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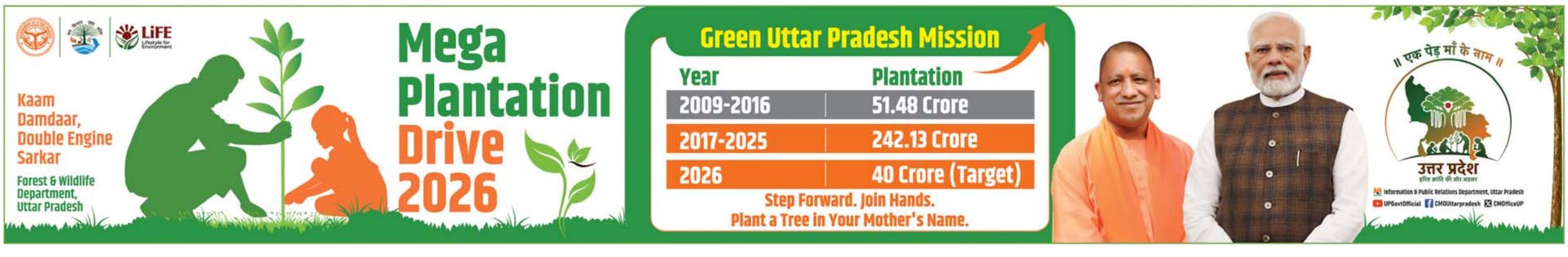
LUCKNOW | THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2026 | PAGES 16 | ₹3.00

RNI No. 2016/1957 | Late City Vol. 162 | Issue 185

PUBLISHED FROM: DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL RAIPUR BHUBANESWAR RANCHI CHANDIGARH DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYAWADA



No India role in Nijjar killing: Canada

RCMP's clarification comes as Canadian and US agencies target Lawrence Bishnoi gang

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has stated that its investigation into the 2023 killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar has found no evidence connecting Indian Government officials to the crime.

The clarification came on Tuesday as Canadian authorities, in coordination with the United States, targeted transnational criminal networks allegedly involved in the murder.

RCMP Deputy Commissioner Lisa Moreland, while briefing on Operation Hard Ball, explicitly ruled out any Indian Government involvement. "There is no evidence through this organised crime investigation and the charges and indictment laid forth that Indian officials were charged or involved in these investigations," Moreland told *CBC News*.

An FBI Wanted poster for Satinderjeet Singh also known as Goldy Brar is displayed at a news conference at the Federal Building in Los Angeles on Tuesday, July 7 AP

She added, "As with any good arrest, there were over 50 search warrants that were conducted today... I firmly state that nothing has come out today to link the Indian government."

The RCMP's position marks a clear departure from claims made by then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who in September 2023 alleged in Parliament that Indian officials may have been involved in Nijjar's killing outside a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia. Nijjar was a designated terrorist in India.

Trudeau's remarks triggered a major diplomatic crisis between India and Canada, leading to the expulsion of diplomats on both sides and a sharp deterioration in bilateral ties that lasted nearly two years.

India had consistently rejected the allegations, pointing instead to the growing influence of transnational criminal gangs operating from Canadian soil and the space allegedly provided to pro-Khalistani elements.

On the same day, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) unsealed indictments against 24 individuals linked to three major transnational criminal syndicates, including the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, which has been charged with orchestrating Nijjar's assassination.

The other groups named in the indictment are the Jaggu Bhagwanpuria cartel and the criminal syndicate led by Ravinder Singh Dhanda.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

US-Iran ceasefire crumbles, as Trump hardens stand

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Dubai

US President Donald Trump threatened on Wednesday to strike Iran's civilian infrastructure and to seize Kharg Island, with its oil infrastructure, just hours after he said the ceasefire was over.

"We hit them very hard last night," Trump said. "We'll probably hit them hard again tonight."

Trump made the remark in Ankara on the sidelines of the NATO summit. He said the strikes are continued retaliation for attacks on commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz. "Maybe we'll take over Kharg Island. We may take over Kharg Island. There's not a thing they could do about it," Trump said.

The US launched strikes on Iran early Wednesday, hours after it revoked a license authorising the sale of Iranian oil.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

US President Donald Trump, foreground with other NATO leaders at the organisation summit in Ankara AP

CRUDE SURGE BATTERS MARKETS

New Delhi: Indian equities slumped on Wednesday as rising geopolitical tensions between the US and Iran sent Brent crude soaring 6.18 per cent to $78.74 a barrel, triggering heavy selling in oil marketing, aviation and paint stocks. HPCL, IOC and BPCL fell up to 4.6 per cent, while InterGlobe Aviation, SpiceJet and major paint makers also declined. The Sensex tumbled 1,677 points (2.15 per cent) and the Nifty lost 517 points (2.12 per cent), marking their steepest single-day fall in over two months. Analysts said fears of prolonged Middle East conflict, supply disruptions through the Strait of Hormuz and higher inflation weighed on investor sentiment.

DETAILED REPORT ON >> P11

The ByStander

LeT commander killed in J&K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Coinciding with the 10th anniversary of gunning down Burhan Wani, the poster boy of the pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist outfit, a joint team of the security forces on Wednesday tracked down a top-ranking commander of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) before neutralising him in the Chhanapora area of Shopian district.

The anti-terrorist operation was launched in the area on Saturday by the joint team of the Rashtriya Rifles unit, Special Operations Group of Jammu and Kashmir Police and Central Reserve Police Force soon after the suspected movement of two local terrorists of LeT came on the radar of the CCTV surveillance system in the area. The first contact with the LeT terrorists was established during a cordon and search operation in a dense orchard in the Meemandar area. The security forces exercised utmost restraint while maintaining the tight cordon in the nearby villages.

A security official keeps vigil near the encounter site in Shopian, J&K PTI

CONTINUED ON >> P4

India to help restore Prambanan temple

PM Narendra Modi during the inauguration of the Prambanan Temple Restoration Project in Yogyakarta, Indonesia PTI

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

In a powerful reaffirmation of civilisational ties, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto on Wednesday jointly inaugurated the restoration and conservation project of the iconic Prambanan Temple complex, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that stands as a living testament to the deep cultural and spiritual connect between India and Indonesia.

The grand ceremony at the 9th-century temple complex in Yogyakarta marked the formal launch of a collaborative initiative under which the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will lead technical and restoration efforts from the Indian side. Modi, who is on the first leg of his three-nation tour, described the project as a "shining example of the enduring civilisational bonds" that have linked the two nations for centuries.

"Built in the 9th century, the Prambanan Temple complex is the largest temple complex in Indonesia dedicated to the Trimurti — Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva," the Ministry of External Affairs noted. "It stands as an enduring symbol of the shared civilisational and cultural heritage between India and Indonesia."

The visit came just a day after the exchange of a Letter of Intent between the two countries to initiate the ambitious conservation project, an outcome of the understanding reached during President Prabowo's State Visit to India in 2025.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Ram temple trust tightens purse strings

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH ■ New Delhi/Ayodhya

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has set up a three-member committee to oversee its State Bank of India (SBI) accounts. The committee includes Interim General Secretary Krishna Mohan, Chandan Rai, a chartered accountant by profession, and chief engineer and project manager of the temple, Jagdish Afale. From now on, all financial transactions or payments from SBI accounts need the approval and signatures of all three members.

This change follows recent resignations and an ongoing Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe embezzlement of temple donations. On July 6, 2026, the trust accepted the resignations of former general secretary Champat Rai and trustee Anil Mishra, who stepped down on moral grounds after the Uttar Pradesh Government's SIT shared its initial findings with the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust. The investigation began when reports of missing cash bundles from temple offerings came out in late May 2026, leading to FIRs against several people, including temple staff.

