 graduate of NALSAR University of Law as advocates until further orders, but reversed this order within hours after an uproar on social media.

In the first statement, BCI chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra said it was examining allegations regarding a campaign against CJI Kant's participation in the university's convocation and had sought a report identifying those responsible.

The apex statutory body for lawyers said a final decision in the matter would be taken on August 19 after considering the material placed before it. The BCI then modified its decision after the uproar on social media and allowed state bar councils to enrol 2026 graduates of NALSAR University of Law as advocates. The new notification modified the earlier order, saying the "vast majority" of the students were innocent and should not be made to suffer for the alleged misconduct of a few.

IIT-backed flood resilience system coming soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The state government will implement the Kerala Flood Resilience Initiative to scientifically address floods and other rain-related disasters triggered by climate change, the Chief Minister's Office said on Friday.

A team of experts from IIT Roorkee, IIT Palakkad, and IIT Kottayam met Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan and presented a comprehensive road map for a state-of-the-art flood-resilience system using advanced technologies on Friday. The experts recommended preparedness to tackle extreme rainfall, urban flooding, riverine floods, landslides and mudslides. The initiative will deploy artificial intelligence, machine learning, remote sensing, hydrodynamic modelling and precise rainfall forecasting to identify flood-prone areas and issue timely warnings.

They also advised that silt and soil removal from rivers, lakes, and backwaters be undertaken only after scientific assessment of environmental impact and water flow. (The Chief Minister directed the Water Resources and Disaster Management Departments to examine the technical feasibility, financial implications and implementation modalities of the proposal, and submit a joint report within a month. Revenue Minister A. P.



IIT experts meet Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday to submit the preliminary report on the Kerala Flood Resilience Initiative.

Govt sanctions Rs 150 cr for pending paddy dues

Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan on Friday announced that the state government has sanctioned Rs 150 crore to clear pending paddy procurement dues of farmers.

In a post on X, Satheesan said payments for all Paddy Receipt Sheet dues issued up to July 31, 2026, for the 2025-26 procurement season would be disbursed starting Friday. The disbursement was resumed through a bank consortium comprising the State Bank of India and Canara Bank.

Paddy procurement is managed through Supplyco and cooperative societies, which facilitate the



minimum support price mechanism for cultivators. The system is crucial in regions such as Kuttanad, Palakkad, Alappuzha and Thrissur, where paddy farming remains a primary source of livelihood.

However, delays in disbursement have been a recurring issue, often leaving farmers in financial distress during peak agricul-

tural cycles.

In recent years, arrears in procurement payments have triggered protests and highlighted the rising costs of cultivation, with farmer groups demanding quicker settlement of dues. The procurement process, while ensuring price stability, has faced criticism over procedural delays and the mounting backlog of receipts.

The release of funds comes at a time when farmers had been pressing for clearance of outstanding payments from the current season, underscoring the continuing challenges in the state's paddy procurement framework.

Anilkumar, Environment Minister Sunny Joseph, Agriculture Minister T.

Siddique, Water Resources Minister Mons Joseph and Chief Secretary Biswanath

Sinha were among those present at the high-level meeting.

‘No chargesheet filed in microfinance cases yet’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

Investigating Officer and Vigilance SP S. Sasidharan informed the Kerala High Court on Friday that no charge sheet has been filed in court for any of the cases related to the controversial SNDP (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana) Yogam microfinance scam.

The court had earlier raised sharp criticism and expressed deep dissatisfaction over the prolonged delays in submitting final reports and initiating prosecutions in the case. When the court specifically asked whether charge sheets had been filed in cases related to the scam, in which SNDP Yogam General Secretary Vellappally Natesan and others are named as accused, the SP confirmed that none had been formally submitted yet. Vellappally Natesan is the prime accused.

The investigative team noted that involvement of the accused has been identified in eight separate cases of the scam. Furthermore,



Vellappally Natesan General Secretary SNDP

probes into the specific instances registered in Pulpally and Ranni have been concluded. The Vigilance department stated that sanction from the government has been sought to prosecute the accused in the case. Charge sheets will be officially filed as soon as this government clearance is granted.

The high-profile microfinance scam case centres around allegations that heavy interest rates were illegally levied on backwards-class women through loans sourced via the Backwards Classes Development Corporation, utilising a NABARD grant

scheme, leading to financial misappropriation and cheating. The controversy centres around an alleged financial scam worth approximately 715.85 crores involving the SNDP Yogam. It is alleged that between 2003 and 2014, the organisation secured bulk loans at low interest rates from the Kerala State Backward Classes Development Corporation (KSCDC), utilising NABARD schemes intended for microfinance programs aimed at backwards-class women.

Investigators and petitioners claim that these funds were redistributed to beneficiaries at much higher interest rates, records were manipulated in the name of fake self-help groups, and money was systematically misappropriated.

Vigilance cases and First Information Reports (FIRs) began registering in 2016. However, due to prolonged investigations and years of perceived delays, petitions were filed before the High Court seeking court-monitored probes and setting up of specialised investigation teams (SITs).

Vande Mataram not mandatory for schools

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Directorate of General Education has released an official circular clarifying that singing Vande Mataram is not mandatory during Independence Day celebrations in schools across the state.

This explicit directive was issued directly to all educational institutions ahead of the national celebrations to clear up mounting confusion. The official guidelines emphasise that school ceremonies must focus strictly on the traditional hoisting of the national flag followed immediately by the singing of the National Anthem.

This newly released circular completely omits any mention or instruction regarding the recital of the national song, Vande Mataram. The clarification from the state education directorate follows intense political and public debates triggered by an earlier administrative order from the Chief Secretary.

An earlier communication had instructed state

government departments to ensure the collective singing of Vande Mataram in its entirety during public functions tied to the Har Ghar Tiranga campaign.

While that Central directive raised speculation that schools would also have to enforce the full recital, the dedicated school protocol

issued by the Directorate of General Education has now put those rumours to rest. According to the school guidelines, the head of each institution must hoist the tricolour flag at or after nine in the morning, standing in absolute respect.

Furthermore, the state authorities have strictly mandated that schools must follow the Flag Code of India and observe eco-friendly green protocols by completely banning plastic flags on campus. The department has officially requested maximum participation from students, teachers, and school staff to celebrate the national event with patriotic songs and official messages, while keeping the core legal mandate limited solely to the national anthem.



Questions for Census 2027 include caste, COVID, and nature of trade

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Centre on Friday notified 40 questions, including for the first time queries on caste, to be asked of respondents during the population enumeration phase of the

Census, set to begin from September 1 in snow-bound areas, a government order said. The order from Registrar General of India Mrityunjay Kumar Narayan notifies questions such as whether the person belongs to a Scheduled Caste or a

Scheduled Tribe and their caste. The population enumeration in Ladakh and snow-bound non-synchronous areas of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, will take place from...

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Minors entering gig biz ruin Union efforts to bring order

GEETHIKA GIREENDRAN
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The death of a 17-year-old delivery rider has brought the state's food delivery sector into scrutiny. According to Ameer Azad, state vice-president of the All Kerala Gig and Platform Workers Union, CITU, around 16 delivery riders died in accidents last year, while more than 230 accidents involving riders were reported.

The union alleges that the pressure to complete targets and deliver orders quickly is contributing to the growing risk of accidents. The state's expanding food-delivery sector is drawing more minors and has raised concerns over their safety, earnings and working conditions amid growing algorithmic



A Swiggy delivery agent, working tirelessly in the rain to meet his daily target

pressure. Students from schools and colleges, including those staying in hostels, are increasingly entering the food delivery workforce. But their entry into a sector built around time-bound deliver-

ies, incentive targets and two-wheeler travel is raising questions about who is protecting these young workers and what risks they face.

Behind this pressure is an invisible supervisor, the app.

For food-delivery riders, work is not simply a race against traffic. It is a race against the numbers displayed on their phones. The number of orders completed can determine whether a rider qualifies for an incentive and whether the day's work is financially worthwhile.

A Zomato rider working in Ernakulam described how the system operates. Riders book separate lunch and dinner "gigs", generally from noon to 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 10.30 p.m. According to him, the incentive structure currently offers Rs 125 for five orders, Rs 150 for seven, Rs 200 for nine and Rs 225 for 12 orders.

But reaching the highest

incentive is not necessarily easy. The rider alleges that the app can limit the number of orders allocated to a worker, sometimes leaving a rider with around seven orders. Reaching the 12-order slab therefore requires additional orders to come in and makes work hectic.

According to him, riders who want to reach the target may have to complete deliveries faster.

The rider further alleges that the incentive system responds differently to individual workers. Those who work continuously may see their incentives reduced, while riders who stay away from the platform for...

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80-year-old stabbed for son representing abused woman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

An 80-year-old man is in the Intensive Care Unit(ICU) after being stabbed multiple times at his home in Puthuvyppeen on Thursday evening, allegedly by a man enraged that the victim's lawyer son had agreed to represent his wife in a domestic violence case, police said.

The victim, Mohandas, whose son T.M. Dolgo and daughter-in law Neema are both practising advocates, was attacked. Njarackal police arrested two men, identified as Velu (alias Duster) and Vavakutty (alias Dynaster). Dolgo had recently agreed to represent a local woman seeking protection from her husband, Velu, in a domestic violence case. Angered by this, Velu and his associate arrived at Mohandas' house while the lawyer and his wife were away at court, demanding to know his whereabouts.

When Mohandas told them his son was not home, asked them to leave, Velu allegedly issued death threats. As the confrontation escalated, the two men dragged Mohandas out of the house and threw him to the ground, despite objections from his wife, Lovely, who tried to intervene. Velu then allegedly stabbed him repeatedly with a knife, targeting his neck and abdomen, before the pair fled the scene.

‘Liberation from Violence’ gathering at Manaveeyam Veedhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

A gathering organised under the theme 'Liberation from Violence' was held at Manaveeyam Veedhi in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday, bringing together activists and like-minded women to stop domestic violence and to support survivors. Forum Against Domestic Violence (Garhikaathikrama Prathirodha Samithi), a collective to fight against domestic violence, organised the gathering.

The collective was formed by a group of Thiruvananthapuram-based women activists against the backdrop of increasing domestic violence cases. Since its formation, the forum has worked to bring cases of domestic violence into public attention and to challenge the silence surrounding violence within families.

The Forum's Convenor, Mercy Alexander, briefed against the cases in which

SFI stages funeral protest against Sanskrit University V-C

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

A major political controversy erupted at Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit in Kalady following a mock funeral protest staged by the Students Federation of India (SFI). The stir targeted the Vice Chancellor, Dr. Ciza Thomas, while a crucial Syndicate meeting was underway.

Student activists performed a symbolic death ritual, which drew widespread criticism for crossing ethical boundaries. However, the student outfit defended its actions against the administration, with the SFI leader-



ship stating that the event was merely a street play intended as a form of creative democratic protest.

The incident sparked serious concerns over academic safety and decorum in

the state's higher education sector.

In a strong show of institutional solidarity, all Vice Chancellors of Kerala universities issued a joint press release vehemently con-

demning the incident and calling for legal protection for educators. Dr. Ciza Thomas later alleged that the demonstrators also attempted to physically assault her and other university officials during the chaos.

Speaking on the controversy, Higher Education Minister Roji M. John strongly rejected the aggressive protest methods employed by the student organisation. In a formal press statement, the Higher Education Minister noted that the government will not bow down to such agitations and emphasised that the state's higher education sector requires comprehensive reforms.

Law students stage sit-in at KU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Students from various government and private law colleges staged a sit-in protest at the Kerala University entrance on Friday, demanding reforms in the LLB examination and valuation system. The protesters highlighted alleged irregularities in the 2024 LLB examinations, pointing to cases where students who initially failed reportedly passed after revaluation. In one instance, all 49 students who had failed reportedly cleared the examination after revaluation, with several securing more than 10 additional marks.

Man accused in girlfriend's murder dies after consuming poison

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kozhikode

A 35-year-old man out on bail in connection with his girlfriend's murder died on Friday morning after allegedly consuming poison, just as a chargesheet in the case was being finalised. The deceased was identified as Vaisakhan K. of Thadamabbattuthazham, Karaparamba. He consumed rat poison at his Vengeri residence on Thursday and was rushed to Kozhikode Medical College Hospital in critical condition, where he died early Friday.

Vaisakhan was arrested in January this year for the murder of his 26-year old girlfriend at his workshop in Morikkara, near Malikkadavu. Police said he had convinced her to enter a suicide pact after spiking her drink. As the two stood on stools with nooses around their necks, he allegedly stepped down and kicked away her stool, causing her death, before

drinking a mildly spiked portion himself to feign a joint attempt.

Cyber forensic teams later recovered deleted CCTV footage showing the victim entering the workshop but never leaving alive, undermining his claim of a voluntary pact. Investigators also found that the relationship had begun when the victim was a minor, leading to POCSO Act charges, along with charges over desecration of her body after death.

Vaisakhan was granted bail by the Kerala High Court on June 30 after nearly five months in custody, despite prosecution concerns over evidence tampering. The Elathur Special Investigation Team had recently submitted its chargesheet to the Kozhikode Sessions Court, with trial expected to begin soon.

Chevayoor police have registered a case into Vaisakhan's death and launched an investigation. His body was handed over to relatives after a post-mortem examination



Chief Minister V D Satheesan and Health Minister K Muraleedharan at the inauguration of Supplyco Onam fair in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday,

Kerala deck officer trainee goes missing from cargo ship

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

A 24-year-old deck officer trainee from Njarakkal in Vypin, Ernakulam, has gone missing while serving aboard a cargo vessel sailing from South Africa to Singapore, with search operations underway in Indonesian territorial waters and his family appealing for Central government intervention.

The missing man has been identified as Shinton Benny, who was serving as a Deck Officer Trainee aboard the chemical tanker Victoris Ace, operated by Mumbai-based MOL (Mitsui O.S.K. Lines). He last spoke to his family over the phone around 8:30 pm on Tuesday, showing no signs of distress.

According to the shipping company, he failed to report for his scheduled afternoon shift on Wednesday, prompting an immediate onboard headcount, and his family was formally noti-



Shinton Benny

fied of his disappearance on Thursday.

The crew has since carried out an extensive, room-by-room search of the vessel, but no trace of Shinton has been found. The ship briefly anchored to conduct a localised sea search in Indonesian waters before resuming its voyage; maritime tracking data shows it now continuing through the Strait of Malacca toward Singapore.

Family members told local media that Friday marks

Shinton's 24th birthday, adding to the anguish surrounding his disappearance. The family has registered a missing persons complaint with the Njarackal police station and has also petitioned the Union Ministry of Shipping and the Ministry of External Affairs, appealing to Union Minister S. Jaishankar to seek assistance from the Indonesian Navy and Coast Guard for an aerial and naval search along the vessel's route.

Local MPs and MLAs from Ernakulam have reportedly begun coordinating with maritime regulators in Mumbai to review the shipping company's logbooks and verify that proper protocol was followed after Shinton was found missing. Maritime search and rescue efforts along the ship's route in Indonesian waters are ongoing, as diplomatic channels work to coordinate a wider international search response.



Police officers lift a rope barricade to let an ambulance pass through, clearing the way amidst a protest march by the SFI towards the Police Commissioner's office in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday.

- Prathyash Vipanchika

Eleven officers selected for President's Medal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

As part of the Independence Day celebrations, 11 officers from the Kerala Police, Fire, Rescue Services, and Prison and Correctional Services have been selected for various President's Police and Fire Service Medals.

SPS. Sasidharan, investigating officer in the Sabarimala gold theft case, has been awarded the President's Medal for Distinguished Service, the Union Govt announced on Friday. Sasidharan is the lone officer from Kerala to receive the President's Medal for Distinguished Service this year. The Kerala HC appointed him last year to investigate cases related to the alleged loss of gold from the Dwarapalaka (guardian deity) idols and doorframes of the Sreekovil (sanctum

sanctum) at the Sabarimala temple. He was part of the investigation into the 2022 Elanthoor human-sacrifice case while serving as Deputy Commissioner of the Kochi City Police. IG Rajpal Meena, SP Binu Ramakrishna Pillai, DSP Ravikumar V.R., SP Ujjual Kumar S., Sub-Inspector Jyothish Kumar S.L. and DSP Suresh Babu S.S. have been selected for the Medal for Meritorious Service. ASO S Rajendran Nair and Sebastian Joseph N of the Fire and Rescue Services have been selected for the Meritorious Service Medal. ASP Sunil S. Kumar and Prison Officer Mohandas M.K. of the Prison and Correctional Services have also been selected for the Meritorious Service Medal. The Sabarimala gold loss probe has entered its final stage, with charge sheets in two cases expected to be filed soon.

Minors entering gig biz ruin Union efforts to bring order

several weeks may receive attractive offers and notifications encouraging them to return. He believes different workers are subjected to different algorithmic patterns that influence the incentives and orders they receive. The platform, he alleges, effectively learns a worker's pattern and adjusts the offers shown to them.

If the allegation is accurate, it raises a fundamental question about the meaning of flexibility in platform work. A rider may be free to decide when to log into the app, but the app can influence when working becomes financially attractive and how much work is required to earn a reasonable income.

According to the union, an earlier target of around Rs 650 earned a rider a Rs 200 incentive. The target has now increased to Rs 1,250, with an incentive of Rs 450. Riders therefore have to gen-

erate substantially more before unlocking the higher incentive. Their actual income is further reduced by fuel, vehicle maintenance and travel costs. Many riders from the outskirts travel long distances to major cities because food-delivery orders are concentrated in urban areas.

The arrival of students presents another problem. Unions say they cannot even identify many of these new workers because they do not have access to the platforms' complete worker lists. The young riders therefore remain outside the traditional structures through which workers raise complaints over pay, working hours and safety. Platforms offer bicycles and electric vehicles as delivery options that do not require a conventional driving licence.

However, the union alleges that some young riders use motor vehicles to complete deliveries faster. The death of the 17-year-old

has consequently raised questions about how minors are entering a delivery system that places them on busy roads under pressure to meet targets. The union also says young workers are reluctant to speak about their difficulties because they fear fewer orders, reduced incentives or account blocking.

The growing pool of student workers has weakened collective bargaining. When established riders demand better pay, shorter working hours or safer conditions, the availability of young workers willing to enter the sector makes it easier to replace them, the Union alleges.

The problem is therefore larger than one accident or one teenage rider. What looks like a flexible job to a teenager can conceal a harsher reality, an income system controlled by targets, incentives and an algorithm that workers cannot see or negotiate with.

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Questions for Census 2027 include caste, COVID, and nature of trade

September 1 to 30, according to a gazette notification issued earlier this month.

"For the conduct of the above Census, there shall be an option for self-enumeration from August 17 to 31 just before the start of house-to-house population enumeration," it said.

In the rest of the country, the population enumeration (PE) will begin next year.

This will be the first time when caste details will be collected as part of the Census.

The questionnaire is unlikely to carry a list of castes, and the responses will be recorded as shared by respondents, sources said.

The decision to include caste enumeration was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on April 30 last year.

HC allows revenue recovery to help Co-op banks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ernakulam

The Kerala High Court has ruled that cooperative societies can use revenue recovery proceedings to recover amounts awarded through arbitration and other statutory proceedings, providing significant relief to the cooperative sector.

The judgment was delivered by a single bench while considering petitions filed by 17 depositors of the Venkuringi Service Cooperative Bank in Pathanamthitta. The bank had reportedly been unable to repay matured fixed deposits amid a severe financial crisis, despite having secured awards against loan defaulters.

Clarifying the legal position, the court held that under Section 76(b) of the

Kerala Cooperative Societies Act, 1969, awards obtained under Section 70 can be recovered through the Kerala Revenue Recovery Act, 1968. It also ruled that a separate government notification under Section 71 of the Revenue Recovery Act is not required to initiate such proceedings.

To facilitate faster recovery, the court directed the Principal Secretary of the Revenue Department to make necessary changes to the online portal within two weeks, enabling cooperative banks to submit revenue recovery applications directly.

The ruling is expected to accelerate the recovery of outstanding dues and help financially distressed cooperative banks repay matured deposits to their depositors more efficiently.

UPST rank holders call off protest after talks with Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The UPST Rank Holders' Association on Friday withdrew its protest outside the Secretariat, ending a 17-day agitation after General Education Minister N. Shamsudheen assured the group that their key demands would be sympathetically examined.

The protest had centred around the association's grievance that the Public Service Commission was repeatedly issuing fresh notifications without first reporting existing vacancies, effectively bypassing candidates already on approved rank lists. Following talks, the Minister agreed to look into the matter and also indicated the government would



Members of the UPST Rank Holders' Association in discussion with General Education Minister N. Shamsudheen over their protest demands, at the Secretariat on Friday.

consider extending the validity period of the rank list to allow more candidates to be appointed before it lapses.

Their second major demand, that PSC-ranked candidates be appointed to Higher Secondary Teacher (HTV) posts, was not immedi-

ately resolved. The Minister told the protesters that the government would need 45 days to conduct a detailed study into the issue, which is tied to the teacher-student ratio in government schools and the resulting loss of posts in several institutions.

During the discussions, representatives of the rank holders' association pointed out a specific shortfall: the absence of upper-primary level teachers in Model Residential Schools and Fisheries Schools. Taking note of this, the Minister directed the Director General of Education to explore appointing candidates from the existing UP school rank lists of the respective districts. With the Minister assuring to examine all the demands raised over the course of the protest and implement those found feasible at the earliest, the association agreed to call off the agitation. The talks were also attended by Director General of Education Snehal Kumar IAS, Private Secretary Nisar H., and other senior officials.

'I apologize', Cong MLA for travel without seatbelt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Congress MLA C.R. Mahesh has apologised for travelling without wearing a seat belt, admitting it was a violation of traffic rules. The Karunagappally legislator said elected representatives should not commit such lapses and recalled that the incident occurred while visiting the tomb of former CM Oommen Chandy at Puthuppally church ahead of the recent Assembly elections. Mahesh noted he had paid fines for similar cases during the polls. He stated this after visual media reported the violation. "I apologise for the incident and thank the media for pointing out the mistake," he wrote.



An NCC cadet from 1 (Kerala) Remount & Veterinary Squadron, Mannuthy, Thrissur, rides through a ring of flames during a rehearsal of the Independence Day parade at Central Stadium in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday.

- A V Muzafar

Lifer for 7 in 2016 murder of Kannammoola youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

A special court here on Friday sentenced seven men to life imprisonment for the 2016 murder of a 19-year-old Kannammoola resident, nearly a decade after the crime.

Judge A. Shahjahan of the Nedumangad SC/ST Special Court convicted Arun (alias Paratta Arun), Lallu, Rajesh (alias Poocha Rajesh), Sanalkumar (alias Sanju), Vijesh (alias Vishnu), Manu (alias Shetty Manu) and Sreenath (alias Bolji) under multiple sections of the IPC and the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

An eighth accused, Suresh (alias Ashir), was also found guilty but could not be sen-

tenced as he had since died. Five others - Dini Babu, Jayan, Ajees, Unnikrishnan Nair and Dileep, were acquitted, while five more had been discharged earlier.

According to the prosecution, the victim Vishnu, known as Appu and a former Yuva Morcha unit secretary, was attacked outside his home on Puthenpalam Vidyadhiraja Road on October 7, 2016. A gang attacked him with machetes and knives as he tried to flee, inflicting 34 wounds, as the post-mortem report showed.

His parents, Anil Kumar and Bindu, and his aunt Laila were injured trying to intervene. Investigators said the killing stemmed from a gang rivalry: Vishnu was close to Puthenpalam Rajesh,

allegedly linked to the 2015 murder of Sunil Babu, brother of acquitted accused Dini Babu.

The case, initially probed by Pettah police, was transferred to an Assistant Commissioner of Police at Shangumugham and later reassigned after lapses, resulting in a revised chargesheet. At trial, Special Public Prosecutor V. Sajan Prasad relied on DNA evidence matching blood on the accused's clothing to the victim and his relatives, along with hospital-bed statements from Bindu and Laila. The prosecution examined 48 witnesses, including Vishnu's cousin Adithyan, who was seven at the time and had witnessed the attack.



Police detain ABVP supporters protesting over LLB revaluation irregularities at Kerala University, on Friday

ABVP protests against LLB valuation irregularities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

ABVP activists staged a protest at the Kerala University headquarters on Friday raising allegations of irregularities in the valuation of LLB examinations. The demonstration later escalated into a confrontation with police.

The protesters demanded strict action against teachers allegedly responsible for the lapses and called for a refund of the revaluation fees collected from students. Police used water cannons twice to prevent the protesters from crossing the barricades.

The situation intensified after ABVP state leaders addressed the gathering.

Several activists reportedly climbed over the university walls and entered the headquarters premises. More than half of the protesters allegedly reached the main entrance, where they staged a sit-in and raised slogans against the university authorities.

After the protesters initially refused to leave, additional police force arrived at the scene, and officers resorted to removing the protesters from the premises. The protest took place amid a shortage of police personnel at the university, as a large number of officers had been deployed earlier in the day to deal with an SFI protest over similar concerns related to LLB revaluation.

LLB revaluation row: SFI for indefinite strike from Monday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The Students Federation of India (SFI) activists have announced that it would launch an indefinite protest at Kerala University from August 17 after the Vice Chancellor refused to show up during their discussion with Syndicate members over the university's decision to discontinue revaluation for LLB examinations.

On Friday, the SFI activists had staged a sit-in outside the Kerala University Registrar's office, protesting against the university's decision. The demonstration soon escalated into a confrontation with police resulting in the detention of around 30 students, including several women. They were later taken to the Armed Reserve (AR) Camp. SFI activists alleged that police used excessive force while removing the protesters, claiming that male officers dragged female activists, including by their hair. The students insisted they had protested peacefully, using placards and avoiding slogans.

Following the police action, the SFI marched to the Commissioner's Office, demanding action over the alleged use of force. Authorities later announced that the detained students would be released.

Later, members of the organisation alleged that



Police removing SFI activists during a protest against anomalies in the LLB examination answer paper revaluation.

Vice-Chancellor Dr Mohanan Kunnummal had refused to meet university union office-bearers and Senate members when discussing the LLB students' concerns, while accepting a complaint from ABVP district office-bearers.

The protest was triggered by widespread complaints regarding the LLB first-semester examination. The university had decided to discontinue the revaluation system for LLB examinations and introduce a new evaluation method under which each answer script would be assessed by two teachers.

The students alleged that ending revaluation would

deny them an opportunity to challenge errors in the evaluation of their answer scripts. They said students who fail could be forced to wait for supplementary examinations, potentially delaying their higher education, enrolment and employment opportunities by a year or more.

The protesters also raised concerns over the reported increase in revaluation fees to Rs 2000 per paper. They questioned discrepancies in the evaluation process, pointing out that some students who initially failed later passed after revaluation, with significant increases in their marks.

Min orders probe into overcharging at BEVCO outlet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

State Excise Minister M. Liju has ordered an inquiry into allegations of overcharging customers at a Kerala State Beverages Corporation (BEVCO) liquor outlet in Karunagappally, Kollam. The Minister directed BEVCO's internal audit wing to investigate the allegations following news reports and videos purportedly showing an employee of the outlet asking customers to pay more than the billed amount. The Minister said that he had taken note of the complaint, along with the visuals and reports, and instructed the BEVCO CMD to conduct an immediate



State Excise Minister Liju

inquiry and initiate appropriate action. He further added that action would be taken promptly after the inquiry report is submitted. Reiterating the government's "zero tolerance" policy towards corruption, he said any conduct contrary to this policy would not be accepted.

1 dies, 5 hurt as car overturns in Balussery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kozhikode

One man died and five others were injured, one of them seriously, after the car they were travelling in lost control and overturned near Vattoli Bazaar close to Balussery in the early hours of Friday. The deceased has been identified as Vishnu, a native of Thoppil Thozhithazhe, North Paravur in Ernakulam district. He died on the spot. The five others in the vehicle sustained injuries and were rushed to the hospital. According to preliminary information, the accident occurred around 12:30 am as the group was returning to

Kinalur after having dinner in Balussery. The speeding car reportedly lost control on the Vattoli Bazaar stretch, rammed into a roadside electricity post, struck an adjoining wall, and flipped onto its roof. Police are examining whether poor visibility or a possible mechanical fault caused the driver to lose traction, though the exact cause is yet to be established.

The occupants were trapped inside the mangled vehicle and had to be extricated in a joint rescue operation involving the Fire and Rescue Services, Highway Police, and residents who rushed to the spot. Of the five injured, four were shifted to Kozhikode

Medical College Hospital, while the fifth was admitted to a private hospital in Modakkallur.

All six occupants, including Vishnu, were reportedly working as contract employees with a company in Kinalur. "Investigations are going on and the body was taken for postmortem. Of the four injured in Medical College, the condition of one is serious," police said.

Officers from the Balussery police station are expected to record formal statements from the injured once they are cleared by doctors, which is expected to help establish the precise sequence of events leading to the crash.

BSNL announces Independence Day-Onam offers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

BSNL has announced Independence Day-Onam offers and new services for its customers.

One of the key announcements is the Rupee 1 Freedom Plan for customers purchasing a new SIM. The plan offers 24 days of validity, along with 1GB of data per day, 100 SMS messages per day and unlimited voice calls.

BSNL has also announced an extended validity offer on its Rs 2,399 annual plan. Customers subscribing to

the plan will receive an additional 47 days of validity, taking the total validity to 412 days.

The company also launched a new Selfcare App that brings several services under one platform, including new SIM booking, FTTH connection booking, bill payments, recharges and chatbot-based assistance.

In collaboration with Tango TV, the new BSNL Selfcare App will also provide BSNL mobile customers with free access to around 500 live TV channels.

BSNL is also offering Global

Satellite Phone Service (GSPS), enabling communication in remote areas where conventional mobile signals are unavailable.

Addressing the press conference, BSNL Kerala Circle Chief General Manager (Telecom) J.R. Sajikumar said BSNL has a strong presence in Kerala's mobile market, with a 21% market share.

BSNL's network in Kerala ranks first in India in terms of network availability with around one crore customers, including 86 lakh mobile subscribers and around eight lakh Fibre-to-the-Home

(FTTH) customers. BSNL Kerala currently has around 7,200 4G towers, which can be upgraded to 5G in phases, Sajikumar said.

PIB Director Parvathy V., BSNL Principal General Managers Nirmal P.G. and Meera Mardi, Thiruvananthapuram District General Manager Jitender Prakash, Chief Engineer (Civil) Sh Rajendra Singh Chonkad, General Managers Colin Lawrence and Rajesh U.K., and General Manager (Finance) K.B. Krishna attended the press conference.

CPI(M) leader booked for threatening police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Pathanamthitta

CPI(M) state committee member and former district secretary K.P. Udayabhanu has been booked for allegedly threatening police officers and making derogatory remarks about their family members during a protest march at Mallappally, police said on Friday.

The case was registered at Keezhvaipour police station after a march organised by the CPI(M) on August 11 against searches carried out at houses in Mallappally on

August 8 while tracking history-sheets Arjun Ayanki, who was arrested in Kannur the same day. More than 100 CPI(M) leaders and workers took part, accusing police of high-handedness and entering homes without valid warrants.

According to the FIR, Udayabhanu addressed the gathering through a loudspeaker and allegedly threatened officers, asking whether they did not have mothers and sisters at home and warning that "we will deal with them".

Videos of the speech went



K.P. Udayabhanu

viral, which police said caused fear among personnel. Police subsequently registered a suo motu case against Udayabhanu under Section 351(2) (criminal intimidation) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and Sections 117(e) and 120(o) of the Kerala Police Act, carrying a poten-

tial sentence of up to three years.

Udayabhanu told reporters he stood by his remarks. "I only asked if you don't have a mother and sister in your home as well. We will face whatever comes, whether it is a case or anything else, as a result of this. So do not try to intimidate us by filing cases," he said. He also alleged that the police entered homes without warrants and misbehaved with a young girl during the raid, defending the protest as a justified response.



Arjun Ayanki in custody for threats to SHOs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

The Ernakulam Kuttampuzha Police took Arjun Ayanki into custody on Friday in connection with a case involving alleged threats made through social media against the station house officers (SHOs) of Kothamangalam and Oonukal.

The police took him into custody from Thalassery Sub-jail after producing a production warrant. Ayanki had been in police custody in connection with a separate case involving alleged derogatory remarks against the Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala on social media. He was produced before the Thalassery CJM Court earlier in the day and was subsequently remanded. Following the court's order, Kuttampuzha Police reached the jail and took Ayanki into custody in the social media threat case.

Dulquer Salmaan's 'I'm Game' Postponed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Dulquer Salmaan's 'I'm Game, one of the much-anticipated Malayalam releases of 2026, will not hit theatres this Onam. The film's release has been postponed to September 3.

Dulquer Salmaan confirmed the postponement through a social media post, stating that "the game gets bigger and the release gets wider." He said the decision was made to give the film a wider theatrical release and reach a larger audience. The film will now be released in Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and Kannada, expanding its theatrical reach across India and beyond.

'I'm Game' marks Dulquer's return to Malayalam cinema as a lead actor after King of Kotha in 2023. Directed by Nahas Hidayath and produced by Dulquer under Wayfarer Films, the film follows Dan John, a fearless gambler who trusts his luck but finds himself caught in unexpected events.

The story promises gambling, action and twists. The postponement means 'I'm Game' will no longer be part of the much-anticipated Onam box-office clash with major Malayalam releases scheduled for the festive season.

Cosmo IAS Academy reaches out to Ayyappas College, Nagercoil

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Cosmo IAS Academy, in association with its media partner 'The Pioneer', conducted a special outreach programme 'IAS as a Career' at Ayyappas College for Women, Nagercoil, as part of the institution's Independence Day celebrations.

The event drew a large gathering of students, faculty members and guests. Chief Patron Dr P. M. Nair, IPS (Retd.) was the chief guest, while Executive Director Mr Sreekumar also graced the occasion.

In his keynote address, Dr Nair recalled the immense sacrifices of India's freedom fighters and the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. He underlined Gandhi's ability to inspire millions without modern communication tools and urged students to

State restores SI-led SHO system in police stations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The state government has approved changes to the Station House Officer system, restoring sub-inspectors as heads of regular police stations while retaining inspectors in 63 key units.

The inspector-led SHO system, introduced in 196 stations in 2017 and extended to 268 more in 2018, was reviewed by a committee headed by the Additional Director General of Police (Headquarters). Acting on its

recommendations, the government issued an order aimed at improving policing efficiency, grievance redressal and utilisation of inspector-level officers for serious crime investigations.

Under the reorganisation, 203 surplus inspector posts will be redeployed to specialised units including district crime branches, special branches, narcotic cells, the Anti-Terrorism Squad, the State Crime Branch, the Anti-Narcotics Task Force, the Economic Offences Wing and the Vigilance and Anti-

Corruption Bureau.

The government also sanctioned sub-inspector posts in 59 stations that lacked them, redeploying personnel from the State Special Branch, VACB, Kerala Police Academy, Economic Offences Wing and Crime Branch.

The new system will take effect after two months, allowing time for training and infrastructure changes. SIs designated as SHOs will undergo a two-week refresher course and be issued identification badges. Additional SIs and assistant SIs may

head the law and order and crime and prosecution wings at the station level.

Women inspectors posted at Vanitha Police Stations in Pathanamthitta, Idukki, Palakkad and Kasaragod will continue as SHOs. In their absence, women SIs will serve under the supervision of inspectors or circle inspectors.

The order clarified that no new posts would be created, no extra expenditure incurred and no manpower left idle as part of the restructuring.



Chief Minister V D Satheesan , Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala, Health Minister K Muraliedharan, State Police Chief Ravada A Chandrasekhar, ADGP P Vijayan at the state level inauguration of the 'My Police Station' project in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday.

- A V Muzafar



Chief Minister V D Satheesan shares a light moment with BJP MLA V. Muraliedharan and Thiruvananthapuram Mayor V.V. Rajeeesh at the 80th Independence Day celebrations organised by the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi at Nishagandhi Auditorium on Friday.

- Prathyash Vipanchika

13-yr-old ends life after being told not to use mobile anymore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

A 13-year-old Class 9 student died on Thursday night at her home in Chalakka, Kunnukara, near Nedumbassery, after her father reprimanded her over the prolonged use of the family's shared mobile phone, police said on Friday.

The deceased was identified as Parvathy, daughter of Vijesh, a daily-wage construction worker. The family, described by Chengamanad police as close-knit, lived in a rented house in Chalakka along with Parvathy's younger brother.

According to police, the incident occurred between 6 pm and 6:15 pm on Thursday. Vijesh had attempted to call the family's shared smartphone, used primarily for household purposes - to pass on a message, but found the line engaged on repeated attempts. On returning home, he questioned Parvathy about the prolonged use of the phone and restricted her from

using it further.

Upset, she went to her bedroom. When family members checked on her a short while later, they found her hanging. She was rushed to a nearby medical college hospital, where doctors declared her dead on arrival. Chengamanad police have registered a case of unnatural death and said an inquest has been completed.

Officers said they found no signs of foul play, though the investigation into the broader circumstances continues.

"We are also investigating whether any other factors may have led to her death," police said, adding that they are examining whether digital pressures or other underlying issues may have played a role, alongside the immediate argument over phone use.

Parvathy studied at Christuraja School in Kunnukara. The body has been moved to the Medical College Hospital for a post-mortem examination, following which it will be handed over to the family for last rites.

Balan says mafia wanted to disrupt Nava Kerala Sadas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

CPI(M) leader A. K. Balan has alleged that a network involving drug dealers, money launderers, goons and underworld groups had plotted to disrupt the Nava Kerala Sadas, the statewide outreach programme organised by the previous LDF Govt. Balan alleged that attempts were made to sabotage the programme across Kerala. He claimed that meetings of goons had been convened in some places, while separate meetings involving members of the drug mafia were allegedly organised elsewhere. Balan described the alleged attempts as unprecedented in the state and said the circumstances warranted serious scrutiny. He also defended Operation Thoofan, the special anti-drug drive initiated by the Ministry of Home Affairs, describing it as a structured and well-planned programme aimed at tackling the drug network.

According to Balan, however, the Youth Congress had attempted to pressure the police to scale down or stop the drive. He alleged that instead of supporting the anti-drug campaign, CM Satheesan had remained silent on issue.

Balan further alleged that the Chief Minister was indirectly supporting the drug mafia by failing to endorse the enforcement drive. He demanded that the govt take a clear position on the campaign against drugs and ensure that agencies are allowed to act against organised drug networks.

Rs 1 Lakh from LIFE beneficiaries is pick pocketing: K. N. Balagopal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kozhikode

CPI(M) leader and MLA K.N. Balagopal has termed the state government's decision to collect Rs 1 lakh from beneficiaries under the LIFE Mission housing scheme as "pick pocketing" and an act of betrayal of the people.

He said that the construction of five lakh houses under LIFE had provided Rs 5,000 crore directly to the people. Under the PMAY-Urban scheme, the UDF Government's objective was to collect Rs 3,000 crore from beneficiaries if three lakh houses were built, he alleged. The government should withdraw this anti-people decision, Balagopal demanded at a press conference.



He highlighted Karge's rise from humble beginnings and noted that he had been elected to legislative bodies 11 times.

Venugopal accused the

BJP leadership of promoting an ideology that seeks to reinforce upper-caste dominance by dividing society along caste and religious lines. The Congress has demanded an apology from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and announced protests and dharnas at district centers across the country.