The new committee structure is meant to encourage shared responsibility. The introduction of a committee to manage SBI accounts is meant to reduce the risk of irregularities and improve oversight.

Police personnel escort accused in the alleged Ram temple donation theft case in Ayodhya on Wednesday PTI

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Mahadev Book kingpin held in Oman

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH ■ New Delhi

Sourabh Chandrakar, the main accused and an alleged promoter of Mahadev Book, an online betting platform, has been detained in Oman. The Royal Oman Police arrested him weeks ago after an Interpol Red Notice was issued by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) the and Chhattisgarh Police. Indian agencies, led by the CBI, have sent a formal extradition request with court records, non-bailable warrants and other evidence.

Chandrakar, from Chhattisgarh and in his early 30s, is held at the high-security Al Khoud detention centre in Muscat. Reports say he entered Oman with a fake Indonesian passport. Omani authorities have also started a separate case for passport fraud and illegal entry.

Sourabh Chandrakar FILE PHOTO

The ED has filed several chargesheets, naming 74 entities and arresting 13 people. It has seized assets worth over ₹1,700 crore, including properties in Dubai and India. The agency has also sought fugitive economic offender (FEO) status for Chandrakar, his associate, Ravi Uppal, and others.

The ED has repeatedly said that its investigation found connections to powerful people in Chhattisgarh. Former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel was accused of getting ?508 crore in kickbacks through a cash courier named Asim Das. Baghel has denied these claims, saying they are politically motivated and meant to damage his reputation before the elections.

CBI raids and other investigations have focused on hawala operators, cash couriers, and intermediaries, uncovering a complicated money trail from Indian bettors to operators in the UAE and possibly beyond. Chandrakar and Uppal left India for Dubai around 2019 as enforcement increased.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

PIONEER IN SHORT

FLASH FLOODS CUT OFF ROADS IN HIMACHAL

Flash floods triggered by heavy rain disrupted road connectivity in parts of Himachal Pradesh's Shimla district on Wednesday, leaving several villages temporarily cut off. Officials said a surge in the Ganvi Khad stream damaged a temporary bridge in Rampur subdivision, snapping road links to the twin panchayats of Kyao and Kut and causing hardship for residents. Videos circulating on social media showed commuters stranded on both sides of the swollen stream as locals attempted to restore access by clearing stones and debris. The flooding followed heavy rainfall in the upper reaches of the Samej Khad catchment on Tuesday evening, with strong currents submerging roads at several locations and disrupting traffic. According to the Meteorological Department, Jatton Barrage in Sirmaur recorded 70.5 mm of rainfall since Tuesday evening.

GARBAGE MOUNTAIN BURIES PUNE OFFICE

A three-storey office building of a private waste-processing company collapsed after a massive garbage mound fell onto it in Moshi, Pune district, on Wednesday, trapping at least 16 people, officials said.
Rescue teams had pulled out seven people alive from the debris by evening, while efforts continued to rescue eight to nine others still feared trapped. The injured survivors were shifted to hospitals for treatment. The incident occurred around 1.45 pm in the Pimpri-Chinchwad area following heavy rains. The building was being used as an administrative office by a private firm processing waste at the site on behalf of the civic body.
Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation Commissioner Vijay Suryawanshi said the office was located next to a huge mound of legacy waste.

Corbett's wildlife pays the price for growing wedding and party tourism

CHANCHAL GOLA ■ Ramnagar

The Corbett tiger landscape has for long been famous for its tigers, elephants and other rich wildlife and forests visited by nature enthusiasts from across India and abroad. However, recent trends point towards a rising number of people visiting this area for wild recreational events which often violate the law. Increasing party tourism in resorts dotting this wildlife rich landscape is becoming a cause for concern.

Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to promote destination weddings in Uttarakhand, the area surrounding Corbett National Park has also emerged as a popular venue for wedding celebrations, giving a significant boost to local tourism and employment. However, the changing nature of tourism has also raised fresh concerns.

The Corbett landscape, once known for its peace, natural beauty and wildlife experiences, is increasingly witnessing complaints of late-night loud music, liquor parties and objectionable activities in some resorts. Recently, the Kumaon chapter of Uttarakhand Against Noise Pollution was also launched in the Corbett landscape by locals who are raising their voice against noise pollution from resorts. Environmentalists believe such activities are not only affecting the cultural identity of *Devbhoomi* (abode of gods) but are also disturbing the natural behaviour of wildlife in the surrounding forests.

Sunlight penetrating through the dense forest of Corbett Tiger Reserve WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The issue came under the spotlight recently after police raided a party at a resort in Sanwalde near Ramnagar. According to the police, the raid was conducted following complaints of obscenity, cash being showered on dancers and other objectionable activities during the event reportedly hosted by a pesticide company owner from Meerut in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh. The police arrested the accused and sealed the resort.

According to officials, a case was registered under section 210/2026, 143 of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, Excise Act and the Juvenile Justice Act. The incident has triggered a wider debate across the state over the changing face of tourism in the Corbett region.

Local residents claim that this is not an isolated incident. They allege that some resort operators are encouraging such events in pursuit of higher profits. Large groups from Delhi, Haryana, Meerut, Gurugram, Noida and other places reportedly visit this region primarily for weekend parties featuring alcohol, DJ nights and even objectionable activities in some cases.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Suicide: Family protests, seeks justice

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

Following a death by suicide on Tuesday evening, the family members of a 30-year-old man staged a protest at Aminabad crossing on Wednesday afternoon. They were demanding action against those they claimed harassed him. The deceased, Ajay Gupta of Dugaunwa area under Naka Hindola police station, ran a chaat stall at the Fatehganj Galla Mandi. Ajay was found hanging from a ceiling fan hook with a 'dupatta' in his room around 6 pm on Tuesday.

After receiving the body following a post-mortem examination, the family gathered at Aminabad crossing around 3 pm on Wednesday, placing the body on the road to demand swift action against the people they allege had been harassing Ajay.

The protest caused significant traffic disruption for about 90 minutes. Police arrived at the scene and held discussions with the family members, assuring them of a thorough investigation and appropriate legal action against those responsible. Satisfied with the police assurance, the family called off the protest and took the body for the last rites. Preliminary investigations by the Naka police suggest that Ajay may have been struggling with severe financial distress.

A police spokesperson noted that a forensic field unit was called to the scene on Tuesday evening to collect evidence, and a case was registered following a police inquest. The police have stated that they are investigating all aspects of the case, including the family's allegations of harassment.

Man injured in firing

A 40-year-old man was injured in a firing incident in the Kaiserbagh area on Wednesday morning.

The accused, identified as the victim's brother-in-law, fled the scene immediately after the incident.

The incident took place at Talab Gagni Shukla in the Khadra market area. Preliminary investigations reveal that the accused, Mohammad Ilyas of Raja Bazar, had been embroiled in an ongoing matrimonial dispute with his wife. On Wednesday, Ilyas arrived at his in-laws' residence, where a heated altercation ensued. During the argument, he allegedly opened fire at his brother-in-law, Fazil Hussain.

Hussain sustained a gunshot wound to his shoulder and was rushed to Balrampur Hospital. Doctors stated that the victim is stable and out of danger. The victim's wife, Afreen, filed a complaint at the Kaiserbagh police station. Based on her testimony, police registered a case against Mohammad Ilyas under relevant sections of the law.

A senior official stated that police teams have been constituted to trace the accused. Forensic experts inspected the crime scene.

Man points gun at fellow gym-goer

A morning workout at a fitness centre in Banthra turned chaotic on Wednesday when a man allegedly brandished a firearm at another gym member following a minor argument over a ceiling fan.

The incident occurred around 7:35 am at the Royal Fitness Gym in the Niwan area of Banthra.