Venugopal also criticized the Center's decision to order an inquiry, arguing that a probe by the Uttarakhand police would not ensure justice.

Meanwhile, Uttarakhand

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama rejected Karge's allegations and denied any BJP connection with the organization involved in the incident. Karge had raised the issue in the Rajya Sabha, alleging that the stage at a Congress rally in Haldwani was purified after he left because he was a Dalit.

Dhama said the organization that carried out the ritual, identified as Shri Ram Sena, had no connection with the BJP and accused Karge of portraying the incident as anti-Dalit to gain sympathy.

I-Day celebration at Infant Jesus Central School

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Infant Jesus Central School, Pongummoodu, hosted a special interactive session as part of its Independence Day celebrations on August 14, offering students an inspiring opportunity to engage with Major General Arun C.G., SM, VSM, Additional Director General, NCC Kerala and Lakshadweep Directorate.

Held under the theme "Meet, Interact and Learn," the programme encouraged students to gain insights from the senior officer's experiences and perspectives. Major General Arun C.G. spoke about the importance of patriotism, discipline,



Major General Arun C G interacting with the students at Infant Jesus, Pongummoodu in connection with the Independence Day celebrations

and a spirit of service among students. The enriching interaction left a lasting impression on the students and added special significance to the school's Independence Day celebrations.

plined, leadership, responsibility and service to the nation. School Principal Rev. Sister Dr. Ranit Thekke Murri presided over the programme. The session was designed to nurture confidence, leadership qualities

Remember Ananthan Nair, the INA martyr from Thycaud?

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

As India steps into the 80th year of Independence, the story of a Thiruvananthapuram freedom fighter who was hanged by the British for his alleged role in the Indian National Army's espionage network remains largely unknown, even as the search for his lost history continues.

Ananthan Nair, also known as Thanu Pillai, of Thycaud, was among four INA members sentenced to death by the British Government after being arrested following

a clandestine mission to India.

The story dates back to a period when the anti-British movement was gathering momentum across India. In Malaya, the INA established the Swaraj Institute, strengthening its efforts for India's independence. As part of its activities against the British administration, the INA formed a special suicide squad for espionage and recruited 33 members.

Of those who completed training in Penang, 20 were sent to India. The entire group was subsequently captured by the British authori-

ties and taken into custody. Following their trial, four of them were sentenced to death — Ananthan Nair (Thanu Pillai), Vakkom Abdul Khader, Fauji Singh and Bardhan. They were executed at Madras Jail on September 10, 1943.

Ananthan Nair and Vakkom Abdul Khader were hanged together on the same gallows, according to the historical account.

While Vakkom Abdul Khader's role in the freedom struggle has received considerable attention, the story of his fellow martyr from Thycaud in

Thiruvananthapuram remains largely unexplored.

Nearly eight decades after Independence, questions surrounding Ananthan Nair's life, his journey to the INA, his activities in Malaya and the circumstances leading to his arrest and execution continue to remain unanswered. His story represents one of the many lesser-known strands of Kerala's contribution to the Indian freedom movement — stories in which ordinary men travelled far from home, joined the struggle for independence and ultimately paid with their lives.

The continuing search for Ananthan Nair's history is therefore more than an attempt to recover the biography of one forgotten martyr. It is also an effort to restore a missing chapter of Thiruvananthapuram's connection with the INA and India's armed struggle against British rule.

As Independence Day approaches, the unfinished search for Ananthan Nair offers a reminder that the history of India's freedom movement is still incomplete — and that some of its bravest stories may be waiting to be rediscovered.

States Focus



ANNPURNA DEVI SLAMS RAHUL OVER REMARKS ON GIORGIA MELONI

Union Women and Child Development Minister Annpurna Devi on Friday said it was shameful of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to make an "objectionable" and "disrespectful" remark against a woman head of state, referring to Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

"The Congress party and Rahul Gandhi are leaving no stone unturned in disgracing democratic values with their distorted mindset and reckless politics," Devi said in a post on X. The remark comes after Gandhi mocked Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "hug diplomacy" at a Congress convention in New Delhi by giving party leader Sandeep Dikshit a mock hug. Dikshit then said, "You weren't hugging me thinking I was Meloni?" The exchange has led to a backlash from several BJP leaders. (PTI)



CM NAIDU FLAGS OFF 58 MODERN FIREFIGHTING VEHICLES IN ANDHRA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday flagged off 58 modern firefighting vehicles for the State Fire Services Department. The flag-off ceremony was held at the second steel bridge on the newly inaugurated E3 Seed Access Road in Undavalli village of Tadepalli mandal in Guntur district.

The new fleet, procured at a total cost of nearly ₹40 crore, comprises 25 advanced firefighting vehicles, 20 water bowsters and 13 Quick Response Multipurpose Firefighting Vehicles. "We are strengthening the Fire Services Department in phases with modern vehicles and equipment to better protect people's lives and property during fire accidents and disasters," Naidu said in a press release. (PTI)

I-Day: CRPF gets highest gallantry, service medals among CAPFs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) bagged the maximum gallantry and service medals — 86 in total — among the central paramilitary forces on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day.

The country's largest paramilitary force received 24 gallantry medals (GM), five President's Medals for Distinguished Service (PSM) and 57 Medals for Meritorious Service (MSM), according to a Ministry of Home Affairs notification on Friday.

The gallantry medals were earned from two counterterrorist operations in Jammu and Kashmir and one operation against insurgents in Manipur, both taking place in 2024, officials said.

The force is expected to get a few gallantry medals that



are issued by the Ministry of Defence too, they said.

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) M Dhinakaran is among the PSM awardees.

The officer, who earlier served in the Special Protection Group (SPG), currently heads the CRPF Recruit

Training Centre in Avadi, Chennai.

Dhinakaran has served in the paramilitary force for over three decades, commanding units in the anti-Naxal operations theatre and providing leadership to the intelligence and VIP security

wings of the CRPF. "The PSM was awarded to the DIG in recognition of his long and distinguished service, integrity, dedication and exemplary professional performance," an official statement said.

The CRPF, with an estimated strength of 3.25 lakh personnel, is the country's lead internal security force with its units majorly deployed in three main combat theatres — anti-Naxal operations, counterterrorist tasks in Jammu and Kashmir and anti-insurgency duties in the northeastern states.

The Border Security Force (BSF) is the only other Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) that was decorated with gallantry medals (20).

The border guarding force received 47 service medals (PSM and MSM) in addition to the other CAPFs.

PM, Shah pay tribute on Partition remembrance day, urge unity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and several other ministers remembered the victims of the 1947 Partition on Friday, the eve of Independence Day.

The Modi Government has been observing August 14 as the 'Partition Horrors Remembrance Day' since 2021 in remembrance of those who lost their lives in riots after the country's division and the ensuing exodus.

"Today we mark #PartitionHorrorsRemembranceDay. We recall the courage of all those who

were impacted by Partition. It was a moment in history that tore apart several lives - families were uprooted, loved ones were lost and immense suffering was endured," Modi said on social media.

The prime minister said that despite the turmoil, people rebuilt their lives from nothing, turned adversity into achievement and contributed to the nation's progress. Their lives remind everyone of the strength of the human spirit, he said.

"May this day deepen our resolve to preserve harmony and brotherhood in our nation and collectively work towards building a 'Viksit Bharat,'" Modi said. "Let us



further strengthen the national spirit of goodwill and unity," he said. Home Minister Shah said August 14 stands witness to one of the most brutal

chapters in history and the scar of the country's partition, "which is a gift from the Congress", will never be forgotten by history.

BJP slams Rahul Gandhi over foreign policy jibe, says arrogance turning into madness

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The BJP on Friday slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his remarks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's handling of foreign policy, saying it seems his "arrogance" is now turning into "madness".

"The nation must decide whether what Rahul Gandhi has done is merely the childish antics of a frustrated, deranged and envious person consumed by jealousy towards Modi, or the nefarious act of an individual serving as an instrument in a systematic conspiracy orchestrated by forces across the border," BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi told reporters here.

The Congress and Gandhi have emerged as a "challenge" to the country's "healthy democracy", he charged.



This came a day after Gandhi referred to the BJP-RSS as a "bunch of jokers" who have no understanding of India and scoffed at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's handling of foreign policy which he claimed was all about hugging leaders.

Speaking at the Rachnatmak Congress National Convention here on Thursday, he also said it has somehow been ingrained in



Modi's mind that foreign policy is about hugging leaders.

Gandhi then hugged Rachnatmak Congress chief Sandeep Dikshit in a bid to demonstrate what the current Government's foreign policy was about.

"Imagine the ignorance... where did he get the idea that foreign policy was about hugging leaders?" he said. Dikshit then asked Gandhi,

"Ek cheez pooch sakta hoon? Meloni samajh ke toh nahi pakda tha?"

Gandhi responded by saying, "I have not reached there yet."

Trivedi condemned Gandhi's remarks, terming them "rude and indecent".

"What Rahul Gandhi has said makes it evident that his arrogance is now turning into madness. He appears to be losing his mental balance," the BJP Rajya Sabha MP said, when asked.

Use of such "rude, indecent and condemnable language" by Gandhi shows he is probably crossing "all kinds of extremes out of frustration" now, Trivedi charged.

"Until now, it seemed that he was competing with Maoist and Muslim League leaders. Now it seems he is competing with the comedians who make reels of abuses and profanity," the BJP leader added.

India prioritises defence modernisation, production jumps to ₹1.78 lakh crore, says Rajnath Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said the Government is according the highest priority to the modernisation of the defence forces driven by a self-reliant and future-ready defence sector.

Stating this is his address to the soldiers through Akashvani on the eve of 80th Independence Day highlighted the transformative shift witnessed by the defence sector in the last 12 years due to initiatives such as 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Make-in-India.'

He asserted that India has become a nation which is effectively catering to its own security needs, while emerging as a global defence manufacturing hub and a net defence exporter.

Rajnath Singh emphasised that the domestic defence



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh interacts with Indian Army contingent from Commonwealth Games held at Glasgow in New Delhi (PTI)

production, which stood at just ₹46,000 crore in 2014, has skyrocketed to a record ₹1.78 lakh crore in the Financial Year (FY) 2025-26, nearly a four-fold increase over the last decade.

He added that defence exports, which stood at a mere ₹686 crore in FY 2013-14, surged to an all-time high of ₹38,424 crore in FY 2025-

26, an increase of over 5,500 per cent. Rajnath Singh also pointed out that the defence budget has risen from ₹2.53 lakh crore in FY 2013-14 to ₹7.85 lakh crore in FY 2026-27, which is a reflection of India's growing commitment to future defence technologies.

The defence minister said over the past year, the

Investigation (CBI) said in a statement.

Fifteen personnel have been awarded the Medal for Meritorious Service (MSM).

The awardees include Deputy Legal Advisor, Brijesh Singh, Senior System Analyst Girish Joshi, Deputy SPs Manoj Kumar, Om Prakash Chandra, Zahir Akhtar Ansari, Ashish Anand, Inspectors Sarita Yadav, Sub-Inspectors Roshan Kumar, Assistant Sub-Inspector Dilbar Singh Bisht, Head Constables Balkar Singh, Govind Singh Bisht, Kamlesh Kumar Gurjar, Head Constable, CBI, Constables Pal Pandian R, Ajay Kumar Singh, and Kalyanadurgam Samiullah, it said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Twenty-one CBI personnel have been awarded the coveted President's Medal for Distinguished Service and Medal for Meritorious Service on the occasion of Independence Day.

Assistant Sub-Inspector Ramesh Chand, Assistant Inspector Shobha Dutta, Additional Superintendent of Police Manoj Banerjee, Ginni Rana, Deputy Superintendent of Police Sanjay Kumar Samal, and Assistant Sub-Inspector Madan Lal Dhiman have been awarded the President's Medal for Distinguished Service (PSM), the Central Bureau of

PRESIDENT'S MEDAL FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE (PSM)			
			
Smt. Shobha Dutta Assistant Inspector General of Police SP, CBI, Complaint & Coordination Cell, New Delhi	Sh. Manoj Banerjee Additional Superintendent of Police, CBI, BSFB, Kolkata	Smt. Ginni Rana Additional Superintendent of Police, CBI Academy, Ghaziabad	
			
Sh. Sanjay Kumar Samal Deputy Superintendent of Police, CBI, ACB, Visakhapatnam	Sh. Ramesh Chand Assistant Sub-Inspector, CBI, Head Office, New Delhi	Sh. Madan Lal Dhiman Assistant Sub-Inspector, CBI, IPGU, New Delhi	

MEDAL FOR MERITORIOUS SERVICE (MSM)					
					
Sh. Brijesh Singh Deputy Legal Advisor, CBI, ACB, Lucknow	Smt. Girish Joshi Senior System Analyst, CBI, TAFSU, Mumbai	Sh. Manoj Kumar Deputy Superintendent of Police, CBI, ACB, Delhi	Sh. Om Prakash Chandra Deputy Superintendent of Police, CBI, SCB, Kolkata	Sh. Zahir Akhtar Ansari Deputy Superintendent of Police, CBI, ACB, Ghaziabad	
					
Sh. Ashish Anand Deputy Superintendent of Police, CBI, Complaint & Coordination Cell, New Delhi	Smt. Sarita Yadav Inspector, CBI, AC-8, New Delhi	Sh. Roshan Kumar Sub-Inspector, CBI, SI, New Delhi	Sh. Dilbar Singh Bisht Assistant Sub-Inspector, CBI, SC-1, New Delhi	Sh. Balkar Singh Head Constable, CBI, ACB, Chandigarh	
					
Sh. Govind Singh Bisht Head Constable, CBI, ACB, Lucknow	Sh. Kamlesh Kumar Gurjar Head Constable, CBI, ACB, Jaipur	Sh. Pal Pandey R Constable, CBI, ACB, Madurai	Sh. Ajay Kumar Singh Constable, CBI, ACB, Patna	Sh. Kalyanadurgam Samiullah Constable, CBI, ACB, Bangalore	

Amrit Udyan to open for public from August 16

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday graced the opening of the famed Amrit Udyan inside the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The summer annuals of Amrit Udyan will be open for the public from August 16 to September 15, between 10 am and 6 pm. It will remain closed on all Mondays for maintenance.

"President Droupadi Murmu graced the opening of Amrit Udyan Summer Annuals Edition 2026 at Rashtrapati Bhavan," her office said in a post on social media and shared pictures of the event.

Indigenous and native flowering plants, known for their vibrant colours and ecological significance, will be the major attraction of the Udyan this time.

The indigenous collection includes Balsam/Gul-mehndi, Aparajita, Rukmini, Barsha Phool, Lal Saag and Nagphana among others, showcasing India's rich floral heritage and enhancing the biodiversity of the gardens.

Sportspersons on August 29 and teachers on September 5 will get exclusive access to Amrit Udyan to



President Droupadi Murmu during the opening of Amrit Udyan Summer Annuals Edition 2026 at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Friday (PTI)

mark the National Sports Day and Teachers' Day, respectively. Entry and exit for visitors will be from gate no 35, located near North Avenue Road.

Entry to Amrit Udyan will be free of cost, but visitors have to book their slots online at visit.rashtrapatibhavan.gov.in in advance.

Registrations for slot booking will close at 10 am on the previous day, and there will be no on-the-spot booking available.

Visitors can carry mobile phones, electronic keys,

purses, handbags, water bottles, baby milk bottles and umbrellas inside the Udyan.

For the convenience of the visitors, drinking water stalls, first aid posts, rain shelter and restrooms will be set up along the route of the visit.

A shuttle bus service with the banner 'SHUTTLE SERVICE FOR AMRIT UDYAN' will also be available from Central Secretariat Metro Station to the entry point to the Amrit Udyan at an interval of every 30 minutes between 9.30 am and 6 pm.

Sufferings of partition must be remembered so that they do not repeat: Vice President

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Vice-President CP Radhakrishnan on Friday said the suffering and sacrifices endured by people during the Partition must be remembered to ensure that such a "horror" is never repeated and stressed the need to preserve the country's unity and harmony.

Radhakrishnan, who is also the Chancellor of Delhi University, was speaking as the chief guest at an event organised by the Centre for Independence and Partition Studies (CIPS) and the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) on the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day.

The theme this year was "Story of India's Partition (1947)".

"It is just one day before we celebrate our Independence Day. We must remember that the joy of freedom must never be separated from the sufferings that our elders endured in 1947," Radhakrishnan said, adding, "Partition was one of the most tragic and dehu-



Vice President CP Radhakrishnan felicitates a Partition survivor on the occasion of Partition Horrors Remembrance Day at the University of Delhi in New Delhi (PTI)

manising chapters in the history of our nation."

He said remembering the past was not about "opening old wounds", but about learning from history and moving towards greater harmony.

"It is to remember that freedom did not come without any cost, sufferings or sacrifice. The sufferings borne by our elders made India a free country. This type of horror must never happen again," he added.

The Vice-President also emphasised the responsibility of citizens to safeguard the country's integrity and respect its diversity.

"It is the prime duty of all of us to maintain the integrity of this nation. My mother tongue is important to me, but that does not mean I am to hate the mother tongue of others. We should be very proud to be Indians," he said.

An exhibition showcasing the Partition-era materials was organised as part of the event. The exhibition featured archival materials from the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library, besides extracts from books by ICHR chairman Raghuvendra Tanwar as well as documents from the ICHR library.

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao officially comes to West Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

West Bengal was formally adopting *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* scheme in Bengal, Chief Minister Suvenudh Adhikari said on Friday. The previous Mamata Banerjee Government had refused to implement the scheme in the State.

"The previous Government had repeatedly stalled the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* project so conceived by our Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji... now we will implement this scheme in the State to ensure an all-round futuristic development of our girls."

Adhikari's statement came on a day when previous flagship Kanya Shree project of the former Trinamool Congress Government was replaced by the Kanyaratna scheme launched by the BJP regime.

Under the Kanyaratna scheme, a girl child would be entitled to receive ₹2,000 from next year, up from the earlier 1,000 rupees.

Besides, the girl students would also get a one-time grant of ₹50,000 for higher studies. This was ₹25,000 during the previous



Government. Adhikari said that the girl students who would score more than 60 per cent marks in Class XII exams would get a scholarship under the existing Swami Vivekananda Scheme. Besides a new scheme was also launched after Swami Vivekananda that would entitle students to get an additional grant for higher studies at national level or even abroad.

"Girls are our assets and our government will provide them with all possible support they deserve for their future development," Adhikari said adding 20.13 lakh schoolgirls will receive the ₹1,000 assistance this year for which the Government had earmarked ₹400 crore. Both the number of recipients and the amount would increase from the next year.

Editor's
TAKE

Milestones and missing pieces

Since the midnight of August 15 1947 made India an independent nation, each anniversary invites an honest audit, not just a celebration

It has been quite a long time, 79 years since India gained independence from the British yoke. Indeed a moment of joy and cause to celebrate. We have come a long way from the shadow of the Raj. The single most consequential number is 248 million - roughly the number of people who were uplifted from poverty between 2013-14 and 2022-23 alone, as the national poverty rate fell from 29 per cent to 11 per cent.

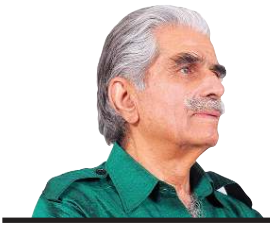
India remains the world's fastest-growing major economy, expanding above 6.5 per cent even as a rebased GDP series and a weaker rupee pushed its dollar ranking from an anticipated fourth place to sixth - a reminder that headline rank matters less than what growth does for a household budget. Elsewhere the gains are more unambiguous: Chandrayaan-3's 2023 lunar landing, a Unified Payments Interface that now moves close to half of the world's real-time digital payments, a February 2026 trade deal that cut US tariffs on Indian exports from 50 per cent to 18 per cent after a bruising year of friction over Russian oil purchases, and last year's Operation Sindoor, fought substantially with indigenous defence systems – a genuine inflection point for "Atmanirbhar Bharat".

Set against this is unfinished business. Annual unemployment sits at a low 3.2 per cent, but this year's data show urban youth joblessness climbing past 15-18 per cent, worse for young women, alongside a labour-force participation rate drifting down when it should be rising to capture the demographic dividend. The UNDP ranks India 130th of 193 countries on human development - better than before, but still 'medium,' with inequality alone erasing nearly a third of its score.

The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, reserving a third of legislative seats for women, passed unanimously in 2023 and remains unimplemented. India breaches seven of nine planetary boundaries, by one recent assessment, with extreme weather recorded on 99 per cent of days in 2025; and it has fallen to 157th of 180 nations in press freedom – its worst showing yet, a genuine embarrassment for a democracy of this scale. None of this diminishes what India has built; it argues for finishing the job with equal seriousness. Growth needs to become job-rich, not just fast, through skilling matched to real demand and the formalisation of an economy still mostly informal. The demographic dividend has a shelf life, and this decade - not the next - will decide whether India converts a young population into a productively employed one. Institutions – a free press, an independent judiciary, functioning federalism – deserve the same attention as ports and highways. Climate adaptation must be built into spending now, before the next flood erases a decade of poverty gains. Viksit Bharat by 2047 is a plausible destination, not a guaranteed one – it depends on implementing laws already passed, not just announcing new ones. Eighty years ago, freedom was won in a single extraordinary year. Development has to be won again every year after.

Time to break the Agniveer deadlock

For nearly six years, the historic Gorkha connection between India and Nepal has remained caught in an unusual silence. As the Army Chief visits Nepal, a growing movement among former servicemen and political leaders is seeking to break the recruitment deadlock and reopen the door to Agniveer, in a bid to preserve the centuries-old Gorkha warrior tradition



ASHOK K MEHTA

Just as Indian Army Chief, Gen Dhiraj Seth makes his first foreign trip; to Nepal on 16 Aug, a flicker of hope is seen of Nepal Domiciled Gorkhas (NDG) being allowed to be recruited in the Indian Gorkha Brigade after a gap of nearly six years (including two COVID years) following Nepal suspending recruitment in the Agnipath scheme introduced in June 2022, Kathmandu claiming it was infringement of the 1947 Tripartite Treaty for recruitment of NDG into Indian and British Armies. Since then, only Indian Domiciled Gorkhas (IDG) and hill troops from Garhwal and Kumaon have filled up the 60 per cent annual quota of approximately 1400 soldiers from Nepal.

Neither India nor Nepal has sought to break the strategic silence over recruitment, Kathmandu viewing introduction of Agniveer as political and diplomatic breach. Further, Nepal considers the four years service and 25 per cent retention terms of engagement as a security risk - release into the marketplace of combat-trained youth as new supply chain for insurgency-wracked Nepal following 10 years of Maoist civil war. Other dangers and disadvantages were also painted about Agniveer, seen as a bolt from the blue.

On 29 July, in an astonishing turn of events the Indian Ex Servicemen Development Committee of Lamjung led by activist Sub Khem Jung Gurung launched a massive movement demanding permission for joining Agniveer due to the abysmal jobs state in the country where 2000 youth leave Kathmandu every day. A former politician, Gurung said: 'young lads travel abroad to take up menial jobs when their centuries old skill as Gorkha warriors is being unutilized in Agniveer'.

The movement has picked up traction all over Nepal, especially in the nursery of soldiering, Pokhara. Petitions have been forwarded to Prime Minister Balen Shah and Home Minister Sudan Gurung. On 6 August, Rashtriya Swatantra Party MP from Syangja- another warrior recruitment treasure house- Dr Dhananjay Regmi, son of a 5/9 Gorkha Rifles Indian ex-serviceman raised the Agniveer issue for the first time in the new Parliament backing Gurung's advocacy of Agniveer. These two events could catalyse the unarticulated urge to accept Agniveer - a sea change from the erstwhile womb-to-tomb engagement of service- because, Gurung said, "something is better than nothing".

The bulk of Gen Seth's 16 to 20 August programme is in Kathmandu where he will be anointed honorary General of Nepal Army, a lifetime honour tracing its tradition to the legendary Field

NEPAL CONSIDERS THE FOUR YEARS SERVICE AND 25 PER CENT RETENTION TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT AS A SECURITY RISK - RELEASE INTO THE MARKETPLACE OF COMBAT-TRAINED YOUTH AS NEW SUPPLY CHAIN FOR INSURGENCY-WRACKED NEPAL FOLLOWING 10 YEARS OF MAOIST CIVIL WAR

The writer, a retired Major General, served as Commander, IPKF (South), Sri Lanka, and was a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, now the Integrated Defence Staff



ESURESH

Marshal Sam Bahadur Manekshaw in 1972, who also introduced several welfare reforms including young Indian Gorkha officers getting to know their soldiers by trekking in remote areas of Nepal. Seth will meet PM Balen Shah who is his own Defence Minister before visiting Pokhara the Bhu Pu (ex-servicemen) citadel for a grand rally. Weather permitting, he will go to Mukthinath temple where a former Army Chief, Gen Bipin Rawat, had presented bells for the temple. As no press meet is held for a visiting Chief, there is little chance of the Agniveer issue cropping up, though it could be raised during the rally in Pokhara. Seth's reply will take cue from what follows.

Recently, former CDS Gen Anil Chauhan of 11 Gorkha Regiment said that when Agniveer was implemented, NDG were considered as Indian citizens and it was not feasible to make an exception for them, alluding to their enlistment on separate terms of engagement, adding that the decision to allow Nepali citizens to enlist now rests with Kathmandu. Chauhan could have made a special case out of it by attaching strategic significance to the bonding and reminding Prime Minister Narendra Modi of what he had said in Nepal's Parliament in 2014: "India has fought no war where Nepali blood has not been shed". But the good Chauhan let it pass; a fait accompli. Like the voices now being heard from Nepal about maintaining the warrior legacy and centuries-old tradition of Gorkhas, no similar sentiment has been publicly expressed in India by hundreds of General-rank retired Gorkha officers including a former Army Chief. That tells another story.

Meanwhile, last week, Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal told BBC Nepali service that 'Nepal was ready to discuss the Tripartite Treaty if it needed to be reviewed and if a formal proposal was received from India'. Khanal has pushed the ball in Delhi's court when he knows

neither side has tried to break the impasse for the last five years. Delhi's contention is that Tripartite Treaty has not been violated. Its two key features are Recruitment and Terms of Engagement bound by 'equal treatment'. These provisions of treaty are in tact. But as India claims special and unique relations with Nepal Delhi should have followed diplomatic nicety - at least informed Kathmandu about the bolt from the blue. The truth is: India's unilateral action is seen as unfair and Big Brother-ly. In previous Nepali governments the Communists commanded majority in parliament and have sought to curtail Nepali citizens joining foreign armies. In the new Parliament they are in extreme minority. There is an economic angle too. Nepal earns nearly Rs 5000 crore annually from soldiering in Indian Army and pensioners enormous benefits in India and Nepal. If Nepal keeps the door to recruitment shut, the Nepal Gorkha connection will burn out in 20 years; only pensioners will be around for another 30 years.

In February 2025, Nepal's Supreme Court in a case over pensions of British Gurkhas pre 2009 had suggested that Nepal should negotiate new bilateral treaties with Britain and India as Tripartite Treaty does not meet present conditions. Agniveer does not provide a level playing field for Nepal like substantial reservations for demobilized Agniveers in India in para-police, para-military and several other institutions. A smaller economy like Nepal cannot comfortably absorb the retired Agniveers. Party Chairman Rabi Lamichhane, Prime Minister Shah, Home Minister Gurung and other legislators have been made aware of the groundswell movement for joining Agniveer among the Nepali youth. Some immediate incentives from India for encouraging Nepal to greenlight Agniveer will revive a key strategic asset, make COAS Gen Seth's visit historic and testify special and unique relations.

PIC TALK



Students take part in a "Tiranga Yatra" ahead of Independence Day, in Jammu

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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VANDE MATARAM AND A NEW NATIONAL SPIRIT

The inclusion of Vande Mataram in the 80th Independence Day celebrations at the Red Fort marks an important moment of cultural renewal. Commemorating 150 years of the National Song alongside the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 creates a meaningful bridge between India's historic struggle for freedom and its aspirations for the future.

The emphasis on youth participation, with thousands of NCC cadets and MyGov competition winners becoming part of the celebrations, is particularly welcome.

It places India's national identity in the hands of its young citizens and recognises the country's growing Yuva Shakti.

Equally significant is the decision to move away from

VIP-centric nomenclature and use the names of Indian lakes. Such symbolism can make national celebrations more inclusive and rooted in India's diverse geography and heritage.

The spirit of decentralisation should be carried forward. Future celebrations could encourage regional innovation, local participation and community-led initiatives across the country.

Vande Mataram is not just a song it is the spirit of freedom that every Indian must have in his heart. What was true 150 years is true now.

Blending heritage with youthful ambition can give India's national celebrations a renewed meaning and help turn the idea of Viksit Bharat into a shared national endeavour.

VIJAYKUMAR H K | RAICHUR

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

Why science alone cannot keep us healthy



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION

Recently many Indian metro cities witnessed a worst outbreak of dengue, chikungunya and malaria with death toll rising to hundred's even as the number of cases of the vector-borne disease had crossed a thousand numbers in most of these cities. These figures have once again posed a serious question for our society: why is it so that despite the advancement in science and technology, there is an upsurge in diseases everywhere? Who is to be blamed for this?

There are various factors responsible for it. Firstly, let us have a look at the physical environment which has degraded over the decades. Today the quality of natural elements like air, water, soil - and everything around us has been deteriorating, which can be attributed largely to unchecked man made activities that exploit nature



for development. Similarly, the quality of raw materials, the five elements that constitute our bodies, is also becoming poorer. Our bones, spine, teeth, delicate organs like eyes, heart, kidney, liver and others are impacted right at the time of their formation.

Synthetic fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides that sustain the crop production seep into our food, as a result of which our resistance power against diseases has lowered and we contract various infections than before for physical reasons alone. Secondly, we need to examine the psyche of the 21st century modern man who faces high levels of worry, fear, anxiety at work as well as at home due to lack of values like tolerance, respect, patience and value-based co-existence.

Today, negativity of all kinds has increased and ethical and moral values have taken a nosedive. As a

result, the moral stamina of the society has been affected. Lastly, the third reason which is the root cause, for the present scenario is the huge accumulated stock of past negative karma that is the biggest link between disease, environment & lifestyle.

We live in an impure world because of the devastation we have inflicted on our external nature, which in turn has deteriorated under the influence of the vicious internal nature of human beings. We receive pain and suffering from people and situations in return for having created negative energy in the form of negative thoughts, words or actions in the past.

This process is a continuous vicious circle and despite the knowledge of the right and the wrong, humans are unable to change the course of their present action. This is where meditation comes to our rescue, as it helps us to connect to the Supreme Source and helps us to burn our past sins. It helps us to use HIS unlimited powers to absolve the burden of past negative actions so that we may regain and sustain our physical, mental, social and spiritual health.

In other words, regaining health and peace is a process possible only through spiritual elevation of human beings. So, let us get rid of our sick mentality to move into the age of enlightenment where our thoughts will be constantly loving, pure and harmonious.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and a columnist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Humanity beneath the rubble

A devastating 7.4-magnitude earthquake struck western Colombia on Monday, turning the quiet rhythm of life in Cali, Pereira and communities across Chocó into scenes of destruction and despair. Homes collapsed, walls fractured and, within seconds, years of memories and dreams were buried beneath concrete and rubble.The disaster is a stark reminder of how fragile life can be. One moment brings tranquility; the next, cries for help and grief fill the streets.Yet amid the devastation, the enduring strength of humanity is visible.

Neighbours are digging with their bare hands in search of loved ones. Strangers are comforting one another amid the dust and ruins. Communities are refusing to surrender to despair.Statistics will record the number of casualties and authorities will assess the material damage, but no figure can capture the anguish of families searching for children, parents, brothers and sisters.Colombia must not be seen merely through the lens of destruction. It is a nation showing courage, solidarity and hope amid unimaginable suffering. Its people are not alone. Our prayers, compassion and support must cross borders to help Colombia rise from the rubble.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR | CHENNAI

Violence has no place in a place of worship

The reported attack on Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal at a gurdwara in Nanded is shocking and deeply condemnable. A place of worship is meant to provide peace, prayer and reflection; there can be no justification for violence within such a sacred space.

The fact that Mr Badal was attacked while performing darshan makes the incident particularly disturbing. It is reassuring that security personnel acted swiftly and prevented the assault from becoming more serious. His receiving timely medical attention and undergoing surgery is also a matter of relief.Such incidents go beyond an attack on an individual.

They threaten the atmosphere of peace, communal harmony and mutual respect that society must preserve. Political disagreements and grievances, however serious, must be addressed through democratic and constitutional means, never through violence.The authorities must conduct a thorough and impartial investigation, establish the motive and examine whether there were security lapses. Political and religious leaders should meanwhile appeal for restraint and harmony.I hope Sukhbir Singh Badal makes a speedy and complete recovery.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

Public property must serve the public

The Karnataka government's proposed Bill to regulate the use of government premises and public property by organisations, including unregistered bodies, has opened another chapter in the state's continuing confrontation with the RSS.Under the proposed Karnataka Regulation of Use of Government Premises and Public Property Bill, 2026, organisations would need permission from the concerned authority before holding events on government premises or public property.

The move could affect RSS shakhas conducted in government schools, colleges, public grounds and other government-owned spaces.The proposal follows Home Minister Priyank Karge's earlier demand that RSS activities in government institutions and public spaces be restricted. Karge had questioned the organisation's activities and sought greater transparency regarding its legal status, office-bearers, finances, expenditure and tax compliance.The dispute has since widened from the question of shakhas to a larger debate over the use of public property by organisations that are not formally registered.

Public spaces belong to citizens and must be governed by clear, neutral and transparent rules. At the same time, such rules must be applied impartially and not become instruments of political vendetta.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Eight decades of transformation: From scarcity to self-confidence

The India of 1947 could scarcely have imagined the India of 2026. The India of 2026 must now show the same courage and imagination in building the India of 2047. As we salute the Tricolour, let us renew our commitment to a strong, prosperous, inclusive, self-reliant and just India and to the Constitution that has made this possible



VIJENDER GUPTA

As India celebrates its 80th Independence Day, we are not merely marking another anniversary of freedom. We are reflecting upon a remarkable national journey, one that began in 1947 amid hope, sacrifice and enormous uncertainty, and has brought us to an India that is increasingly confident, capable and determined to shape its own destiny. The India that became independent on 15 August 1947 was very different from the India we see today. We inherited poverty, widespread illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, food insecurity, weak industrial capacity and the deep wounds of Partition. Yet, our founding generation possessed something more powerful than material resources: a profound faith in the Indian people and an unwavering commitment to democracy.

India's journey since then has not always been easy or linear. For decades, India continued to grapple with shortages, inadequate infrastructure, limited economic opportunities and the immense difficulty of delivering development to a population of continental scale. Yet, when we look at India today, we see a country that has progressively overcome many of the limitations that once appeared insurmountable. This transformation has acquired unprecedented scale and momentum over the last twelve years.

India today is among the world's leading economies and has emerged as a major centre of technology, digital innovation, manufacturing, entrepreneurship and human talent. Infrastructure is being created at a scale once difficult to imagine. Highways, railways, airports, digital networks and public infrastructure are connecting people and regions faster than ever before. Technology has transformed the relationship between citizens and the State. Public services can increasingly reach beneficiaries directly and transparently. A new generation of Indians is growing up with aspirations very different from those of previous decades. Our youth are not merely seeking opportunities; they are becoming entrepreneurs, innovators, scientists, professionals and creators of opportunities themselves.

The journey from scarcity to aspiration, and from aspiration to self-confidence, is perhaps one of the defining stories of modern India. But India's greatest achievement cannot be measured only through economic statistics, infrastructure or technology. Equally remarkable has been the endurance of constitutional democracy in a country of extraordinary social, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. When the Constitution came into force on 26 January 1950, India became a Republic founded on the ideals of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The Constitution gave institutional expression to the values for which generations of Indians had struggled. It established a democratic system in which sovereignty ultimately rests with the people, governments derive legitimacy through elections and State power remains subject to constitutional limitations. India's constitutional journey has not been without turbulence. The Emergency of 1975-77 was perhaps its gravest test, when democratic freedoms and constitutional rights came under severe strain. It remains a reminder that constitutional democracy can never be taken for granted. Yet, India's response demonstrated the remarkable resilience of its democratic system. That experience demonstrated an enduring truth: our democracy is resilient because the Constitution gives citizens not only rights, but also the institutional means to defend them.

Parliament and State Legislatures are the principal forums through which the aspirations, concerns and expectations of citizens are translated into laws and public policy. They are also institutions through which governments are questioned, public expenditure is scrutinised, competing viewpoints are debated and the executive is held accountable. Over the decades, our Constitution and laws have continued to evolve in response to changing social and national requirements.

An important milestone came through the 86th Constitutional Amendment of 2002 under the government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, which inserted Article 21A into the Constitution and recognised free and compulsory education for children



INDIA'S CONSTITUTIONAL JOURNEY HAS NOT BEEN WITHOUT TURBULENCE. THE EMERGENCY OF 1975-77 WAS PERHAPS ITS GRAVEST TEST, WHEN DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS AND CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS CAME UNDER SEVERE STRAIN. IT REMAINS A REMINDER THAT CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY CAN NEVER BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED. YET, INDIA'S RESPONSE DEMONSTRATED THE REMARKABLE RESILIENCE OF ITS DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM. THAT EXPERIENCE DEMONSTRATED AN ENDURING TRUTH: OUR DEMOCRACY IS RESILIENT BECAUSE THE CONSTITUTION GIVES CITIZENS NOT ONLY RIGHTS, BUT ALSO THE INSTITUTIONAL MEANS TO DEFEND THEM

Vijender Gupta is Speaker of Delhi Legislative Assembly

between six and fourteen years of age as a Fundamental Right. In more recent years, legislative reforms have increasingly sought not only to regulate society but also to make governance simpler, more transparent and more responsive to citizens. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax through the constitutional framework created a unified indirect taxation system and strengthened the idea of India as a common economic market. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code created a time-bound framework for dealing with insolvency and represented a significant change in India's economic and financial architecture. One of the most interesting shifts in the philosophy of governance can be seen in the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023. For decades, many relatively minor administrative and procedural defaults carried criminal consequences. The Jan Vishwas legislation decriminalised a large number of such minor offences across several Central laws, replacing imprisonment in many cases with monetary penalties.

It represents a change in the relationship between the citizen and the State, from a system based excessively on suspicion and criminalisation towards one based increasingly on trust. India has also undertaken a major transformation of its criminal justice framework through the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam. These laws seek to move India's criminal justice system away from structures inherited from the colonial period and towards a framework suited to the needs of a modern Republic. Another historic development came with the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, which provides for reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

These developments underline an important truth: A successful democracy must constantly respond to new aspirations, technologies, economic realities and social expectations while remaining anchored firmly in its constitutional values. As Speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, I believe a legislature must never be viewed merely as a place where Bills are passed. It is where the people's voice must be heard, where the government must answer questions and where public grievances must find expression.

It is where differing political viewpoints must encounter one another through debate rather than confrontation outside the democratic process. Our parliamentary traditions teach us that disagreement is not a weakness of democracy. Democracy does not require unanimity; it requires respect for institutions, rules, constitutional boundaries and the legitimacy of differing opinions.

This is why the responsibility of protecting the Constitution cannot rest with institutions alone. It belongs equally to every citizen. The Constitution acquires strength not merely from the words written in it, but from the faith that citizens place in it and from the willingness of governments, legislatures, courts, political parties and citizens to respect its true spirit.