According to the police, the altercation began between two gym members, Sanu Vishwakarma of Ogapur in Unnao district and Ayush Raj, over turning on a fan.

The altercation started as a verbal disagreement and quickly escalated into a tense confrontation. It is alleged that Ayush Raj, a resident of Jahanabad, suddenly pulled out a country-made pistol and pointed it at Sanu Vishwakarma.

However, other members at the gym intervened immediately and overpowered Ayush Raj before anyone could be harmed. They also called the police.

A team from the Banthra police station arrived at the scene shortly after receiving the call and took Ayush Raj into custody and seized the firearm.

The police have registered a case against the accused.

Cash, jewellery recovered during vigilance search

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh Vigilance Department conducted a two-day search operation at the residence of Lalit Kumar, former Assistant Regional Transport Officer (ARTO) of Agra. The operation, carried out on Tuesday and Wednesday, revealed a staggering accumulation of wealth far exceeding his known sources of income.

During the search of Kumar's residence in Aliganj, Lucknow, investigators uncovered cash hidden in various packets throughout the house, totalling approximately ₹1.62 crore.

Beyond the cash, the vigilance team discovered a significant cache of precious metals and jewellery, which have been valued at approximately ₹20 crore.

The seized items include approximately 13 kilogrammes of gold biscuits, bricks and high-value jewellery (including diamonds), and approximately 9 kilogrammes of silver bricks, biscuits and jewellery.

The search also brought to light documents detailing vast investments in real estate and other financial instruments.

Officials identified 15 properties linked to him, including residential houses, plots, and agricultural land across Lucknow, Noida and Barabanki, with an estimated value of ₹13 crore.

Additionally, the team discovered evidence of substantial investments in banks, post offices, mutual funds, and fixed deposits totalling more than ₹1 crore, along with two luxury cars (a Toyota Innova and a Hyundai i20) and a revolver. When accounting for the seized cash, jewellery, real estate, vehicles, and home interior expenses, the total value of the disproportionate assets is estimated at approximately ₹35 crore.

A case was previously registered against Lalit Kumar under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (as amended in 2018) at the Anti-Corruption police station in Kanpur. Following the recent discoveries, the Vigilance Department is currently verifying all seized assets and incorporating them into the ongoing investigation. In recognition of the successful operation, the Director of the UP Vigilance Establishment has announced a reward of ₹1 lakh for the Lucknow sector team that conducted the raid.

School van hits rly employee, injures children

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

An out-of-control school van hit a railway employee who was buying mangoes on the highway near the Community Health Centre turn in Mohanlalganj on Wednesday. He sustained serious injuries in the accident and was referred to the Apex Trauma Centre.

Several school children inside the van were also injured.

After receiving treatment at the CHC, they were sent home with their parents. The police have impounded the school van and taken the driver into custody.

According to reports, a white van transporting private school children home lost control near the CHC turn on the Rae Bareli highway. It struck railway employee Ram Milan of Kudha, who had parked his motorcycle on the roadside and was buying mangoes. The van then crashed into a roadside drain.

Ram Milan was critically injured in the collision. He was initially taken to the CHC and subsequently referred to the Apex Trauma Centre.

Meanwhile, the collision injured several students inside the van, including Divyanshi, Mansi, Virat, and Rishabh.

Locals rushed the injured children to the CHC, from where they were taken home by their parents following treatment.

According to the police, school staff took some of the children away from the scene immediately after the accident. In contrast, the injured children were taken home by their parents after receiving medical care.

The police have impounded the van and detained the driver, Arjun of Dayalpur, and an investigation is underway.

2 bodies found hanging

The bodies of two people, including an adult, were found hanging from nooses in Kesari Kheda and Trilokpur areas of Mohanlalganj.

On being informed, the police sent both the bodies for post-mortem examination. As per reports, the body of Rajau Rawat (70) of Kesari Kheda, Mohanlalganj, was found hanging from a rope in the veranda on Wednesday morning.

His son, Ganesh, took his father down from the noose, but by then he had already passed away.

In another incident, the body of Pushpendra Yadav (20) of Trilokpur village was found hanging from the ceiling reinforcement bars with a rope in a locked room on Wednesday.

On being informed, the police arrived, opened the door in the presence of family members, brought the body down, and initiated legal proceedings. The police have seized the mobile phone of the deceased and are conducting an investigation.

Station House Officer Rambabu Singh stated that no suicide notes were found in either incident. Prima facie, it appears that the suicides were committed due to domestic discord. A thorough investigation into both cases is currently underway.

The Pioneer
CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

Power of Attorney Document No. 7928 dated 03/10/2013 and Freehold Deed Document No.11953 dated 27/11/2014 have been lost. Its unauthorized use shall be illegal, Rohit Katiyar S/o Rajaram R/o. C-153 LIG, Village Kapli, Panki, Shatabdi Nagar, Phase-III, Pank Bahadur Nagar, Kanpur Nagar.

NOTICE

It is inform all that I, Mohammad Zaheen (Aadhar No. 2820 6813 0729) S/o Mohammed Shamshad, am changing my name Mohd. Zaheen S/o Mohd. Shamshad to Mohammad Zaheen S/o Mohammed Shamshad R/o 30 Untsar City & Distt. Unnao I will be known as for all future purposes.

NOTICE

That the correct name of my son is Rudra Narayan Pandey (son of Ajay Kumar Pandey), as recorded in his educational certificates; however, due to an error, his name appears as 'Aman Pandey' on his Aadhaar Card (No. 265236878516), which is incorrect. In the future, my son should be known and recognized by his correct name. Ajay Kumar Pandey S/o Shiv Kumar Pandey R/o Vikash Nagar Town and Tahsil Rasulabad, Kanpur dehat.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby informed to the general public that the original Sale Deed No. 1519 dated 03.09.2001, executed by Smt. Bindumati, W/o Surya Narayan, in favour of Shri Ram Karan and Shri Shyam Karan, Sons of Shri Ram Charitra, and Smt. Sabhapati, W/o Shri Ram Charitra, in respect of Gata No. 117, Village Uchahpali, Tehsil Milkipur, District Ayodhya, registered in the office of the Sub-Registrar, Milkipur, Faizabad (now Ayodhya), has been lost/misplaced despite diligent search. The said original Sale Deed has never been mortgaged, pledged or deposited with any bank, financial institution or any other person. Any person having any claim, objection or information regarding the said Sale Deed is requested to intimate the undersigned within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice, failing which it shall be presumed that no person has any claim or objection in respect thereof. Ram Ganesh Mishra S/o Shri Ram Naresh Mishra Village Sirahir (Pure Sirwar Ka Purwa) Tehsil Milkipur, District Ayodhya.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby informed to the general public that the original Sale Deed No. 5211 dated 28.12.2008, executed by Shri Anant Ram Verma S/o Shri Ramsaware Verma in favour of Smt. Kiran Lata Mishra, W/o Shri Ajay Kumar Mishra, R/o House No. 8/10/183, Hanumat Nagar, Naka Muzaffara, Ayodhya, and registered in the office of the Sub-Registrar, Sadar, Faizabad (now Ayodhya), has been lost/misplaced despite diligent search. The said original Sale Deed has never been mortgaged, pledged or deposited with any bank, financial institution or any other person. Any person having any claim, objection or information regarding the said Sale Deed is requested to intimate the undersigned within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice, failing which it shall be presumed that no person has any claim or objection in respect thereof. Smt. Kiran Lata Mishra

NOTICE

It is hereby informed that I have changed my name from Razia Rahman Malik to Razia Rahman W/o Malik Barkat Ullah R/o 105/195, Prem Nagar Chamanganj Kanpur Nagar for future purposes.