India's experience over eighty years tells us that institutions may be tested, political circumstances may change and the democratic journey may occasionally become difficult. But when citizens retain faith in constitutional processes, democracy possesses an extraordinary ability to correct itself and move forward. Many challenges that constrained India for decades are today being overcome. There is a growing confidence that India need not merely adjust itself to a world shaped by others; it can help shape that world. This confidence must become the foundation of our journey towards Viksit Bharat @ 2047. The next phase of development must combine economic growth with social responsibility, technological progress with human values, opportunity with inclusion and national ambition with constitutional morality.

Our young generation will be the principal architect of this future. Along with opportunity, we must give them faith in the Constitution, respect for democratic institutions, pride in India's civilisation and confidence in its future.

Independence Day: Why the sword Is still overhead



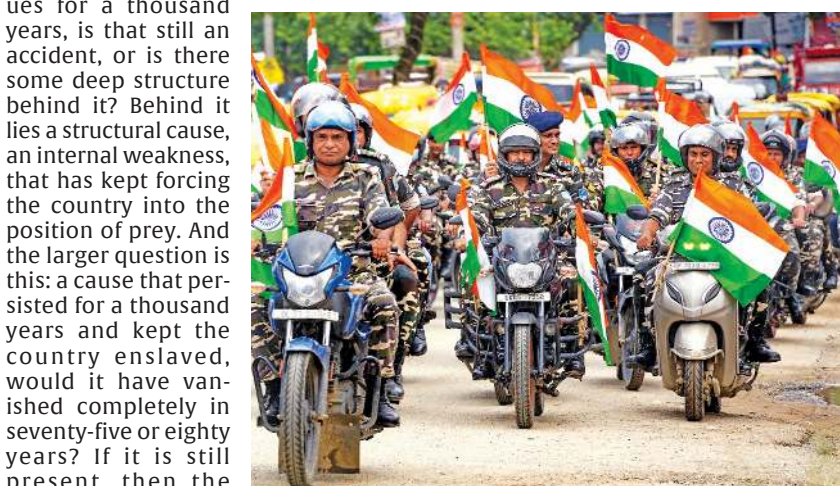
ACHARYA PRASHANT

is born anyone's slave. An animal in the forest is free, a bird in the sky is free. You catch the bird and put it in a cage; only then is it subjugated. A nation is no different, and its natural condition too is freedom.

So what India celebrates on Independence Day begins to look a little strange. Freedom is the given; the more honest and more useful question is this: if everything is born free, where did bondage enter later? Was India always enslaved? No. Then where did the slavery come from? This is why I would want Independence Day observed as a day of self-examination. Eat the sweets of freedom today, by all means, but first ask how the bondage arrived, and whether it has truly left, or whether it still hangs over the country like a sword.

This slavery is not a matter of ten or twenty or fifty years: nearly a thousand years, sometimes a part of the land, sometimes the whole of it, under someone else's dominion. Whoever could come, came. From Europe the Portuguese came, the French came, the Dutch came, the British came; the only ones who did not come were those who could not, for reasons of geography.

From nearby came the Afghans, the Iranians, the Turks, the Arabs. Something that happens once, or twice, you may call an accident. Something that continues for a thousand years, is that still an accident, or is there some deep structure behind it? Behind it lies a structural cause, an internal weakness, that has kept forcing the country into the position of prey. And the larger question is this: a cause that persisted for a thousand years and kept the country enslaved, would it have vanished completely in seventy-five or eighty years? If it is still present, then the danger is still equal to what it was; the sword is still overhead.



So what is that cause? Political it cannot be; no political cause lasts this long. Coincidence it cannot be; that much is settled. The cause is cultural, something that has, by misfortune, dissolved into the air of India and settled there as culture, something held sacred and clung to. I call it lokdharma, the folk-religion.

Lokdharma is no external power; it is one's own ego, hardened into rite, tradition, custom and fantasy. It is the structure that merely looks like dharma, resting on Smriti texts severed from Shruti, on the Puranas and on ritual, while the real dharma, the Shruti-dharma of the Upanishads, of Advaita, of truth and freedom, stays far away. Where the very root of a religion lies in fantasy and fear, what price will fact carry there, or the question, or free thought? India is not a religious country; it is a folk-religious country. It accepted fear, superstition, division and self-interest in the name of dharma, and so it felt no hesitation in accepting its own defeat. This is the dishonesty within, the one that turns its face from fact and is afraid of the question.

In the age when the powers of Europe were working out their exact position at sea, what was India doing? While they were racing ahead in astronomy, India was tangled in the auspicious hour, and is tangled there still. The world moves ahead in science; this country moves ahead in casting horoscopes. This is the very astrology that pushed India back; had India attended to astronomy, its defensive strength at sea and on land would have been something else.

There was a news item these days: at a temple in Madhya Pradesh, the religious observance of Independence Day was held on the eleventh of August, because by the temple's panchang the true tithi of independence fell on that day. The train may arrive at seven in the evening; you will still reach the station at ten at night, because your reckoning says the moment is now.

A country that gives no value to fact will give none to knowledge; and for a country that gives no value to knowledge, there is no surprise in its subjugation. Today's Gen-Z is buried in astrology apps too. Lokdharma is still dominant; its grip has not loosened, it has only come forward in new shapes.

So on this Independence Day my request is only this: celebrate, but even amid the celebration, let the gaze turn inward for once. The sword that has hung over the country for a thousand years has not lifted yet. The danger is equal, the danger remains, and the cause of that danger is internal.

The greatest enemy sits within, not in the house next door but in the very heart, in the very lokdharma. It will not come from outside; it lies in that inner dishonesty which turns from fact, is afraid of the question, walks by fantasy instead of Shruti and invests in ritual in the place of knowledge. And so, even as this Independence Day is celebrated, remember that vigilance has no single day.

The festival is today; the watchfulness must be from today too, and every day after. This is not a matter of any declared result, of any medal of victory; it points a direction, and nothing more. Be careful, wake up. The direction is inward, and no one has promised a destination. Freedom asks to be lived as a responsibility rather than enjoyed as a festival; otherwise the sword stays where it is, and the next slavery, different from the old, will be no less deadly.

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



MP AJITH KUMAR

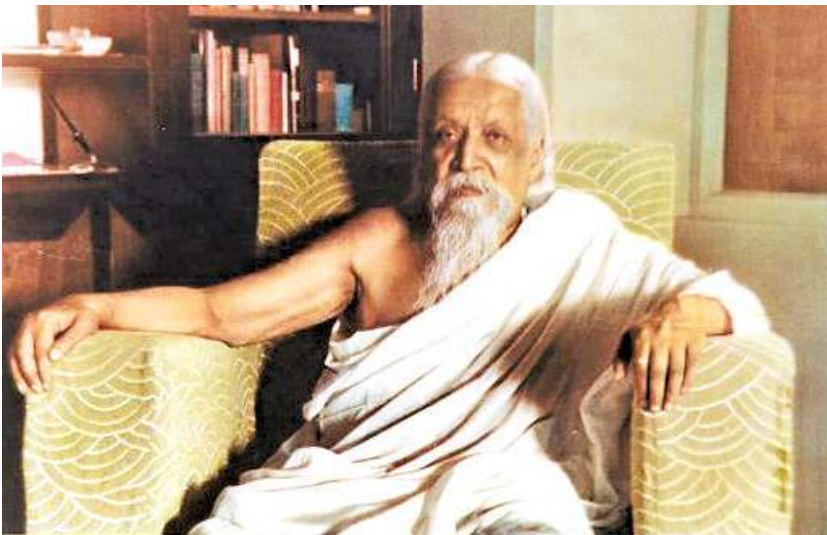
Of the many ancient knowledge systems humanity developed, India's Religion proved outstanding. She developed a coherent system, harmonizing values of inclusivity, and concordance into a balanced worldview. "India is an epitome of the world", commented the philosopher historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee who hailed her as the 'living civilization' that would unite and enlighten the future humanity. India's was a turbulent history with invaders pounding her recurrently, leaving her geographically and psychically torn. Bled white in terrorist violence, her glory often seemed almost irretrievably lost with enemies disturbing her national life. Denunciation of the motherland, derogatory writings against her and declining it for pay-offs were common. Problems confronting our nation are legion. Yet, she sojourns to her destination, determined and untouched by the turbulent surroundings.

India's all-inclusiveness, its readiness to imbibe and harmonize the noble aspects steeled her spirit. Greece was an aesthetic culture that glorified everything beautiful notwithstanding whatever defect what it deemed beautiful had. They would ignore

everything but Beauty. Hence the aesthetic nature of the Greek culture, opined Sri Aurobindo. Ancient Romans ran in contrast. They discarded Beauty for the ethical aspects. Aesthetics gave way to ethics and disciplines of life. A strong and muzzled body was preferred to the beautiful. Romans never thought of a beauty attainable through discipline like the Greeks who never cared the discipline leading to a higher beauty. Beauty and discipline thus had run parallel, never to meet in a creative unity. But India harmonized the both, making discipline a means to realize the beauty.

Ethical life helped her realize the ultimate beauty, Saundarya which is a "joy forever". India's culture was both ethics and aesthetics perfectly mixed. It was satyam-sivam-sundaram - Truth-Bliss-Beauty, synonyms of the divine.

Though many in modern times interpreted Sanatana Dharma, Sri Aurobindo's emendation looms most important. dharayateti dharma - that which sustains is dharma. To sustain what is not specified, and hence the meaning 'sustain all and everything' including the very cosmic order. Rhythm or in Sanskrit the rita is the law of cosmic



order. What is not rita runs in contrast to the natural order. Everything moves in symmetry as if directed by an unseen power. This symmetry and harmony found in cosmic dynamism puzzled even scientists like Einstein as to whether God plays dice.

Even the very aim of diversity, it appears, is to lead things to a creative unity requiring coherence at all levels. For this, one must identify oneself with the entirety, see oneself in others and vice-versa which is the quintessence of Sanatana Dharma. This universal mutuality is the

dharma the ideal of national life. To Aurobindo India represented this dharma and believed, nation is parasakti or universal energy in geographical entity and dharma the priestess in its sanctum. Sidetracking this eternal dharma, nothing can thrive, especially the dharma-rashtra or the spiritual nation that is India. Hence the content of his Uttarapara speech, "The Sanatana Dharma, that is nationalism".

Man making was the mission of this dharma and turning the life divine was its end. To it man was of prime importance and the love of man

was pivotal to Aurobindonian vision which is centered on the worship of man. It aims at discovering and acknowledging the inherent divinity and the intrinsic superiority of man. Summing up India's religion of man Sri Aurobindo wrote: "Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinction of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, political or social advancement. The body of man is to be respected, made immune from violence of outrage, fortified by science against disease or preventable death. The life of man is to be held sacred also, given scope, protected from violations, from suppression, from mechanization, from belittling influences.

The mind of man is to be released from all bonds, allowed freedom and range and opportunity, given all its means of self-training and self-development and organized in the play, of its powers for the service of humanity. And all this too is not to be held as an abstract or pious sentiment but be given full and practical recognition in the presence of men and nations and mankind".

This intellectual religion of man reflects a nation's aspiration, to quote Aurobindo, "to raise the world to god in deathless light, to bring god to the world on earth we come, to change the earthly life into life divine". This is the 'eternal religion' of India that stands above all fetters, limitations and confinements of creed, group or narrow minded nationalism.

Author is Kerala State President, Bharatiya Ithasa Sankalan Samiti

India can hit hard: Doval on Operation Sindoor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Sending out a stern warning to the perpetrators of terrorism, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval has said India's generosity and tolerance should not be mistaken for weakness, asserting that the country can take risks and hit hard, irrespective of the consequences.

Breaking silence over Operation Sindoor for the first time, he said the objective of the 88-hour military operation was to destroy enemy camps, particularly those responsible for the Pahalgam terror attack.

Speaking in the upcoming Discovery docuseries "Declassified: Operation Sindoor", Doval said "We had decided the objective of the operation as destruction of the enemy camps, particularly those who had been responsible for the Pahalgam attack."

"Message to the world is very clear — India's generosity or India being tolerant should not be mistaken for its weakness. India can take risks, India can hit hard, irrespective of the consequences," he added.

The two-part docuseries brings together India's military and national security leadership to recount the decisions and events surrounding Operation Sindoor, with first-hand accounts from those who oversaw



India's response, Discovery said in a statement. In the show, Doval offers an account of the decision-making and resolve behind the military response, it added. "Declassified: Operation Sindoor" will premiere on Saturday at 9 pm on Discovery and streaming service discovery+.

Operation Sindoor was launched early on May 7 last year in retaliation for the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 innocents were killed, with Indian forces conducting precision strikes on multiple terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

The punitive action by the Indian armed forces killed more than 100 terrorists

deep inside Pakistan and destroyed several strategic assets including air fields and other installations.

Pakistan later also launched offensives against India, and all subsequent counter-offensives by India were also carried out under Operation Sindoor.

The military conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, lasting nearly 88 hours, halted after they reached an understanding on the evening of May 10.

The remarks reiterate India's shift toward an active deterrence posture, signaling that restraint does not limit the country's capacity or willingness to respond forcefully to cross-border threats.

Doval's remarks offer a rare insight into the strategic

thinking behind Operation Sindoor and the resolve at the highest levels of India's national security establishment following the Pahalgam terror attack.

The two-part docuseries brings together India's senior military and national security leadership, operational commanders and frontline personnel who were involved in planning and executing the 88-hour response.

The series also examines the military thinking that followed once the objective had been set, including target assessment, decisions taken as the situation developed and the responsibility placed on those carrying out the mission.

Former Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan said the Pahalgam attack had deeply affected the country and that India had decided not to bow to such threats.

"Like, I think, all citizens of the country, we were actually hit by the brutality of this attack. I think it was most barbaric. It was decided that India would not bow down to such kinds of threats," Chauhan said.

He also stressed the importance of knowing when to bring a conflict to an end. "At a strategic level, I think that knowing when to stop a conflict is equally important. It is easy to start a war; it is very difficult to

stop it," the former CDS said. Chauhan also spoke about the decision to have two women officers represent the armed forces during press briefings on Operation Sindoor.

"From the armed forces, we were represented by two women officers, and it conveyed two important messages: that the women of India will not be deterred by these cowardly attacks, and that the social and emotional fabric of India will remain unaffected even by such kinds of challenges," he said.

According to Discovery, the first part of Declassified: Operation Sindoor traces the developments after the Pahalgam attack, including intelligence gathering, surveillance, target identification and preparations for the operation.

Teams carried out mock drills and planned for multiple scenarios as they worked towards a precise operation designed to minimise civilian and military casualties.

The second part moves from planning to execution, taking viewers inside the operation as it unfolded. It examines the coordination between the Army, Navy and Air Force, the tense moments before the strikes and the decisions taken in real time. The series then follows the operation through to confirmation that the mission had been completed.

Himanta inaugurates development projects in Jalukbari constituency

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma today inaugurated several development projects in the Jalukbari Assembly Constituency, including an RCC bridge connecting Bamonrajan Road with Forest School Road and 19 single-cell RCC box culverts constructed over the Kalmani stream at Azara.

As part of the Mukhyamantrir Unnata Paki Path Nirman Achni for 2024-25, Sarma formally inaugurated the RCC bridge, constructed at a cost of more than ₹2.56 crore. Speaking at the inauguration, the Chief Minister said that the old wooden bridge at the site was in a highly dilapidated condition, forcing residents of the Baripara area to take a longer route via Bamonrajan Road for their daily commute. The new bridge, measuring 32.40 metres in length, will provide direct and convenient connectivity to Forest School Road and significantly reduce travel time for students, office-goers, patients and other commuters. Sarma said several thousand people from nearby areas, including Garigaon, Baripara, Bhakunda, Jeutipara and Noapara, would directly benefit from the bridge.

The Chief Minister further said that the bridge would provide improved and direct connectivity from Forest School Road to the Dharapur area.

He also assured local residents that steps would be taken to prevent erosion at Bamonrajan. Meanwhile, Dr Sarma inaugurated 19 single-cell RCC box culverts constructed over the Kalmani stream at Azara at a total cost of ₹3.41 crore. The culverts, extending from Kalitapara to Hatkhowapara, will establish direct connectivity between the interior roads of Azara and National Highway-37.

He said that before the project was implemented, local residents had to use old and dilapidated wooden bridges to cross the Kalmani stream. Keeping in view the convenience and transportation needs of the



people, the Public Works Roads Department undertook the initiative to replace the unsafe wooden bridges with permanent RCC culverts.

According to the Chief Minister, the new culverts will directly benefit patients requiring ambulance and emergency medical services, fire and emergency response teams, school students, daily commuters and local residents by improving connectivity and transportation facilities.

Dr. Sarma also stated that further measures would be undertaken in the coming days for the overall development of the larger area.

Later, the Chief Minister visited Sri Sri Maa Mansa Temple at Keotpara, Azara, and Sri Sri Banshi Gopal Temple at Gosaipara, Azara, where he offered prayers and sought the well-being and prosperity of the people of Assam.

At Sri Sri Maa Mansa Temple, Sarma said that the State Government would take all possible steps to complete the remaining infrastructure development works at the temple and address the demands raised by the people for the development of the surrounding area.

Our blood has been sucked: Omar slams Pak over J&K's water rights



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Srinagar

Accusing Pakistan of "sucking the blood" of Jammu and Kashmir by denying it the right to use its river resources, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday launched an attack on Islamabad for staking a claim over waters originating from the region, asserting that the neighbouring country cannot be selective in its sympathy for Kashmiris.

Responding to remarks by Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif regarding the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), Abdullah maintained that the people of Jammu and Kashmir have historically borne the brunt of the water-sharing framework.

"We have always been saying that our blood has been sucked — these are our rivers. We had the first right on this. Pakistanis say they are great sympathisers of Kashmiris. But when it comes to water, their sympathy dis-

appears. Where was their sympathy when we were denied permission to use our rivers?" Abdullah told reporters here.

Sharif had earlier warned that "every drop of water is our red line" and stated that Islamabad would issue a "direct response" if its water supplies were threatened.

Lashing out at the historical division under the IWT, Abdullah pointed out that out of the six rivers, India retained three belonging to Punjab, while the three rivers of Jammu and Kashmir were handed over to Pakistan, causing long-term detriment to the local population.

"From then until today, we are suffering the consequences of this Indus Waters Treaty. We could neither draw drinking water from the Chenab, nor could we use the Jhelum for navigation by building a barrage on Tulbul, nor could we stop water by building a big dam on any of our rivers," he said.

Certain forces do not want peace in Punjab: Sukhbir Singh Badal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Nanded

A day after he was injured in a *kirpan* attack, former Punjab deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal said on Friday that some groups are against peace in Punjab and the country, and see the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) as standing in their way.

He said he would follow the example of his late father, former Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal, and would not let such groups take control of the state. He added that he is committed to keeping unity.

Badal, who is president of the SAD, was attacked with a *kirpan* by a member of the

Nihang order inside Gurdwara Mata Sahib Devan Ji Mugat on the edge of Nanded city on Thursday. He had surgery at a local hospital and was released on Friday afternoon.

After leaving the hospital, Badal told reporters, "A lot of forces do not want peace in Punjab and this country. They feel that the Shiromani Akali Dal is a hindrance to their mission. My father, Parkash Singh Badal, never compromised with these forces. He always stood for the idea that all communities and religions should live together happily."

"My father was a chief minister. He kept peace among communities and



respected all religions. These groups tried to attack me a year ago. Their goal is to take control of Punjab and disturb the peace, but as president of the Shiromani Akali Dal, I will never let that happen. My father did not allow it either,"

he said. Badal also said he had been targeted at two of Sikhism's holiest sites. Despite these attacks, he said he would keep standing up to any effort to cause unrest. "Both times, they attacked me in the holiest

Opposition making mockery of democracy: Shivraj Chouhan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday slammed the opposition, saying it did not let Parliament run and it was making a "mockery of democracy".

Chouhan also attacked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The agriculture and farmers welfare minister was speaking during an event organised to launch the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)-based Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)



Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan addresses an event organised to launch the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)-based Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) in Chandigarh on Friday

under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) in the Union Territories of Chandigarh and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Pralhad Joshi, Punjab Governor and Chandigarh Administrator Gulab Chand Kataria were among those present on the occasion.

During his address, Chouhan said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the Government is leaving no stone unturned in ensuring that benefits reach the eligible beneficiaries.

He said that Parliament is for discussion and debate over issues of farmers and the poor.

Slamming the opposition, Chouhan said, "but they will not allow it to run. When we

accepted their one demand, they put another one and then came up with another one. It pains me to say these people are making a mockery of democracy," he said.

"Samvidhan ko kalankit karne ka paap kar rahe hai (They are committing the sin of disgracing the Constitution)," Chouhan further said.

The Monsoon Session of Parliament saw relentless protests by the opposition over the police action against students protesting against irregularities in exams and the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple.

14 ITBP officials awarded Police Medals on 80th Independence Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A total of 14 officials of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) have been announced to be conferred with Police Medals on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day, 2026.

Of the 14 officials, three will receive the President's Medal for Distinguished Service, while 11 will be conferred the Medal for Meritorious Service.

President's Medal for Distinguished Service
The three ITBP officials selected for the President's Medal for Distinguished Service are:

1. Mandhir Ekka, Inspector General (GD)
2. Nishith Chandra, Deputy Inspector General (GD)
3. Mohan Singh, Inspector (GD)
4. Medal for Meritorious Service
5. The 11 officials selected for the Medal for Meritorious Service are:
 1. Rahul Yadav, Commandant (GD)
 2. Chhering Tashi Bodh, Commandant (GD)
 3. Arvind Chandra, Second-in-Command (GD)
 4. Jagdish Chand Masiwal, Deputy Commandant (Office)
 5. Rajendra Singh, Subedar Major (GD)



6. Bishan Dass, Inspector (Telecom)
 7. Mohan Singh Dogra, Inspector (CM)
 8. Narendar Singh, Sub Inspector (GD)
 9. Nandan Kumar Singh, Sub Inspector (Pioneer)
 10. Chain Singh, Assistant Sub Inspector (GD)
 11. Til Bahadur Chhetri, Head Constable (KS)
- The Director General, ITBP, along with the entire force family, conveyed congratulations and best wishes to all the medal recipients for their distinguished and meritorious service.

Serious doubts on intent, no discussion with parties: Congress attacks Govt on caste census

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Congress on Friday attacked the Government over the caste census issue, saying that not carrying a list of castes with responses recorded as shared by respondents raises "serious doubts on intent" and there had been no discussion with political parties.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said it had been widely expected that the caste question will be asked with a pre-prepared state-wise list as had been done in the Bihar and Telangana caste surveys with the response being just ticked appropriately.

"This has, unfortunately, not happened, raising serious doubts on intent," Ramesh said on X. Ramesh also shared on X Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's letter of May 5, 2025 to Prime



Minister Narendra Modi on the caste census. "His very first and fundamental suggestion has been completely ignored. There has also been no discussion with political parties as demanded by Kharge ji," Ramesh said.

Kharge had written to Prime Minister Modi in May last year on the Government's caste census decision, urging him to draw upon the Telangana model as well as have a dialogue with all political parties soon on this issue.

Kharge had made three suggestions with the first one being about the design of the census questionnaire. Caste information has to be collected not for counting purposes but for achieving larger socio-economic objectives, Kharge had pointed out.

"The recently-concluded Telangana caste survey was designed and implemented with such goals in mind. The Union Home Ministry must draw upon the Telangana model—both the methodology adopted for finalising the

questionnaire as well the final set of questions asked," the Congress president had said. The Centre on Friday notified 40 questions with caste, place of Covid vaccination being two of them to be asked of respondents during the population enumeration phase of the Census, set to begin from September 1 in snow-bound areas, a Government order said.

The order from Registrar General of India Mrityunjay Kumar Narayan notifies questions such as whether the person belongs to a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe and their caste.

The population enumeration in Ladakh and snow-bound non-synchronous areas of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, will take place from September 1 to 30, according to a gazette notification issued earlier this month.



cell, serious illness, accident and suicide.

Maharashtra has 500 Government-run and 513 aided ashram schools, which are residential facilities for tribal children, the official said.

"In the past two years, 384 deaths were reported in Government ashram schools and 200 in aided schools," a senior official from the department said. The official said that 170 ashram school students died in 2024-25, while 214 deaths were reported in 2025-26. Of these, 36 died on school premises and 348 at home, he said.

In aided schools, 81 deaths were reported in 2024-25 and 119 in the next financial year. Of these, 30 deaths took place on school premises and 170 at home.

FROM THE WORLD

LONDON

2 injured as train derails

A passenger train derailed in southern England, seriously injuring two people and leaving nine others with minor injuries after three carriages overturned, the British Transport Police said.

The Southern Rail train from Victoria station in London to Eastbourne was carrying about 150 people when it went off the tracks outside the tourist town of Lewes on Thursday. Passenger Rob Bradley said the train began rocking as it picked up speed and the carriage he was riding in with his six-year-old daughter jumped upward and the brakes immediately engaged.

All passengers were evacuated within about three hours, the transport police said.

The cause of the derailment is under investigation. (AP)

PAKISTAN

Rubio greets Pak on I-Day

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio greeted the people of Pakistan on their Independence Day and said the two countries, through cooperation on regional mediation and critical minerals, were delivering "real results."

"On behalf of the United States of America, I extend warm congratulations to the people of Pakistan on their Independence Day," Rubio said.

"Together, through our cooperation on regional mediation, critical minerals, energy, counterterrorism, cultural heritage, and trade and investment, we are turning potential into progress and delivering real results for Americans and Pakistanis alike," he said."On this special occasion, we commemorate the partnership between our nations and the bonds of friendship between our peoples," Marco Rubio said. (PTI)

India, Bangladesh weigh Tarique's Delhi visit

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

No date has been announced, but a series of high-level contacts suggests Bangladesh and India are laying the groundwork for a possible Prime Ministerial visit.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's possible visit to India is increasingly becoming a focal point of Dhaka-New Delhi diplomacy, with both sides signalling a willingness to deepen engagement even as the timing of the trip remains undecided.

Rather than a confirmed itinerary, the latest developments point to an active diplomatic process. Indian officials have reiterated that an invitation is on the table, while Bangladesh has indicated that a final decision will depend on the Prime Minister's schedule

and the outcome of ongoing discussions. India has extended two separate invitations to Tarique Rahman: one for a bilateral visit and another to attend the outreach session of the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi on September 12-13.

Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal confirmed that both invitations remain valid, saying India would provide an update if there is progress.

For Tarique Rahman, such a visit would carry significance beyond protocol. It would provide an opportunity for the new Bangladesh government to engage directly with India on a broad range of issues and potentially establish a new framework for bilateral relations.

The possible meeting comes as the two neighbours seek to navigate a number of



complicated issues. Relations have faced tensions over the extradition request for former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, border security, trade and transit, water-sharing, energy cooperation and people-to-people movement.

At the same time, both governments have shown signs of wanting to keep communication channels open. Indian High

with Bangladesh in a positive and forward-looking manner.

The discussions also covered areas of mutual interest and possible avenues for expanding people-centred cooperation.

Trivedi later met Modi in New Delhi and briefed him on his discussions with the Bangladeshi leadership, indicating that the recent diplomatic exchanges are being closely followed at the highest level in both capitals.

The BRICS invitation has added another possible route for Tarique Rahman to travel to India. Bangladesh currently chairs BIMSTEC, and India has invited Tarique Rahman to participate in the BRICS outreach session in that capacity. New Delhi has described the invitation as part of the established practice of invit-

ing heads of regional organisations to BRICS outreach meetings.

If Tarique Rahman attends, the event could provide an opportunity for an informal or formal interaction with Indian leadership alongside the multilateral programme.

However, Bangladesh has not yet confirmed whether the Prime Minister will participate. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam said recently that there was still time to decide, noting that the Prime Minister's schedule and ongoing discussions would be important factors.

While the proposed visit remains uncertain, energy cooperation has already emerged as a practical area of engagement between the two countries.

Bangladesh currently

receives diesel from India through a cross-border pipeline and has requested an increase in supply. Indian officials have said the request will be examined in light of India's domestic requirements, refining capacity and the availability of diesel.

The issue could become an important component of wider economic and energy discussions between the two governments. For Dhaka, securing reliable energy supplies is a major economic concern, while for New Delhi, any expansion of exports must be balanced against domestic demand and supply conditions.

The most politically difficult issue in the relationship remains Bangladesh's request for the extradition of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from India.

Two UAE tankers attacked while transiting Strait of Hormuz

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Dubai

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is blaming Iran for firing drones at two tankers operated by a state-owned oil company as they sailed through the Strait of Hormuz, saying Friday that the attacks were acts of piracy. The attacks caused no casualties but underlined the dangers faced by vessels seeking to move cargo through the critical waterway that leads from the Persian Gulf to the open oceans as Iran keeps a firm grip on the passage.

Here's a look at the latest developments in the Iran war and the wider Middle

East. Full coverage can be found here.

Two tankers owned by Abu Dhabi's state-owned oil and gas company ADNOC were attacked Thursday evening while transiting the Strait of Hormuz, the company said. It added that the attack caused no injuries and that "the situation has been brought under control."

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Centre said two vessels were reported to have suffered minor damage when attacked by drones while transiting the Strait of Hormuz. It did not identify them as the ADNOC ships,



but it appeared to be the same incident.

The UAE's Foreign Ministry blamed the attacks on Iran and said they were a "fla-

grant violation" of the United Nations' principles of freedom of navigation.

"Targeting commercial shipping and using the Strait

of Hormuz as a tool of economic coercion or blackmail represents acts of piracy by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, and constitutes a direct threat to the stability of the region, its peoples, and global energy security," the Foreign Ministry said.

There was no immediate response from Iran.

President Donald Trump's son-in-law and negotiator Jared Kushner will travel to the Middle East next week to try to advance plans for an end to the conflict in Gaza after a deal recently announced by the Trump administration ran into Israeli opposition.

Trump orders Navy to return to older carrier jet-launch system

KONSTANTIN TOROPIN ■ Washington

President Donald Trump is ordering the US Navy to remove the advanced system used to launch fighter jets from its newest type of aircraft carrier and return to using older steam catapults that he has long said he prefers, according to a directive issued.

The new mandate would likely cost billions of dollars and revert the Navy's most advanced ships to a system that takes more sailors to operate and is more difficult



to maintain. The memo directs the Pentagon and the Navy to present Trump with plans to remove the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System, also known as EMALS, within two

months. It also says the Ford-class carrier's electromagnetic weapons elevators should be replaced.

The move comes after years of Trump railing against the new, magnetical-

ly powered catapult system that shoots fighter jets off the deck of the carriers. It also comes at a time when the US military is trying to find funding from Congress for all its desired equipment and as the Navy is struggling to fill its ships with enough sailors.

Trump's ire with the new technology goes back to at least 2017 in his first term, when he claimed the new system is "not good" and "doesn't have the power" of the older, steam systems in an interview with Time magazine.

"You're going to god-damned steam," Trump said

at the time. The topic has frequently come up since then at rallies and other events.

While Trump is looking to roll back the latest technology, the newest Chinese aircraft carriers employ electromagnetic catapults and France said it plans to use the system on its new carrier.

Trump's memo directs the fourth Ford-class carrier, the USS Doris Miller, to be the first ship to include the new changes. That will leave the USS Gerald R Ford, as well as the forthcoming USS John F. Kennedy and USS Enterprise, untouched. (AP)

Heavy rain causes flooding near Tokyo; kills five, disrupts train, air travel



MARI YAMAGUCHI ■ Tokyo

Record-breaking rainfall that pounded cities east of Tokyo overnight flooded roads and dozens of homes, stranded thousands of people, caused power outages and left at least five people dead and one missing.

The Japan Meteorological Agency downgraded its most severe warning for heavy rain in more than a dozen municipalities in Chiba prefecture as rain subsided Friday morning but forecast more rain later in the day.

Photos and television footage showed widespread damage after daylight, with homes, cars and parts of railway tracks flooded with muddy water.

The Ground Self-Defense Force said it dispatched buses to pick up about 4,000 stranded people who stayed overnight at the Soga train station, a local route that also serves Tokyo Disney, an operation finished later Friday. The theme park did not report any damage.

Thousands of people who were stuck overnight at the Narita airport serving the Tokyo region gradually left

as train service partially resumed Friday morning with delays. Flights in and out of Narita were operating normally Friday, with many people returning home at the end of Japan's Bon Buddhist holiday week.

Hundreds of people took shelter overnight at the Chiba prefectural government building.

The prefecture said five people were found dead and another person was missing. The victims included a man found floating on a flooded road in Ichikawa city and a woman who had been stuck in a flooded car in Sakura city. Two people were presumed dead after being pulled from flooded cars in Kashiwa city and in Chiba.

More than 170 homes were flooded in the prefecture and more than 300 people were taking shelter at public facilities as of Friday afternoon, Chiba officials said.

The torrential rain and flooding also knocked out power to about 18,000 homes Friday morning, down from 68,000 earlier, according to the TEPCO Power Grid. (AP)

Cook Islands PM Mark Brown expected to return to power following election

CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-MCLAY ■ Wellington

Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown is expected to lead the South Pacific nation's Government for a second term after his party won more seats than any other group in this week's election.



Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown

Voting continued for one of 24 Parliamentary seats in the country of 17,000 people, which is made up of 15 islands. Bad weather prevented electoral officers from reaching the island of Nassau earlier in the week and results there were expected late Friday New Zealand time.

However, Brown's Cook Islands Party, a nationalist group that has governed

since 2010, was already celebrating victory after winning 12 seats which promised a fifth term in power. A 13-seat majority is required to form a government, but Brown's party has joined with independent lawmakers to pass laws before.

"Today my heart is full of gratitude," Brown wrote on

Facebook. "Thank you to everyone who came out and voted, for taking part and making your voice heard. This is what makes our country strong."

In the seat yet to be decided, the incumbent, a member of Brown's party, is competing with an independent candidate. (AP)

N Korea slams US-South Korea military drills, threatens to exercise self-defence

HYUNG-JIN KIM ■ Seoul

North Korea on Friday threatened to exercise its right to self-defence in a statement that slammed the upcoming US-South Korean military drills as a war rehearsal that would be more provocative than last year.

The US and South Korean militaries are to start their annual large-scale drills Monday and have described the scope of this year's training as similar to past years.

The allies have said the Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises are meant to strengthen their readiness against North Korean threats and reiterated that they are defensive in nature.

The North Korean warning signals the country could conduct more weapons tests in coming days after its neighbors detected two ballistic missile launches off North Korea's east coast in the past week.

North Korea hasn't commented on the launches, but outside experts assess they were likely meant to protest the US-South Korean drills or upgrade weapons systems.

In a statement carried by state media Friday, North Korea's Foreign Ministry called



North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un

the US-South Korean training "a rehearsal for an aggressive war" that is triggering a different level of instability in the region.

"It is our consistent principle of ensuring security to respond to a new level of a threat with a new level of a deterrent," the statement said. North Korea "will more clearly express its stance on the enemies to cope with any threats and challenges through the responsible and decisive exercise of the right to legitimate self-defence." (AP)

Democrats set to finalise 2028 presidential primary calendar

MIKE CATALINI ■ Austin

Democrats are gathering to finalise their 2028 presidential primary calendar this week, setting the stage for a wide-open contest to succeed President Donald Trump and chart a path ahead as the party's voters oscillate between progressive and more moderate candidates.

The Democratic National Committee is expected to vote at its summer meeting in Austin, Texas, on the new order that frontloads states with more diverse populations.

The meeting comes ahead of bitterly contested midterm elections that will decide control of Congress later this

year. Democratic voters have delivered mixed messages on the direction they want to see the party go -- backing candidates viewed as more left-wing as well as moderates in consequential primaries across several states.

The group also is convening at a time of internal turmoil, with some members calling for DNC Chairman Ken Martin to be replaced. Critics have questioned Martin's leadership decisions and the party's fundraising, which lags well behind that of Republicans just months before the crucial midterms.

Martin had his defenders, though, on Thursday. William Owen, a committee member from Tennessee, pointed to the victories in special elec-



Democratic National Committee chair Ken Martin

tions that Democrats have won under Martin.

"I think all of us are working as hard as we can to elect Democrats across the country," Owen said

during a resolutions committee hearing. He added later: "I'm tired of people criticising Ken Martin and criticising the DNC."

Martin himself addressed

the spotlight he's been under during remarks on Thursday.

"There's all these stories about Democrats in disarray" and Ken Martin this, 'Ken Martin that,' he said, adding an expletive. "You know, who's not focused on that? Me. You shouldn't be either. I want you to focus on power and support."

New calendar would cement South Carolina as first primary

The party is expected to give final approval to a calendar that has South Carolina's primary first on January 22, followed by Nevada on Feb. 1. New Hampshire, New Mexico, Michigan and Virginia would round out the early states, voting throughout February.

The overhaul shows Democrats' effort to give greater influence to states reflecting the party's coalition, particularly Black and Latino voters. It follows years of a calendar led by Iowa and New Hampshire, two states with overwhelmingly white electorates.

The proposed calendar would cement South Carolina at the start of the calendar, reflecting a change former President Joe Biden pushed for after that state revived his struggling 2020 campaign.

South Carolina has long been the first Southern contest and has served as a key test of candidates' support among Black voters. (AP)

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LG Electronics India posts strongest quarterly growth

LG Electronics India reported its strongest quarterly performance since listing in Q1 FY27, with revenue rising 15.5% to ₹72.33 billion. EBITDA grew 26.2% to ₹9.04 billion, expanding margins to 12.5%, while profit after tax surged 27.2% to ₹6.53 billion. Growth was broad-based across televisions, refrigerators, air conditioners and washing machines, supported by premiumisation and strong consumer demand.

Home Entertainment led the performance, with revenue rising 22.3% and EBIT margins expanding to 19%. Home Appliances & Air Solutions revenue grew 13.6%. Managing Director Hong Ju Jeon said the results reflected India's shift towards premium, technology-led and energy-efficient products. The company expects further momentum from the festive season, B2B expansion, exports and new capacity at Sri City, while managing geopolitical and commodity pressures through localisation and calibrated pricing.

(PTI)

Industry hails MMDR Bill over greater clarity on levies

Industry leaders on Friday welcomed the passage of the MMDR Amendment Bill, saying it will create a more uniform and investment-friendly regulatory framework for the mineral sector.

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, would improve ease of doing business, provide greater clarity on state-level taxes, cess and other levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands, and help unlock the country's mineral potential.

Vedanta Ltd Chairman Anil Agarwal welcomed the passage of the bill, saying the changes would improve ease of doing business and help the country unlock its mineral potential.

In a social media post, Agarwal congratulated the Centre on the passage of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 and highlighted its potential to strengthen the mining sector and contribute to India's economic ambitions.

"The changes to the law will greatly improve ease of doing business. This will help raise production, create massive jobs and promote self-sufficiency," the Chairman said.

Sumit Jhunjhunwala, Vice President, Sector Head, Corporate Sector Ratings, ICRA Ltd, said the bill will enhance clarity and predictability around uneven state-level taxes, cess and other levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing land, including retrospective tax claims and potential contingent liabilities for mining companies.

He further said greater visibility on the overall fiscal burden on the mining sector could support investment decisions and improve the viability of projects, particularly those that are capital-intensive and have long gestation periods.