NOTICE

It is hereby informed that I have changed my name from Barkat Ullah Malik to Malik Barkat Ullah S/o Malik Karamat Ullah R/o Plot No 2 Araji 7, Pokharpur Jajmau Kanpur Nagar for future purposes.

NOTICE

My father name has been erroneously mentioned as "Yogender Kumar Tiwari" in my CBSE Class X educational records. While correct name of my father is "Yogendra Kumar Tiwari". In future my father name shall be read as "Yogendra Kumar Tiwari" for all official purposes. Harsh Tiwari S/o Yogendra kumar Tiwari R/o-931 Alinagar Sunehra, Manasnagar, Krishna Nagar Lucknow-226023, U.P.

NOTICE

I, Sanjeet Kumar alias Suresh Kumar (Aadhaar No. 3566 9686 1173), son of Karim, resident of C-155, Begamganj, Nawabganj, District Barabanki (U.P.) - 225001, hereby declare that my legal name is Sanjeet Kumar son of Karim and my household name is Suresh Kumar son of Karim both names belong to me. Due to various reasons, the name "Suresh Kumar, son of Karim" has been recorded in some of my documents/papers. Henceforth, wherever the name "Suresh Kumar, son of Karim" appears, it should be read and understood as "Sanjeet Kumar, son of Karim," and recorded as such in all official records.

NOTICE

It is to inform general public that Nirmala Devi had purchased House built over Plot No.368/61, Lakadmandi, Lucknow from Devi Deen, vide Sale Deed No. 2079 Dated 03.12.1993 SRO IV, Lucknow. Thereafter, Nirmala Devi has died leaving behind her legal heirs, Gopal Prajapati, Neeraj Prajapati and Sanjay Prajapati who have sold Plot No.368/61 to Kavita Gupta and Meena Gupta Vide Sale Deed S.No. 3508 on 25.03.2013 SRO V, Lucknow. Thereafter, Kavita Gupta and Meena Gupta have sold House built on Plot No.368/61 to Himanshu Patwa and Mayank Patwa Vide Sale Deed Serial No. 11725 on 14.11.2024 SRO V, Lucknow. A Correction Deed No. 1532 on 11.02.2025 SRO V, Lucknow was also registered in respect of Municipal No.368/001/09/110-(22) of said property. Now, Himanshu Patwa and Mayank Patwa are mortgaging said property with Axis Bank Ltd,Lucknow against loan. If any person or financial institution has any interest or objection regarding such mortgage of above mentioned property, please contact to Advocate mentioned below with objection in writing and with relevant documents, within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice.
Mr. Amit Kumar Singh Rathaur Advocate, Chamber No.7, UGF, Krishna Tower, Chakbast Road, Quaiserbagh, Lucknow. E-mail advoffice04@gmail.com.Mobile No.9559811119

NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that my name in passport is wrongly mentioned as Mohamad Kasim Mohammad Sagir. My correct name is Mohd. Kasim, son of Mohamad Sagir, resident of Achalgarh, P.S. Inhauna, District Amethi.

NOTICE

I have changed my daughter's name from Aliya to Aliya Ubaid. In the future, she should be known and recognized by this new name. Mohammad Ubaid, son of Mohammad Zubair, resident of 5/505 Vikas Nagar, Lucknow.

NOTICE

Shambhu Prasad Gupta S/o Sita Ram Gupta R/o 32/98, Maniram Bagia Kanpur, I have changed my name SHAMBHOO PRASAD GUPTA to SHAMBHU PRASAD GUPTA for future purposes.

NOTICE

I have changed my daughter's name from Adiba to Adiba Ubaid. In the future, she should be known and recognized by this new name. Mohammad Ubaid, son of Mohammad Zubair, resident of 5/505 Vikas Nagar Lucknow, UP.

NOTICE

I, Seema Kapoor, W/o Shobhit Kapoor and R/o 117/M/32, Gopala Tower, Kakadeo, Naveen Nagar, Kanpur, state that my name was Seema Kumari prior to my marriage and became Seema Kapoor after marriage; therefore, both these names belong to me.

NOTICE

I, Rijvan Shaikh, S/o Jaleel, residing at Poorabpatti Bhimalpatti, Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Pincode 223221. I hereby declare that in my educational marksheet, my surname is missing, and my name is mentioned only as 'Rijvan'. My true and legally complete name is Rijvan Shaikh for all future purposes.

NOTICE

This is to inform you that Mr. Vijay Rawat, son of the late Ramesh Chandra Rawat, resident of 44, Rajman Bazaar (B C Bazaar), Post Dilkusha Cantt, Lucknow, has legally and legally adopted Mr. Arjun Rawat (age 14 years), the younger son of his elder brother, Mr. Ajay Rawat, and his wife, Mrs. Hema Rawat, on December 24, 2025. Mr. Vijay Rawat is unmarried. From now on, Mr. Vijay Rawat will be Arjun Rawat's father and sole guardian, and Mr. Vijay Rawat's name will be recorded and recognized as his father in all of Mr. Arjun Rawat's documents.

NOTICE

This is to inform that the original copy of my sale deed was lost on July 4, 2026. The sale deed, dated June 7, 2003, was executed by the UP Awas Vikas Parishad in favor of Kanti Devi, wife of the late Dhuni Ram. It is registered in Book No. 1, Volume 2741, Pages 293–308, at Serial No. 2770. Sonu Gandhi, S/o Ajit Singh House No. 301 Feroze Gandhi Nagar, Raebareli.

NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that the correct name of my son is "SAKSHYA GAUTAM" son of "ASHUTOSH KUMAR" which is mentioned in his educational records. Due to mistake, my son 's name has been mentioned as "SAKSH" in his Aadhar card number 819254291794 which is wrong. In future, my son should be known by his correct name "SAKSHYA GAUTAM" son of "ASHUTOSH KUMAR".

NOTICE

I SMT SARSAWATI (name of wife as per Service records) is mother of No. 9424641M, Rank Hav Name VASAVA SHANTILAL Unit 2/11 GR, Permanent Resident of Village Bor, Post office Bogaj, District Namda, Gujarat, Pin 393040, declare that in the Service Records of my son's my name is mentioned as SMT SARSAWATI while my correct name is VASAVA SARASVATIBEN which is mentioned in my Aadhaar Card No. 205933504149 hence same may be recorded in my son's service records.

NOTICE

I, Ali Rizwan, S/o Late Ali Imam Abidi, R/o 546/P6, Sarfarazganj, Hardoi Road, Lucknow-226003, declare that my son (Class 8th "section I", City Montessori School, Rajajipuram, Lucknow) is wrongly recorded in school records as "Mohd Abbas" instead of correct name "Abbas Abidi", as per Aadhaar, Birth Certificate, Passport & Bank records. Both names refer to same person. Henceforth he will be known as "Abbas Abidi".

NOTICE

I LAXMI LOKSOM(name of mother as per Service records) is mother of No. 9426166A, Rank L/Nk Name James LOKSOM Unit 6/11 GR, Permanent Resident of Kankey Bong Busty, Lodhama, Darjeeling, West Bengal, 734201, declare that in the Service Records of my son's my name is mentioned as LAXMI LOKSOM while my correct name is LAXMI LUXOM which is mentioned in my Aadhaar Card No. 837119063831 hence same may be recorded in my son's service records.

The Pioneer
CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

Zareen S/o Shamim Khan R/o Ghatiyapur Shamsabad Farrukhabad , I have changed my name from JAREEN TO ZAREEN for future purposes.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from RAHILA JAVEED to RAHILA MIRZA W/o Mirza Shahnawaz Husain R/o 101/289-B. Colonelganj Kanpur for all future purposes.

NOTICE

It is hereby informed that I have changed my name from Malik Razia Begum to Razia Rahman W/o Malik Barkat Ullah R/o 105/195, Prem Nagar Chamanganj Kanpur Nagar for future purposes.

NOTICE

Kausar Tasneem W/o Mohammad Iqbal R/o 42/12 Makhania Bazar Parade Kanpur, I have changed my name QAUSER TASNEEM TO KAUSAR TASNEEM for future purposes.

NOTICE

Satyam Sonker S/o Tribhuan Sonker R/o H. No. 78/215, Latouche Road Anwar Ganj, Kanpur Nagar, I have changed my name from SATYAM TO SATYAM SONKER for future purposes.

NOTICE

It is hereby informed that I have changed my name from Pooja Agarwal to Pooja Khemani W/o Sachin Khemani R/o 119/67, Naseemabad, Darshanpurwa, R. K. Nagar Kanpur for future purposes.

NOTICE

Be it known to all that earlier my name was ARPIT KUMAR which is now changed to ARPIT KUSHWAHA. In future I shall be known as ARPIT KUSHWAHA S/o Phool Chand 26/B Chota Baghara, 55 Chota Baghara sectar 1, Prayagraj U.P.

Police rescue two-year-old girl, unite her with mother

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

The Chinhat police successfully rescued a two-year-old girl and reunited her with her mother following serious allegations of exploitation and human trafficking.

The case came to light on Wednesday when a woman approached the Chinhat police station alleging that she had been held captive in a city hotel for the past 25 days and forced into prostitution.

The complainant alleged that Anil Kumar Singh of Lolai in the Chinhat area had forcibly kept her two-year-old daughter and was refusing to return her.

Acting swiftly on the complaint, the police summoned Anil Kumar Singh for questioning.

During the inquiry, Singh claimed that the woman had been staying with him voluntarily for nearly a month. He alleged that the woman left the hotel on July 5 leaving the child behind and that he had sent the toddler to a contact in Sitapur for her care and safety.

Following this lead and utilising electronic surveillance, a police team from Chinhat, with the assistance of the Manapur police in Sitapur, reached Sarvahan Purwa village. The toddler was found safe and was subsequently brought back to Lucknow, where she was reunited with her mother following legal formalities.

The woman has levelled grave accusations of sexual exploitation against the suspect, alleging that she was forced into sexual relations with him and other individuals.

A senior police official stated that a case under relevant sections of the law has been registered based on the woman's complaint. The victim has been sent for a medical examination.

"The accused is currently in police custody for intense interrogation. We are also conducting a thorough investigation into the other serious allegations made by the complainant," the official stated.

S-I critically injured in mishap

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

A sub-inspector of the Lucknow Police was left critically injured after his motorcycle was hit by an unidentified car on Wednesday morning.

The victim, Sub-Inspector Anil Kumar, is currently posted at the Manaknagar police station and resides within the Para police station limits.

The incident occurred near the Tikonia intersection under Para police station while Kumar was en route to his duty in the Ashiyana area.

The incident came to light when Sub-Inspector Gaurav Singh, In-charge of the Jalalpur police outpost, was out for his morning walk and spotted the injured officer lying on the road. Singh rushed him to Lok Bandhu Hospital.

The doctors at Lok Bandhu Hospital referred Kumar to the KGMU Trauma Centre.

The Manaknagar police have been informed of the incident, and the victim's family has also been notified. The Para police have recovered the damaged motorcycle.

A police spokesperson stated, "We are scanning CCTV footage from the vicinity of the Tikonia intersection and gathering evidence to identify the vehicle and the driver responsible. A formal investigation is underway, and further legal action will be initiated immediately upon receipt of a complaint from the family."

Cyclist killed

A 58-year-old cyclist died after being hit by an unidentified vehicle near the Khushalganj overbridge on the Kisan Path on Wednesday. The victim was identified as Bodhi Gautam of Bada Gaon in Kakori.

According to Para police, they received information about the road accident on Wednesday afternoon.

Upon arrival at the scene, officers found the victim critically injured and rushed him to the KGMU Trauma Centre, but doctors declared him dead upon arrival.

The victim's identity was confirmed through his identification documents found at the scene. His son, Milan Gautam, was informed and reached the hospital.

The police have sent the body for a post-mortem examination.

A police official stated that CCTV footage from the surrounding area was currently being reviewed, and that further legal action will be taken as soon as the family files a complaint.

Auto driver dies in mishap; kin protest

An auto-rickshaw driver, Arun Kumar Sonkar (36), succumbed to injuries sustained in an accident on Tuesday, which led to a protest in Krishna Nagar area on Wednesday.

Sonkar of Sneh Nagar was driving his auto-rickshaw when an animal suddenly crossed his path. In an attempt to avoid hitting the animal, he lost control of the vehicle, which then collided with a roadside wall.

Passersby rushed the critically injured driver to Lok Bandhu Hospital. He was referred to the Trauma Centre for specialised care, where he passed away during treatment. After the post-mortem examination, his body was handed over to his grieving family. The situation turned tense in Sneh Nagar on Wednesday as family members and locals staged a protest by placing the deceased body in the area. The protest, which caused temporary traffic disruptions, was organised to demand immediate government intervention.

SP took cheating in exams as birthright, plunged youth into identity crisis: Yogi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Varanasi

Taking an apparent swipe at the opposition Samajwadi Party, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said those who described copying during board exams as a birthright had pushed the state's youth into an identity crisis.

Speaking after launching the Chief Minister Teachers' Cashless Medical Scheme in Varanasi, Adityanath said cheating was prevalent during the previous Samajwadi Party government, and examination centres in Ballia, Ghazipur, Azamgarh and Mau districts had become hubs for organised malpractice.

"Earlier, candidates from Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and other states used to register for the Uttar Pradesh Board examinations. Their examination centres were not allotted in Varanasi, Lucknow, Gautam Buddh Nagar or Gorakhpur, but in Ballia, Ghazipur, Azamgarh and Mau. We wondered if these districts had become exceptionally advanced in education. We realised something was wrong, launched a campaign, and shut down all the cheating syndicates and their centres," he said. The chief minister said investigations revealed that candidates would hand over contracts to cheating rackets instead of appearing for the examinations themselves.

"The candidate who filled out the examination form would not even come to take the test. The cheating mafia took care of everything, and the pass certificate would eventually reach the candidate's home," he claimed. Without naming anyone, Adityanath said, "There was a leader in Uttar Pradesh who had said that copying is our birthright.

If cheating itself is considered a birthright, what can one say?" The remark is widely seen as a reference to the late Samajwadi Party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav, who had strongly opposed the anti-copying ordinance introduced by the BJP government led by Kalyan Singh in 1992 and withdrew it after he became chief minister in 1993. Adityanath said the culture of organised cheating had created an identity crisis for the youth of Uttar Pradesh. "We must remember that no one has the right to play with the future of the country and its unity and integrity," he said.

The chief minister said there was a time when educators from Uttar Pradesh were invited to teach in other states, but later, "people pursuing their selfish interests completely ruined" the state's education system.

Invoking Acharya Chanakya, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan as role models, Adityanath said a nation guided by teachers like Chanakya could never become weak or vulnerable to external forces.

Adityanath defends Ram temple trust; says Cong, SP trying to malign Ayodhya, Lord Ram's legacy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Chitrakoot

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said the SIT probing the alleged Ram temple donation theft found evidence against only eight out of the nearly 150 people engaged in counting offerings, and the entire temple Trust cannot be defamed for the wrongdoing of a "handful" of individuals.

He hit out at the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, alleging they were trying to malign Ayodhya and insult the legacy of Lord Ram over the case.

Defending the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, Adityanath noted that the state government ordered the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe at the recommendation of the Trust.