(PTI)

Exports to FTA partners gain momentum in Q1 FY27

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India's exports to key free trade agreement (FTA) partner countries witnessed strong growth in the first quarter of 2026-27, with outbound shipments to Singapore and Sri Lanka more than doubling, according to the commerce ministry data.

India has so far signed 17 FTAs with a number of countries and groups, including Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Mauritius, the UAE, Australia, the European Union, Asean and the EFTA bloc. Out of this, 16 are operational.

The data showed that exports to Singapore surged 101.2 per cent to USD 6.52 billion during April-June 2026, from USD 3.24 billion in the year-ago period, while shipments to Sri Lanka rose 123.8 per

cent to USD 2.35 billion from USD 1.05 billion.

The shipments to the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) region grew 61.6 per cent to USD 14.61 billion in the first quarter of this fiscal, from USD 9.04 billion in April-June 2025-26.

Exports to the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) region rose 36.6 per cent to USD 8.40 billion from USD 6.15 billion.

Among individual countries, Malaysia recorded a

The Pioneer

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM | SATURDAY | AUGUST 15, 2026

Coal demand to hit 1.6b tonnes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

India's coal demand is likely to touch 1.6 billion tonnes per annum by 2030, a top Government official said on Friday, underlining the need for transparent and market-driven pricing for the commodity.

Speaking at the Global Commodities Conclave here, Union Coal Secretary Vikram Dev Dutt said that the setting up of the 'coal exchange', a Government-established platform designed to work as an independent marketplace will be of help.

He said in each of the last two fiscal years, domestic coal production has crossed 1 billion metric tonnes and the demand is continuing to grow as the commodity is a mainstay of energy needs.

"Coal demand is projected to rise further to an estimated 1.6 billion tonnes by 2030," Dutt said, adding that we are at an "inflection point" where we are shifting from a scarcity scenario to one of surplus.

Such a shift underscores the need for "more efficient, transparent and market driven mechanisms for coal trade", he said, pointing out that till now the state-run Coal India has enjoyed a virtual "monopoly".

"While this model did serve its purpose for the time that it was designed, it

does not fully reflect the competitive, transparent and efficient price discovery that a market of India's scale and India's maturity deserves," he added.

The coal exchanges will provide commercial and captive miners ready and transparent access to a wider market, wherein

buyers and sellers can bid simultaneously enabling efficient, competitive, and market-driven price discovery, he said.

The Government plans to operationalise the coal exchange concept in "the months ahead", he said, without sharing affirm timeline.

FCNR, ECB measures to draw \$90-95 b capital inflows in FY27: Report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

The RBI's concessional swap windows for FCNR (B) deposits, external commercial borrowings and overseas foreign currency borrowings are likely to draw capital inflows of USD 90-95 billion in 2026-27, according to a report.

CareEdge, in its report, has revised its projections for FCNR flows, considering the inflows observed in the last two months. It now expects FCNR (B) inflows to reach around USD 80 billion, while external commercial borrowings (ECBs) and overseas foreign currency borrowings (OFCBs) are projected at USD 10-15 billion.

Taken together, the measures are likely to generate USD 90-95 billion of capital inflows in FY27.

The report said that considering the inflows received so far and expected to come, India's capital account surplus is now likely to increase to approximately USD 108 billion compared to a surplus of just USD 2 billion in the previous year.

As a result, India's balance of payments (BoP) is expected to improve to a surplus of USD 64 billion in FY27 compared to deficits of USD 23.6 billion and USD 5 billion in FY26 and FY25, respectively, the report added.

Between June 5 and July 31, 2026, these measures have

attracted USD 40.8 billion, with FCNR (B) inflows accounting for USD 36.7 billion, and ECBs and OFCBs together accounting for USD 4.1 billion.

Large banks are currently offering deposit rates in the 6.0-6.5 per cent range, while some smaller and newer

banks are offering rates close to 7 per cent for FCNR deposits.

Additionally, the availability of significant leverage for investors, with some foreign banks reportedly offering leverage as high as 19x-29x in some cases, appears to have enhanced the attractiveness of

the scheme and supported stronger-than-expected participation, the report said.

The inflows received through these measures will have a positive impact on banking system liquidity, with CareEdge expecting core liquidity to boost around ₹8.6 lakh crore.

However, this could be partly offset by a seasonal rise in currency demand and the maturity of the RBI's short forward book. The report estimates that currency in circulation (CiC) could rise by around ₹1.1 trillion in December from levels in June amid a seasonal uptick in festive periods.

The report said that assum-

ing maturity of around USD 30 billion in the RBI's forward position (short-forward book maturing in 3 months and within 1 year stands at USD 16 billion and USD 40 billion, respectively), this could create a drag of roughly ₹3 trillion. After accounting for the incremental CRR requirement on deposit growth, CareEdge estimate core liquidity could still reach a surplus of around ₹9 lakh crore.

This is expected to prompt the RBI to use liquidity management tools such as long-tenor variable rate reverse repo (VRRR) or Open Market Operation (OMO) sales to absorb excess liquidity, the report said.

Stock markets end lower amid geopolitical uncertainty

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Friday as elevated oil prices and the prolonged US-Iran impasse weighed on investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 70.71 points, or 0.09 per cent, to settle at 78,009.25. During the day, it declined 395.59 points, or 0.50 per cent, to 77,684.37.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 29.85 points, or 0.12 per cent, to end at 24,366.

From the Sensex pack, Asian Paints, InterGlobe Aviation, NTPC, Power Grid, State Bank of India and HCL Tech were among the major laggards.

Bharti Airtel, Adani Ports, ICICI Bank and Titan were among the winners.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.17 per cent to USD 87.15 per barrel. "Indian equity markets ended largely unchanged on

Top Gainers (%)	Top Losers (%)
Asian Paints: 2.53	Asian Paints: -1.68
InterGlobe: 1.82	Adani Ports: -1.39
ICICI Bank: 0.57	NTPC: -1.19
Titan: 0.36	Power Grid: -1.08
	SBI: -1.04

Friday, struggling to build on supportive global cues as persistent uncertainty surrounding the US-Iran stand-off and the Strait of Hormuz kept investors cautious heading into the weekend. Despite a softer US inflation reading and record closes on Wall Street, elevated crude oil prices and the absence of any diplomatic breakthrough continued to cap risk appetite," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. Geopolitical tensions

remained the dominant market driver, he added.

"Indian equity markets ended lower on Friday as renewed geopolitical tensions in the Middle East pushed crude oil prices higher, overshadowing the positive global cues from Wall Street's record close. A notable positive for the domestic market was the Nifty-50's ability to defend the 24,325 support zone for the second consecutive session," Hariselman Radhakrishnan, Founder & CEO of HST Wealth, a Research Analyst firm, said.

The BSE SmallCap Select index declined 0.65 per cent and the MidCap Select index dipped 0.13 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Housing Finance declined 1.40 per cent, MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt 0.58 per cent, MidSmall Private Banks 0.46 per cent, Oil & Gas 0.45 per cent, Energy 0.44 per cent and Services 0.39 per cent.

Rupee finds lift as dollar weakens

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

The rupee appreciated 3 paise to close at 95.42 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, due to weakness in the greenback against major rivals overseas.

According to forex traders, the rupee stayed under pressure due to foreign fund outflows and rising crude oil prices amid geopolitical uncertainties.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 95.39 and moved in a tight range of 95.38 to 95.44 against the American currency before ending the session at 95.42 (provisional), up 3 paise from its previous close.

On Thursday, the rupee closed 12 paise lower at 95.45 against the US dollar.

Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst — Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said the rupee traded with a weak bias this week, although the overall movement remained largely

Date	Rate (₹ per US\$)	Change
7	95.30	-0.13
8	95.33	+0.03
9	95.42*	+0.03
10	95.17	+0.05
11	95.36	-0.06
12	95.45	-0.12
13	95.42	-0.03
14	95.42	0.00

range-bound.

"Crude had surged around 25 per cent during July and continues to remain elevated, keeping the import-cost pressure on the rupee. Meanwhile, the dollar index remained below the 100-mark near 99.50, limiting the rupee's downside. Technically, the rupee is expected to remain in the 95.10-95.80 range in the near term, with crude and the dollar remaining key directional triggers," Trivedi said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies,

was trading 0.08 per cent lower at 99.78.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading higher by 0.99 per cent at USD 87.93 per barrel in futures trade.

Analysts said the dollar index retreated after a fall in US Treasury yields, and the data showed inflation in the world's largest economy at lower levels.

Also, they said that oil prices bounced back after days of easing, as hopes of a deal to end the West Asia crisis remained uncertain, with both the US and Iran contradicting each other over ship transit conditions through the Strait of Hormuz.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex fell 70.71 points, or 0.09 per cent, to settle at 78,009.25, and Nifty dropped 29.25 points, or 0.12 per cent, to 24,366.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth ₹510.69 crore on a net basis on Thursday, according to exchange data.

WPI inflation eases to 9.78%, first dip in nine months

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Wholesale price inflation softened month-on-month for the first time in nine months to 9.78 per cent in July on easing in fuel and food prices.

Wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation was 9.87 per cent in June.

This is the first time since October 2025 that WPI inflation has fallen month-on-month. The softening in July numbers is mainly on account of lower inflation in fuel and power even as inflation in primary articles and manufactured products accelerated.

"Across groups, mineral oils (containing petroleum products), food articles, manufacture of basic metals, non-food articles, manufacture of food products, and manufacture of chemicals and chemical products have been major drivers of WPI inflation in July 2026," the commerce and industry ministry said while releasing the

monthly Wholesale Price Index (WPI) data on Friday.

Wholesale inflation in fuel and power dropped to 20.05 per cent in July, as against 27.41 per cent in June.

Inflation in food articles too eased marginally to 5.44 per cent in July from 5.49 per cent in June. However, manufactured products saw an uptick in inflation at 8.29 per cent in July, as against 7.48 per cent in June.

As per the data, the output Producer Price Index (PPI) — which the Government has said will eventually replace

the WPI in about 5 years — remained unchanged at 9.6 per cent YoY in July vis-a-vis June. Output PPI saw lower inflation in manufacturing and mining, but higher agriculture and electricity PPI nullified those gains.

In a research note, Barclays said the direction of the WPI has reversed and WPI inflation should soften in coming months as global prices seem to have peaked.

"In our view, WPI inflation has peaked and gradual and modest disinflation from hereon should continue, in

line with relatively lower global commodity prices in general and crude oil price in particular (since June)," Barclays said.

The war in West Asia war which began on February 28 and the resultant blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, through which the majority of crude oil is imported into India, has kept WPI elevated with pressure on global crude and fertiliser costs.

ICRA Principal Economist Rahul Agrawal said the moderation in July WPI was not broad-based and was entire-

ly led by the fuel and power group whereas all the other groups witnessed a hardening in their inflation prints vis-a-vis June 2026.

"Looking ahead, we anticipate a larger easing in the WPI inflation to below 9.5 per cent in August, after peaking at 9.9 per cent each during May-June 2026. Nevertheless, prints are likely to remain elevated through much of the year, with an average WPI inflation forecast of around 8.5 per cent for FY27," Agrawal said.

The WPI data is in contrast to the retail inflation numbers released earlier this week.

The consumer price index based retail inflation rose to 4.45 per cent in July from 4.38 per cent in June, on high food prices.

The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee, earlier this month, kept benchmark policy rates unchanged at 5.25 per cent and has projected retail inflation at 5 per cent for FY27.

BUSINESS 10

PROSPECT



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman receives a dividend cheque of ₹259 crore for FY 2025-26 from Swarup Kumar Saha, MD and CEO of Punjab & Sind Bank, on Friday.



A team led by the Director, Directorate of Sainik Welfare, Assam, undertook an outreach initiative to extend support and assistance to people affected by the devastating floods across Upper Assam



Tiranga Yatra headed by ACEO (PR) and General Manager (Water Supply and Electrical & Mechanical) with their team in Sector 65



The Bhartiya Vyapar Mahotasav 2026 at Bharat Mandapam is showcasing the strength, innovation and diversity of India's business community, with more than 700 startups, manufacturers, exporters, women entrepreneurs, traders and companies participating. Among the attractions are the Siddharth Fashion stall, led by Siddharth Doshi, which has drawn strong interest for its retail and B2C offerings. The festival, jointly organised by CAIT and IPTO from August 12—15, aims to connect Indian businesses with new markets and create greater domestic and international opportunities for Indian products.



BIPIN KUMAR TIWARI

On 14th August 1947, India was partitioned into three parts. The main actors of this tragic partition were the British, the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. On the request of Liaquat Ali Khan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah returned from London in 1934 and assumed leadership of the Muslim League. Under Jinnah's leadership, the Muslim League passed the Pakistan Resolution at its Lahore session on March 23, 1940. While addressing this session, Jinnah gave the 'Two-Nation Theory'. He said, 'By any definition, Muslims are a nation. It is nothing short of a nightmare to imagine that Hindus and Muslims could coexist as citizens of the same nation. In reality, they represent two distinct civilisations. Muslims will not accept any constitution of India that results in a Hindu-majority government.'

The foundation for the country's partition was laid much earlier, with the Partition of Bengal on October 16, 1905, and the establishment of the Muslim League on December 30, 1906. With the partition of Bengal, Muslim elites began to believe that, based on demographics, they could establish dominance and rule over certain regions of the country. The

The tragic Partition of India

League became the proponent of it. The Congress responded to the Muslim League's separatist policies with a policy of Muslim appeasement; the Lucknow Pact and the Khilafat Movement are some examples of this approach.

Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and an active member of the Congress began to perceive that the rhetoric of 'Hindu-Muslim Bhai Bhai' is, in fact, a policy of Muslim appeasement and an attempt to make Hindu society forget its true history. The consequences of the idea would prove disastrous for the nation.

Although the increasingly toxic atmosphere in the country since 1940 had instilled a fear of impending calamity within Hindu society, people still placed their trust in the triumvirate of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, believing they would not allow the country to be partitioned. To force the Congress and British government to accept the demand of separate Pakistan, the Muslim League under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah gave a call to the Muslims to observe August 16, 1946, as Direct Action Day: 'The Muslims of India would not rest contented with anything less than the immediate establishment of an independent and sovereign state of Pakistan... Now the time has come for the Muslim Nation



to resort to the direct action.'

As 16th August 1946 approached, meetings, processions and calls for jihad against Hindu were held in all big cities. On 16th August 1946, the massacre of Hindus was carried out in Kolkata under the leadership of Bengal premier Hussain Suhrawardy. Later, Hindus were massacred in Noakhali and other parts of the country.

On 22nd March 1947, Lord Mountbatten arrived in India, and the fate of India was sealed. 3rd June 1947, in the House of Commons, British Prime Minister Attlee announced the partition of India. In his book 'The Tragic Story of Partition', HV Sheshadri writes, 'Between the date of announcement of partition 3rd June and 15th August, hardly 72 days were left for carrying out the stupendous task of division of the vast country... The idea was to jostle a settlement through

either Congress or the Muslim League had too much time to think about it, and before any really effective opposition to the partition of the country had time to develop.' The basis for the demarcation of boundaries was 1941 census figure. Congress had issued a call to the people to boycott the Census of 1931 as it entailed communal enumeration. Same repeated in 1941. This resulted in tilting the balance in favour of Muslim in several districts.

According to Prof A N Bali, it was a mistake on the part of the Congress leadership to accept a one-man boundary commission and Sir Cyril Redcliffe as its chairman, who was legally incompetent and also politically biased. The partition of India became the biggest tragedy of humanity. Overnight, crores of innocent people became homeless. The fate of Sikhs and Hindus in the whole of West Pakistan was left

entirely to the mercy of murderous Pakistani jihad monger. Not a single Congress leader felt it was their duty to hasten to their rescue in that hour of grave peril.

During this period, the Sarsangchalak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Madhva Sadashivrao Golwalkar: Shri Guruji, was in Sindh and Punjab. He urged all the Swayamsevak to defend the Hindus and Sikhs by sacrificing their own life. He asked the Swayamsevak not to leave undivided India until every Hindu and Sikh reached India safely.

In the book Now It Can Be Told, Prof A N Bali writes, 'Who else came to the rescue of the people of this state but a band of young selfless Hindus, popularly known as the RSS? They organised the work of evacuation of the Hindus and the Sikhs, women and children from the dangerous pocket to the comparatively safe centre.

They ensured and arranged for their clothing and health care. Arranging transport from Pakistan to India was a task. The young man were the first to come to the The horror of the partition of India should not be forgotten. We have to remember this so that it can never be repeated. The solution to this partition is Akhand Bharat.

The author is journalist and political analyst, president of Centre for Policy Research and Studies (CPRS) and editor of NitiPost

ITC celebrates 150 years of Vande Mataram with *Desh Ek Raag 3*

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

On the occasion of India's 80th Independence Day, ITC Limited celebrated 150 years of Vande Mataram, India's National Song, with a soulful tribute, rendered through a music video, 'Desh Ek Raag 3', created by the ITC Sangeet Research Academy (ITC SRA).

The composition has been anchored in Raag 'Desh' and was brought alive by the gurus, scholars and tutors of ITC SRA alongside other musicians. The production reflects ITC's deep homage to a song that has remained one of India's most enduring symbols of national awakening, pride and unity.

In the run-up to Independence Day, ITC Chairman Sanjiv Puri shared the heartfelt creation through a post on LinkedIn. Puri is also the Chairman of the Board of



Trustees of ITC SRA.

In his LinkedIn post, Puri mentioned, "On the eve of India's 80th Independence Day, it gives me immense pleasure to present Desh Ek Raag 3, commemorating 150 years of Vande Mataram, our National Song, whose timeless message of devotion, unity and love for our motherland continues to inspire generations. Specially conceived and performed for this momentous occasion by the Gurus, Musician Tutors and Shishyas of the ITC Sangeet Research Academy,

Desh Ek Raag 3 is ITC's heart-felt tribute to our great nation and its rich cultural heritage. This exclusive rendition of Vande Mataram beautifully brings to life the vocal and instrumental traditions of our nation that ITC SRA has nurtured and preserved for nearly five decades."

The third edition of the Desh Ek Raag series also marks ITC SRA's journey towards its Golden Jubilee in 2027. At the heart of the presentation is the Academy's timeless Guru-Shishya Parampara, with gurus and scholars coming together to present Vande Mataram through the spirit of Hindustani classical music.

Their collective performance reflects a living tradition in which musical knowledge, discipline and artistic sensibility are passed across generations of gurus and scholars.

National vendor meet held in Kolkata to accelerate PM-Surya Ghar Scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

A National Vendor Meet under the PM-Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana (PMSGY) was jointly conducted by West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (WBSEDCL) and REC Ltd on August 13 at Hotel Taj Bengal, New Alipore, Kolkata, with an aim to strengthen the implementation of the scheme and accelerate rooftop solar installations across West Bengal.

The meeting was chaired by Santanu Basu, IAS, Principal Secretary, Power Department, Government of West Bengal. Officials from REC Ltd, CESC, the Government of West Bengal, State and National Vendors, and Training Partners also participated in the meeting.

Addressing the gathering, the Principal Secretary,



Power Department, Government of West Bengal, emphasised that the implementation of PMSG: MBY in the State would be further strengthened through the active participation and coordinated efforts of both State and National Vendors.

He affirmed the collective commitment of the Government of West Bengal, REC Limited, WBSEDCL, Vendors, DISCOMs, financial institutions and other stakeholders towards accelerating rooftop solar adoption

and strengthening the implementation of PM-Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana in West Bengal.

REC Ltd (PMSG: MBY team) headed by S Jayanthi, ED, presented the perspective of the scheme as Nodal Agency for implementation of PMSG:MBY. She urged National Vendors to deploy adequate manpower and requested Brand Owners to expand their channel partner network across West Bengal to facilitate faster installation of rooftop solar systems.