Addressing a gathering after dedicating projects worth over `950 crore to the public in the holy town Chitrakoot, where Lord Ram stayed during his exile, Adityanath said the opposition parties had suddenly become active after the case surfaced because they had found "an issue" to target Ayodhya.

"You must have heard the recent reports. Congress and the Samajwadi Party suddenly became active. These are parties that have historically criticised Ayodhya, and they found an issue to exploit," he said.

The chief minister said the Trust itself informed the government that it had received inputs about alleged theft during the counting of donations and requested the constitution of a high-level SIT.

"We accepted the Trust's recommendation and constituted a high-level SIT. The investigation was conducted, and the evidence showed that only six people were found stealing.

"In addition, two other people were found to be part of the conspiracy, making a total of eight individuals. The SIT submitted its recommendations to the Trust, following which the Trust lodged a First Information Report (FIR), and action was taken."

He said around 150 people are engaged in counting offerings at the temple and the alleged wrongdoing involved only a handful of individuals.

Questioning the opposition's criticism, Adityanath said, "When action has been taken against the accused, what is the justification for defaming the entire Trust, questioning Ayodhya and insulting the legacy of Lord Ram? It appears the Congress and the Samajwadi Party have taken a contract to attack India's faith."

"Every devotee of Lord Ram and every citizen who respects India's faith must remain alert to this," he said.

The CM also targeted the Congress over its stand in the Ram Setu case.

KMC LANGUAGE UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION

Take Indian languages to global platform: Guv

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel urged students of Khwaja Moinuddin ChishKMC Language University to take Indian languages to the global platform. Addressing the students at the university's eleventh Convocation on Wednesday, she advised them to work in such a manner that their success is not merely personal but becomes the pride of society and the country.

Governor Patel said folk languages were not languages alone. "They are the heartbeats of the society and carry the fragrance of the culture and history of our country." She added that a society that respects its folk languages makes its place in the world with confidence.

Governor Patel said that India was moving ahead and the world was looking at it with respect not only because of its economy but also its culture.

"India's identity stands not only as an ancient civilisation but as a place of living knowledge and tradition. Our sages have not only collected knowledge but made it the medium of people's welfare," she said.

The governor noted that India's identity is a balance between tradition and technique. "Today artificial intelligence has become the medium of change and is presenting new scope in the translation of language, digital dictionaries and research. If we connect Indian languages with AI, education would become more inclusive. The diversity of languages is our biggest power and the world is getting attracted to our languages," she said.

Governor Patel pointed out that everyone knows that India has the biggest collection of ancient manuscripts. "Many of the manuscripts were destroyed in the adverse circumstances of history and whatever manuscripts are left are an invaluable heritage of knowledge," she said. The governor said nobody cared about these manuscripts until Prime Minister Narendra Modi began work in this direction, and a survey was conducted to document and digitise them. The prime minister also appealed to people to share information about these manuscripts which could be saved for future generations, she added.

She asked the students to take three pledges — to respect the Indian languages, to use knowledge not for self but for the welfare of society and the country, and, lastly, to give priority to morality and sensitivity.

Governor Patel said it was unfortunate that sensitivity was no longer valued and honesty was in question.

"If society were sensitive, then girls would not have been raped. What is happening in society today? In some cases a husband kills his wife, in other cases a wife kills her husband," she said.

She appealed to the students not to follow the dowry system, child marriage, domestic violence and gender disparity.

"Wherever you see injustice, then don't be a mute onlooker but stand to fight against it. Your education will only be useful when you reach out to the last man in the society. Be connected to what is happening around you and make creative use of digital equipment," she said and added that education does not mean earning a livelihood but making life useful and making changes in society.

Bharatiya Janata Party national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi, who delivered the Convocation address, said that AI-driven language translation would improve qualitatively in the coming years and that, within 10 years, real-time translation of languages would be available.

"Technology will hamper the efforts of those people who would use languages as the basis for starting fights," he said. Trivedi said that many languages around the world had evolved from Indian languages and that, in the future, because of technology, Indian languages would shine even more.

Referring to the Convocation ceremony, he said that though 'shiksha' could be availed from anywhere,"diksha' could be procured only in India.

"German philosopher Karl Marx stated that money was the key to happiness while Sigmund Freud talked about physical pleasures as the basis of happiness and a French scholar said that name and fame was the basis of happiness. However, India taught the world that one can be happy with minimal requirements," he said, adding that the education of character was only available in India.

LDA to GIS tag all development works

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) has implemented a GIS tagging system to bring greater transparency to development works.

Under this system, complete records of development projects undertaken through infrastructure funds and other schemes will be available at the click of a button. This will help eliminate the possibility of duplicate tenders and make the entire process more transparent. On the instructions of LDA Vice Chairman Prathmesh Kumar, the Project Monitoring Cell (PMC) is developing a dedicated module on the GIS portal, and around 80 per cent of the work has already been completed.

The LDA vice chairman pointed out that in the past, there have been instances where both the municipal corporation and the LDA issued separate tenders for the same project.

Once the new GIS portal becomes fully operational, such discrepancies will be prevented as details of every project will be available on a digital platform.

As part of this initiative, all development work is being GIS-tagged on the portal. The system will record when a project started, its expected completion date, the agency responsible for executing it and the estimated cost.

In addition, complete information about development projects underway across all city zones will be available online. Kumar stated that the new arrangement will improve transparency in development works and strengthen coordination among departments.

It will also effectively prevent situations where multiple departments issue separate tenders for the same project, he added.

He informed that GIS tagging has already been completed for all development works carried out through infrastructure funds during the financial year 2025-26. Data related to other projects is now being uploaded to the module.

The GIS portal module will provide complete information on any development project with a single click.

Different colour codes are being used for GIS tagging. By selecting the colour code for a specific year, users can instantly access all relevant project data. This will also make monitoring and supervision of development works much easier.

Subsidy scheme accelerates EV adoption in UP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Uttar Pradesh government's Electric Vehicle Manufacturing and Mobility Policy-2022 is delivering significant results across the state. According to data from the Transport Department, public interest in electric vehicles (EVs) is steadily growing across all districts of the state under the EV Subsidy Scheme.

Lucknow has recorded the highest number of applications for the scheme, followed by Noida, Agra, Ghaziabad and Varanasi.

According to the Transport Department, the Transport Nagar RTO in Lucknow has received the highest number of applications (12,520). It is followed by Agra with 10,752 applications, Gautam Buddha Nagar (Noida) with 6,088 applications, Ghaziabad (5,556), Varanasi (4,059), Kanpur Nagar (3,895), Lucknow Metropolitan ARTO (3,839), Saharanpur (3,768), Gorakhpur (3,204) and Prayagraj (3,110).

The popularity of electric vehicles is also increasing rapidly in smaller districts of Uttar Pradesh. Under the EV Subsidy Scheme, Mau has received 817 applications, Ghazipur 750, Kushinagar 547, Unnao 387, Sant Kabir Nagar 101, Maharajganj 170, and Siddharthnagar 74.

These figures indicate that confidence in electric vehicles is growing not only in major urban centres but also across smaller districts of the state.

The scheme is providing direct financial benefits to vehicle owners. Buyers of electric two-wheelers receive a state subsidy of ₹5,000. In addition, they are granted a 100 per cent exemption on road tax and registration charges. Relief on RC and HSRP fees further enables buyers to save nearly ₹18,000 on the purchase of an electric two-wheeler.

Transport Minister Dayashankar Singh said, "A subsidy of up to ₹20 lakh is being provided on non-government electric buses, up to ₹1 lakh on four-wheel electric vehicles, and up to ₹5,000 on electric two-wheelers."

He urged people to make the most of the scheme, adding that greater adoption of EVs would help achieve the goal of zero emissions and contribute to a cleaner environment. According to the Transport Department, consumers benefit from electric vehicles not only at the time of purchase but also during their operation.

Since EVs have significantly lower per-kilometre operating costs than petrol and diesel vehicles, daily commuters are saving thousands of rupees every year.

Donation 'theft' has tarnished India's image: AKY

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday said the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram Janmabhoomi temple has 'angered' the followers of Sanatan Dharma worldwide, particularly those who made the contributions, and accused the Bharatiya Janata Party of tarnishing India's image abroad.

The SP chief claimed that the news of the embezzlement has spread across the world. "The news of theft of offerings, donations and contributions from the Ayodhya temple has spread across the world.

Followers of Sanatan Dharma living in different countries are ashamed because of the disrepute caused by the BJP and its associates. They are also hurt because many of them had donated to the temple or personally offered contributions," the SP chief said in a post on X. Akhilesh Yadav claimed the country was suffering a loss of reputation because of the alleged actions of the "BJP's irreligious elements".

Yadav also claimed that investor confidence was being affected by the controversy. "Investors across the world are withdrawing because they feel that if a government cannot safeguard even donations made to its own deity, how can it protect their investments tomorrow? The BJP government has completely lost its religious, cultural, political and economic credibility," he said.

In a separate post on X, Yadav rejected allegations levelled against him by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey, who had linked him to Ramshankar alias Tinnu Yadav, an accused in the alleged temple donation theft case.

Describing the allegations as "false", Akhilesh Yadav said the BJP had made a mistake by relying on people whose "personal record has historically been discredited". "The BJP committed a mistake by getting false allegations made through people whose personal record has historically been infamous and whose deeply corrupt social and political image is such that even leaders of their own party do not want them around," he said.

He further alleged that such individuals were being used merely as 'loudspeakers' to spread lies. "They have neither their own voice nor their own ideas. They are merely instruments in the hands of others. They have no personal credibility," Akhilesh Yadav said.

SIT names Avinash Shukla as prime accused in Ayodhya Ram Temple donation case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Ayodhya

A preliminary SIT report has identified Avinash Shukla as the prime accused in the alleged theft of devotees' offerings at the Ram Temple here, linking him to a suspected 40-day racket involving nearly 70 instances of pilferage from the donation-counting system, sources said on Wednesday.

The interim findings of the three-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) were discussed during a meeting of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust on Monday, sources associated with the temple said.

According to the preliminary report, Shukla, who was engaged to count devotees' cash offerings at the temple, has been named accused No. 1 after investigators found what they described as the strongest evidence trail against him.

The report said the alleged operation revolved around Shukla, helping investigators identify five other accused and reconstruct the suspected modus operandi inside the temple's counting room. The nine-page report, submitted to Uttar Pradesh Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Sanjay Prasad on June 23, has described the 30-year-old as the focal point of the investigation, sources said. The SIT has, prima facie, identified nearly 70 instances of alleged theft from the temple's counting room over a span of around 40 days, they added. According to sources, repeated examination of CCTV camera footage allegedly showed Shukla removing and concealing bundles of donation cash and loose currency notes during counting operations on multiple occasions.

Investigators are said to have relied extensively on the footage to trace the movement of money and identify the alleged roles of other participants.

The report said the evidence against Shukla was corroborated by CCTV camera footage, recovery records, bank account analysis and witness statements, making him the first among six accused whose prima facie involvement has been established, sources said.

The footage also allegedly showed Anukalp Mishra, Lavkush Mishra and Karunesh Pandey assisting Shukla in concealing and removing donation money, while Manish Kumar Yadav was allegedly coordinating with him inside the counting room, according to the sources. Separate footage provided by representatives of the temple trust allegedly showed Rama Shankar Mishra handling and concealing cash bundles, they added. Based on the material examined so far, the SIT has concluded that the prima facie involvement of all six accused stands established, sources said. The probe extended beyond the CCTV footage. During searches conducted by the Ayodhya police, investigators recovered ₹20.39 lakh in cash, $1,121, gold and silver ornaments, other valuables and an SUV from Shukla's possession — the largest recovery from any accused arrested in the case, according to the report.

Investigators have also found cash deposits and bank transactions allegedly disproportionate to Shukla's known income. The report noted that personnel hired by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust for counting donations receive a monthly take-home salary of a little over ₹15,000 after deductions, whereas Shukla's banking activity prior to his arrest was substantially higher than his known earnings.

बैंक ऑफ इण्डिया Bank of India BOI
Zonal Office: "Star House" Vibhuti Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226010, Ph. 0522-2721512
PUBLIC AUCTION NOTICE

NOTICE FOR PUBLIC AUCTION OF PLEDGED GOLD JEWELLERY/ ORNAMENTS / COINS

It is hereby brought to the notice of the following gold loan borrowers, their legal heirs, person engaged in business of gold jewellery/ornaments/coins and general public that inspite of repeated reminders/notices by the Bank. The following borrowers are not repaying their dues to the Bank. Notice is hereby published that if they fail to deposit all their dues in their respective gold loan accounts (including up-to-date interest and all cost charges/expenses) by **23.07.2026 UPTO 4:00 P.M.**, then from **01:00 P.M. of 24.07.2026**, their pledged gold jewellery/ornaments/coins will be put up for public auction in the respective Branch premises. For this, Bank shall not be held responsible for any inconvenience or damage caused to the concerned borrowers and no allegations or representations will be entertained from any borrowers in this regards. Persons interested to take part in the bidding should deposit Rs. 500/- (Rupees Five Hundred Only) with the Branch Manager before the scheduled time/date towards earnest money **(on or before 12:00 Noon 24.07.2026)**. The highhest/ successful bidder shall deposit 25% of the amount of bid/ purchase money on the same day of the auction. The balance 75% of the bid/purchase money shall be payable within 48 hrs, failing which the amount deposited with the bank will be forfeited. Bank reserves the right to change the date, time or place of the above scheduled auction or cancel the same without assigning any reason thereon.

DATE & TIME OF PUBLIC AUCTION 24.07.2026,1:00P.M. onwards
AUCTION Place: Bank of India, Following Branches
Note: 3% GST will be Applicable on the purchase of Gold.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrowers Name /Address/Account No.	Gross Weight of the Gold	Branch Address
Branch: Alambagh	**Sr. Branch Manager: Vivek Chaudhary, Mo. 99701655747**		
1	**Dileep Gupta,** 545 K024NK Narpat Kheda Para, Near Ganga Devi School Manak Nagar, Lucknow-226011 **A/c No. 683228110000183**	32.98 Gram	**Bank Of India,** Alambagh Branch, Shyam Plaza 47 C Sringar Nagar, Nr Avadh Hospital, Alambagh, Lucknow-226005
Branch: Tiwariganj	**Branch Manager: Aman Singh, Mo. 9169147260**		
2	**Dharmendra Yadav** S/o Mr Sri Pal Yadav, 692, Sector-16, Indira Nagar, Lucknow **A/c No. 754977610000056**	16.00 Gram	**Bank Of India,** Tiwariganjh Branch, Vill & Post Tiwariganj (Chinhat) Lucknow-227105

Date : 09.07.2026 **Place : Lucknow** **Authorised Officer, Bank of India**

The Pioneer
LUCKNOW | THURSDAY | JULY 9, 2026

Yogi govt concerned about teachers: Sachan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kanpur

The district administration organised the launch of the Chief Minister Teacher Cashless Medical Scheme and a DBT distribution programme at the Merchants' Chamber auditorium in Civil Lines on Wednesday.

Uttar Pradesh Khadi and Village Industries Minister Rakesh Sachan, who was the chief guest, stated that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's government is concerned about teachers. He said, "Recently, the honorarium for instructors and shiksha mitras was increased. Now, an initiative has been taken to benefit basic and secondary teachers through a cashless medical scheme. Previous governments never cared about teachers."