DAILY SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

HOW TO SOLVE IT

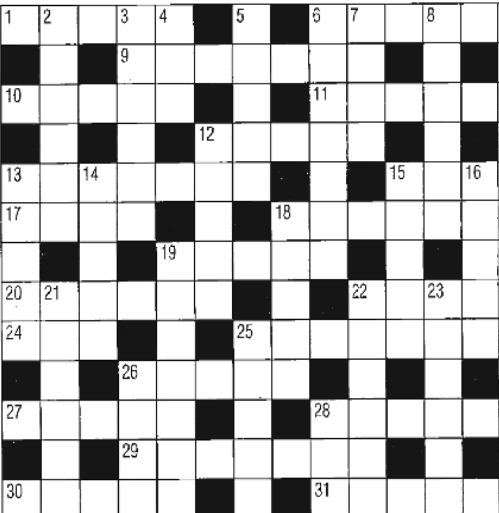
Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9×9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3×3 box, using elimination and logical deduction—no maths involved.



SOLUTION (14.8.26)

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

DOUBLE CROSSWORD SATURDAY | AUGUST 15, 2026



ACROSS

- We set out to be nice (5)
- Burst out with bits of interruption (5)
- Figure to have a bad time some place (7)
- Like most epics, it has taste (5)
- Guardian of treasure, but maybe no gem himself (5)
- How to stand proudly before the court (5)
- The high part a chap is unable to manage? (7)
- It's apt to be bent when you knock (3)
- Rod gets cross when there's beer about (4)
- Disagree with one's position at work (6)

DOWN

- We saints no longer possess this ancient kingdom (6)
- Show clearly to be a noted fellow (6)
- It can make one a bit twitchy (3)
- Chat up the redhead in the lift, perhaps (5)
- Encourage to take trophies in small vessels (7)
- Are such books torn? (4)
- Areas of outer Pennsylvania in new maps (6)
- Give a final cry! (5)
- Hop around when caned? (5)
- Cunningly, yet in a silly way (5)

- Writes about a number that shocks (5)
- Wanting experience, visit the town centre (6)
- Woman in overalls (4)
- Timely conclusion in the city (3)
- This system has its point (7)
- What Poles will do when the beer has no head? (5)
- Charge back to bed for it (5)
- I leave Johnny the figure work (5)
- Icy in a big way (7)
- Rocky, it seems, is broke! (5)
- The French department is severely restricted! (5)

- A child takes them to be something symbolic (5)
- It's often underfoot (5)
- When you duck the right, is this the left? (5)
- How butchers may be in business together (7)
- Stepote, perhaps, being princely (6)
- A bit of tea in little bottles for the inner man! (6)
- Sooner? Definitely! (6)
- Judi's little room next to the church (5)
- Sing drunkenly outside the inn (4)
- Girl in France for a time? (3)

SOLUTION (14.8.26)

ACROSS	23. Left alone	DOWN	22. Hi-at-us
9. Over-nigh-t	25. Appointed	1. Consoler	23. Loss of face
10. A-V-Alanche	26. Shed	2. Retaining fee	24. On the level
12. Stay	27. Stable	3. Ign-O-rant	
13. P-on-ies	29. Intoned	4. Strike	
14. Initial	32. Off-end-ers	5. Passable	
15. Den-I-grate	34. Clad-stone	6. Making It up	
17. B-a-g-at-elle	35. Flourice	7. Sadi-Sis	
18. Ring-let	36. Italic	8. Well-heeled	
19. Sheet-H	37. Goes	11. CH-ill	
20. O-p-Ai	38. Cant-one-se	16. Gally-ay	
	39. Con-tender	19. Shy-may	
		21. Put into	
		34. (B)G-lance	

NCC Cadets of 1 Assam battalion mark Har Ghar Tiranga across Kamrup district

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

On the eve of the 80th Independence Day Celebrations, the NCC outfits of 1 Assam Battalion NCC, Guwahati Group, organised and participated in a series of patriotic events across Kamrup District under the national campaign 'Har Ghar Tiranga'.

At KC Das Commerce College, a total of 40 NCC cadets participated in a Tiranga Rally and distributed national flags among citizens as a symbol of unity. The event was followed by an inspiring lecture by Brigadier Ranjit Borthakur, SM (Retd), on



the theme 'The Horrors of Partition'.

Cadets of Guwahati Commerce College also joined the celebrations with 20 NCC cadets taking out a Har Ghar Tiranga flag rally around the college campus. At Gauhati College, NCC cadets along with cadets from 60 Assam Girls Bn NCC participated in a Tiranga Rally. The programme con-

cluded with a drawing and poster-making competition aimed at promoting national integration and patriotism.

In Jawaharlal Nehru College, Boko, 60 NCC cadets participated in a Har Ghar Tiranga Rally followed by the mass singing of 'Vande Mataram' and a Drawing & Poster Making competition. The events witnessed enthusiastic participation from cadets and faculty members. The celebrations reflected the spirit of 'Unity and Discipline' and reaffirmed the commitment of NCC cadets to the nation on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day.

Former IAF chief RKS Bhadauria joins LOHUM as strategic advisor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

LOHUM, a diversified producer of sustainable critical minerals and advanced materials, has appointed Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria (Retd), former Chief of the Air Staff of the Indian Air Force, as Strategic Advisor to support its Defence Materials Sovereignty Programme.

The initiative, being undertaken in partnership with VishvaSutra, aims to establish a structured ecosystem for recovering critical minerals and advanced materials from decommissioned defence assets and advancing indigenous technologies for their refining and reuse.

The programme will focus on three key areas: creating secure and transparent path-



ways for recovering strategic materials from retired defence platforms; developing indigenous technologies for refining materials such as gallium, titanium and rare earth elements; and contributing to a national framework for strengthening critical-mineral security in the defence sector.

India's dependence on imports for several critical minerals has made domestic recovery and refining increas-

ingly important. Decommissioned aircraft, vehicles, radar and communication systems, batteries, cables and specialised equipment contain valuable materials including titanium, aluminium, copper, nickel, cobalt, rare earth elements, specialised steels and high-performance alloys. Recovering and reintroducing these materials into domestic supply chains can help reduce import dependence and strengthen industrial resilience.

LOHUM brings expertise in advanced refining and recycling of critical minerals and materials, while VishvaSutra contributes strategic capabilities across defence, aerospace, technology, policy and institution-building.

UCO Bank opens new branch in Noida Sector 135



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Noida

The Noida Sector-135 branch of UCO Bank was virtually inaugurated on Friday by Rajendra Kumar Saboo, Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer (In-charge) and Executive Director of the Bank. Customers and members of the general public were also invited to attend the inauguration ceremony.

On the occasion, Gautam Patra, Chief General Manager, and Rajesh Kumar Tiwari, General Manager & Zonal Head, from the Zonal Office, New Delhi, along with officers and employees of the Zonal Office and nearby branches, participated in the programme. During the programme, customers were apprised of the latest banking products, schemes and customer-centric services being offered by UCO Bank.

The officials encouraged customers to avail themselves of the Bank's various schemes and benefit from modern banking facilities for a better and more convenient banking experience. On the occasion of the branch's inauguration, the Bank officials expressed their commitment to providing better banking services in line with the needs of customers in the area and further strengthening UCO Bank's presence and outreach in the region.

BRIEFLY

Chennai Open WTA event to be held from November 2-8



Chennai Open International Tennis Championships, a WTA 250 event, will be held from November 2-8, Tamil Nadu Tennis Association (TNTA) announced on Friday. It is being held for the third time here. "A WTA 250 event is returning to India for the third time and the players expected to participate in the event would be amongst the top 100 in the world," Indian tennis legend and TNTA President Vijay Amritraj said. "The conduct of such an international women's event will fulfil a longstanding need of promoting women's Tennis and will encourage more girls in the state to play the sport which will immensely help them." He said the staging of the tournament will benefit the Indian and local players. "There is no doubt as to the impact of staging major international sports events. Our own Chennai Open, the earlier ATP event and the current WTA event, are an outstanding example. "Not only the best in the world came to Chennai and everyone knows the exploits of our own players who used the home opportunity to the maximum to move onto the top world stage."

South Korea soccer players push for K League season shift



South Korea's Pro Footballers Association is calling on the K League to overhaul the domestic soccer season to avoid playing during the height of summer, as local temperatures reached record highs in August. "The K League must transition to the Fall-Spring schedule to protect players from the worsening climate crisis and punishing summer heat," the KPFA said in a statement this week, "and to maintain the league's leadership within Asia and its global competitiveness." On August 2, the southeastern city of Yangsan recorded a temperature of 42.5 degrees Celsius, the highest in decades of official records, prompting authorities to warn residents to stay indoors. The Korean baseball league was suspended for a week because of the extreme heat. The high temperatures also had an impact on the size of the crowd for Manchester City's friendly exhibition against a K League All Star team last week, although the Premier League club's pre-season exhibition win over Atletico Madrid attracted a full crowd on Sunday.

Infantino receives support from six Arab federations amid revolt over WC plan



STEVE DOUGLAS ■ Doha

The heads of six Arab soccer federations expressed their "full support" and "confidence" in Gianni Infantino on Thursday as the embattled FIFA president fights to keep his job after his failed World Cup private investment plan. The backing came from 2030 World Cup co-host Morocco, Qatar, Egypt, Mauritania, Lebanon and Sudan, with four of the signatories being FIFA council members. "We, the undersigned leaders of four respective football associations, express our full support for Gianni Infantino, President of FIFA, and reaffirm our confidence in his leadership and continued commitment to the development of football worldwide," the statement read. "We deeply appreciate Infantino's sustained efforts to advance football globally, expand opportunities across all regions and strengthen the game's role in bringing people and communities together." The statement said the signatories "look forward to continuing our close cooperation with him towards a stronger and more prosperous future for world football, expanding opportunities and further enhancing Arab football's contribution to the global game." Infantino is facing a revolt after his plan to sell stakes in the World Cup to private equity investors. He withdrew the \$20 billion proposal after a furious backlash by global soccer officials, including European body UEFA, which has warned of a boycott of all FIFA games and events. UEFA teamed up with CONCACAF - the confederation for North, Central America and the Caribbean - and the Asian Football Confederation - and issued an open letter Monday saying Infantino's plan was a "fundamental breach of trust" and described it as "deception."

Pulling out of FIFA ASEAN Cup is a bad decision: Bhutia slams AIFF

TAPAN MOHANTA ■ Kolkata

Indian football icon Bhaichung Bhutia on Friday questioned the AIFF's decision to pull out of the inaugural FIFA ASEAN Cup to prioritise a high-profile friendly against Brazil, saying the reported ₹50-70 crore expenditure on the marquee fixture was difficult to justify at a time when the country's club football is grappling with a financial crisis. India will face the record five-time world champions in a friendly slated in Kolkata on October 3, with the All India Football Federation choosing the invitational fixture over participation in the FIFA ASEAN Cup following a scheduling clash. Bhutia said he had no objection to Brazil coming to India for a "free friendly", but argued that spending crores on the match at a time when clubs are struggling to survive was simply the "wrong priority". "If Brazil were coming free of cost to play a free friendly match, I have no problem with that. But to pay Brazil ₹50-70 crore to come and play a friendly in India at this



moment, the timing is not right. The timing is completely wrong," Bhutia said. He also took aim at AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey, accusing the federation leadership of "completely misleading" the government and those around Indian football. "Why do you want to pay ₹50-70 crore at this moment when ISL clubs are shutting down, club after club, and I-League clubs are struggling to pay their entry fees?" he asked. Bhutia's criticism comes against the back-

drop of a turbulent period for Indian club football. The previous AIFF-FSDI commercial arrangement around the ISL ran into prolonged uncertainty after the Master Rights Agreement approached expiry, forcing the 2025-26 season to be delayed before it eventually began in a truncated format following the Sports Ministry's intervention. The crisis also saw Tata Steel exit Jamshedpur FC, as the club was transferred to Churchill Brothers for a symbolic ₹100 on Friday. Against this backdrop, Bhutia said decision to sacrifice FIFA-recognised competition for a single friendly was difficult to justify. India had initially accepted FIFA's invitation to participate in new tournament and were subsequently drawn in Division 1 Group A alongside Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. (PTI)



Churchill set for ISL entry after acquiring Jamshedpur FC's stake



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi/Jamshedpur

Churchill Brothers are set to feature in the upcoming Indian Super League (ISL) season starting September 4 after Tata Steel on Friday sold its entire stake in Jamshedpur Football Club (FC) to the Goan side. The Goan club is expected to pay the full ₹1.1 crore participation fee to the All India Football Federation (AIFF) by Friday's deadline set for all participating ISL 2026-27 clubs. Jamshedpur FC had pulled out of the ISL and disbanded the first team on July 31, hours after the deadline for paying the first installment of participation fee amounting to ₹55 lakh. The AIFF had said that all the 13 other ISL clubs have paid their partic-

ipation fees. On Friday, Tata Steel transferred Jamshedpur FC's Indian Super League sporting licence. The transfer of ownership for a nominal amount of ₹100 includes the transfer of Jamshedpur FC's 12 players and two coaches to the Goan club. Churchill will take over the contracts of all Jamshedpur FC players and coaching staff with effect from September 1. The transfer of ownership is expected to be completed by August 31. "Tata Steel has agreed to transfer its equity shares in 'Jamshedpur Football & Sporting Private Limited' (JFSL) to Churchill Brothers Football Club for a token consideration," Tata Steel said in a release. Jamshedpur FC and Sporting Private Limited (JFSL) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tata Steel.

Sinquefield Cup: Praggnanandhaa bounces back; crushes Van Foreest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ St Louis (USA)

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa bounced back from his previous loss to crush Dutchman Jorden Van Foreest in the fourth round for a share of the second spot at the Sinquefield Cup here. The victory helped Praggnanandhaa reach 2.5 points from four games in the 10-player-nine-round event. Having lost the previous round against Vincent Keymer of Germany, this comeback is surely going to boost his chances for the podium to qualify for the finale of the Grand Chess tour. Incidentally, this was the lone decisive game of the day as the remaining four ended in draws leaving Wesley So of United States still in lead on three points after his draw with compatriot Levon Aronian. In the other all-American clash, Fabiano Caruana was held to a draw by Sevan Samuel while Anish Giri drew with world championship contender Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan. In the other game of the day, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave signed peace with Vincent Keymer of Germany leaving the field wide open in this \$4,75,000 prize



money tournament. Praggnanandhaa yet again reclaimed the tag of hero-of-the-day with his simple yet effective tactical display right from the word go. It was a King pawn game that the Indian decided to keep close and his strike came very early as by move 12 itself, he was on the path to victory. Van Foreest did not have a clue as he lost his queen for a rook and a minor piece. As has been the case study before, when it comes to technique there are very few who can match

Praggnanandhaa and he did not disappoint his fans. With five rounds still to be played and Wesley So in command, Praggnanandhaa, Vachier-Lagrave and Aronian are in close pursuit of the leader half a point behind while the wolf-pack having Caruana, Keymer and Samules is not far away on two points each. Anish Giri and Sindarov share the eighth spot with 1.5 points in their kitty while Van Foreest is still in the cellar with just a half point thus far.

Shubham bags maiden title at Coal India Open 2026

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

Shubham Jaglan produced a superb final-round six-under 64 to claim his maiden professional title by two shots at the second edition of the ₹1 crore Coal India Open at Tollygunge Club here on Friday. The 21-year-old from Panipat, Haryana, carded rounds of 67, 65 and 64 to finish the weather-shortened tournament at 14-under 196. Jaglan, who is attached to DLF Golf & Country Club, Gurugram, earned the winner's cheque of ₹15 lakh and climbed 12 places from 26th to 14th on the DP World PGTI Rankings. His season's earnings rose to ₹26,99,875. "It feels pretty awesome," said Jaglan. "The first win is very special. I was nervous over the last few holes, so I'm proud of the way I finished." The tournament was reduced to 54 holes after heavy rain disrupted the second round. The fourth round was cancelled, with Friday's third round serving as the final round and being played with a shotgun start. Jaglan began the final round from the



second hole, tied fifth and four shots behind overnight leader Jamal Hossain. His challenge suffered an early setback when he bogeyed his opening hole, but he responded calmly and set the tone for the rest of the day. "I made a poor swing with my first shot, but I didn't get upset," he said. "I knew I had to shoot a low score after

starting four behind, so I kept my cool." Jaglan quickly recovered and moved into contention during a decisive stretch. A birdie on the difficult sixth was followed by an eagle on the par-five seventh, changing the momentum of his round. His six-under 64, the lowest score of the final day, featured an eagle, six birdies and two bogeys. It erased his four-shot deficit and took him clear of the field. The pressure returned on the closing holes. After seeing the leaderboard on the 18th, Jaglan knew his lead had been cut to one shot. Rather than adopting a defensive approach, he hit two assured shots and finished with birdie to seal title.

Hockey: India's Mission World Cup begins against Wales

MONA PARTHSARATHI ■ Amstelveen (The Netherlands)

It's a wait that dates back to more than half a century and the Indian men's hockey team would be determined to break the jinx this time when it begins its title quest at the FIH World Cup with a clash against Wales here on Saturday. The Harmanpreet Singh-led side would hope to add to the country's Independence Day celebrations by beating Wales to set the tone for a campaign that could finally end one of Indian hockey's longest-standing droughts which goes back 51 years. India's last and only World Cup triumph came in 1975, when Ajit Pal Singh's team defeated Pakistan in the final in Kuala Lumpur. "We want to write our own piece of history in Indian hockey," coach Craig



Fulton said ahead of the tournament, acknowledging the weight of the legacy while insisting that his players must create their own story rather than live in the shadow of 1975.

The country previously won bronze in 1971 and silver in 1973. More than five decades later, the current generation believes it has the experience, depth and belief to change

that record. India enter the tournament with genuine optimism. The country won bronze medals at the Tokyo Olympics, ending a 41-year wait for an Olympic medal, and followed it with another bronze at the Paris Games. The challenge now is to replicate that consistency on the World Cup stage. "We have come here with the same passion, mindset and preparation," captain Harmanpreet had said. "There is no pressure to win a medal in the World Cup; rather, it is our responsibility." The opening assignment against 15th-ranked Wales appears favourable on paper for eighth-ranked India, but coach Craig Fulton's side knows that a strong start is essential. England, ranked third in the world, and Pakistan, ranked 12th, await later in the pool, making every point valuable.

After a disappointing eighth-place finish in the nine-team Pro League last season, the team found its rhythm in the last phase of the European leg, defeating reigning world and European champions Germany and Olympic champions the Netherlands. The Asia Cup title in Rajgir has also strengthened belief within the squad. Fulton has opted for a blend of experience and youth after trying out 33 players during the 2025-26 Pro League season. Veteran mid-fielder Manpreet Singh, India's most-capped player with 417 international appearances, provides leadership and composure, while eight players are set to experience the World Cup for the first time. With PR Sreejesh having retired after the Paris Olympics, the responsibility in front of the goal now rests with Mohit HS and Suraj Karkera. (PTI)

Michael Carrick says Manchester United needs more signings

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Manchester

Manchester United manager Michael Carrick has called for more signings in a summer when the club's spending on new players has been below all of its main Premier League rivals. United has spent around 85 million pounds (\$115 million) combined on three players - mid-fielders Andrey Santos and Youri Tielemans and goalkeeper Karl Darlow - during the offseason, while also welcoming back Marcus Rashford from his loan spell at Barcelona. For Carrick, who is heading into his first full season as United manager and will be leading his team in the Champions League, it's not enough. "I think we've done really good business and we've got really some top,



top, top players. We're delighted with that. We always want to improve," Carrick said. "We want more, we need more, we keep looking for how we can do that." Chelsea, Manchester City and Tottenham have each splashed out more than 100 million pounds on a single player, in Morgan Rogers, Elliot Anderson and Sandro Tonali, respectively. Chelsea's expenditure on new players, in fact, has exceeded \$450 million.