He further stated that when he used to visit government schools earlier, he would find children without uniforms. Still, under the Yogi government, money is transferred to parents' bank accounts to purchase uniforms. Parents are urged to use the funds to purchase uniforms for their children. He said that the 'School Chalo' campaign is underway. Schools are reopening in July, and teachers should make every effort to enrol children who are not attending school. Significant improvements in basic education have been seen under the Yogi government. No government has ever shown such concern before, he added.

The minister listed the achievements of the Yogi government in education.

The guests, MP Ramesh Awasthi, MLAs Neelima Katiyar and Mahesh Trivedi, District Panchayat chief Swapnil Varun, District Magistrate Jitendra Pratap Singh, and Chief Development Officer Abhinav J Jain, distributed symbolic cards to 10 secondary and basic education teachers each. Teacher Rajesh Yadav conducted the proceedings.

AD Basic Shiksha Shivendra Pratap Singh, DIOS Praveen Kumar Tiwari, ADIOS Prashant Kumar Dwivedi, GIC Sanjay Yadav, BSA Hariom Singh, Block Education Officer Deepak Awasthi, Yasmin Rahman, District Coordinator Anirudh Singh, Prabodh Pratap Singh, and others were present at the event.

Protest over offensive post against Sarojini Nagar MLA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

A large number of people from the Pasi community gathered at the Sarojini Nagar police station on Wednesday to protest against an alleged offensive social media post targeting Sarojini Nagar MLA Dr Rajeshwar Singh.

The protesters alleged that a Facebook account operating under the name of a monthly magazine had posted abusive, obscene, and caste-based comments against the MLA. Raising slogans, the community members demanded the immediate arrest of the magazine's editor and operator. Former district panchayat member Satguru Sharan Rawat, who submitted the complaint to the police, stated that the post was a deliberate attempt to defame the MLA and incite communal disharmony.

Rawat highlighted The MLA's significant contributions to the Pasi community, including the installation of a grand statue of Maharani Uda Devi Pasi at the Vrindavan crossing and a donation of Rs 10 lakh for a library at the Bijli Pasi Fort complex. Other community leaders, including councillor Ram Naresh Rawat and councillor Draupadi Manoj Rawat, praised Dr Singh for his inclusive work.

They pointed out his efforts in distributing laptops and tablets to underprivileged children, providing daily meals to thousands of needy persons and running sewing centres to empower women. The protest saw a significant turnout of community members, women, and workers, including Dilip Rawat, Badri Prasad Rawat, Kishan Chandra Rawat, and Sarwan Rawat, among others. They asserted that any attempt to insult the MLA or spread caste-based hatred would not be tolerated. Sarojini Nagar Inspector-in-Charge Rajdev Ram Prajapati confirmed that a formal case has been registered in response to the complaint.

Bus driver, helper die in mishap

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kanpur

A sleeper bus driver and a helper were killed when their vehicle collided with a stationary truck on the Agra-Kanpur National Highway in Etawah on Wednesday morning.

As many as 27 passengers were also injured in the mishap.

The sleeper bus was travelling from Varanasi to Delhi. The accident near the ITI intersection was so severe that the bus driver and helper died on the spot.

On being informed, police and rescue teams arrived at the spot as soon as they received information. The injured were sent to the district hospital by ambulance.

According to reports, the bus had left Varanasi for Delhi around 7 pm on Monday. A total of 42 passengers were on board. Driver Prem (35) of Baghpat and helper Deepak (21) died in the accident.

CSAUA&T convocation on July 10

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kanpur

The 28th convocation of Chandrashekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology (CSAUA&T), Kanpur, will be held on July 10.

Ambassador Indramani Pandey, Secretary General of BIMSTEC, will be the chief guest. University's Chancellor and Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel will preside over the ceremony.

In a press conference, Vice-Chancellor Dr Sanjeev Gupta stated that a total of 372 students will be awarded various degrees.

He stated that 33 students will be awarded various medals for outstanding academic performance.

Registrar Renu Singh announced that nine students will be honoured with the Chancellor's Gold Medal, nine with the University Silver Medal, nine with the University Bronze Medal, and six will receive sponsored Gold Medals.

Finance Controller Sanjay Rai, along with all deans, directors, and department heads, was present at the press conference.

IRITM DG visits MRCF

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

The Director-General of the Indian Railway Institute of Transportation and Management (IRITM) in Lucknow, Prakash Ranjan Thakur, visited the Modern Rail Coach Factory (MRCF) in Rae Bareli on Wednesday.

IRITM Professor (Finance) Ashtanand Pathak accompanied him. During the visit, Thakur met MRCF General Manager Raman Krishnan and senior officials and obtained detailed information regarding coach production, manufacturing processes and production capacity.

Prakash Ranjan Thakur, a 1990 batch officer of the Indian Railway Traffic Service, also addressed senior officials from all departments of MRCF. He shared his more than three decades of administrative and managerial experience, highlighting the fundamentals of workplace success. He urged officials to develop an excellent work culture by embracing a positive attitude, effective leadership, team spirit, timely decisions, a spirit of continuous learning, and innovation. During his visit, he inspected the Shell Shop, Bogie Shop, Wheel Shop and Furnishing Shop. He observed the efficiency of state-of-the-art machinery and received detailed information from the employees about their operation and production processes.

He also inspected the Vande Bharat train rake manufactured at MRCF. He then toured MRCF's sports facilities and green and well-maintained residential colony.

Praising the cleanliness, greenery and modern facilities of the factory complex and colony, he said that MRCF was a beautiful, modern, and excellent coach manufacturing unit of Indian Railways.

Labourer killed in accident at Dubagga

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

A labourer was killed in a road accident in Dubagga on Tuesday evening.

The victim was identified as Shravan Kumar, who was riding his motorcycle when the speeding car hit him around 7:30 pm on the Jehta Road, near the MC Saxena College. Shravan Kumar, a native of Sikrori village under Atrauli police station of Hardoi, lived in Lucknow with his family and worked as a labourer to make ends meet. Shravan was riding his Splendour Plus motorcycle when a Honda City car suddenly collided with him. Eyewitnesses reported that the car was being driven negligently and recklessly, leaving the motorcyclist no chance to avoid the high-impact crash.

The collision left Shravan critically injured on the road. Passersby managed to secure an ambulance to transport the injured man to a nearby hospital. However, Shravan succumbed to his injuries while in the ambulance before reaching the hospital. The victim's father, Rameshwar, filed a complaint with the police.

BJP to approach people with development agenda: Chaudhary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Sonbhadra

Bharatiya Janata Party's Uttar Pradesh unit president and Union Minister of State for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary, said the party would go to the people with its agenda of development.

Speaking at a press conference held at the Circuit House on Tuesday, Chaudhary affirmed that the public stood with the politics of development, good governance, and national interest, adding that the BJP government was continuously working for the welfare of people with low incomes, farmers, youth and women.

He said the BJP's objective was to ensure that the benefits of Central and state government schemes reached the person standing at the very end of the queue.

Chaudhary said public expectations were being met through better coordination between the organisation and the government.

He pointed out that the BJP was a party of workers, and that the organisation itself was its greatest strength. He added that the hard work and dedication of booth-level workers drove the BJP's expansion.

On the question of internal differences and friction, he remarked that the BJP was a large family and that minor misunderstandings were natural in such families.

He said that every issue was resolved in the party through dialogue and a robust organisational structure. Wherever misunderstandings arise, they will be cleared up, and all workers will collaborate in the interest of the organisation, the UP BJP chief added.

Responsibilities within the party are assigned based on a worker's diligence, activity level, and commitment to the organisation, he said, adding that ongoing efforts were underway to strengthen the organisation further.

Responding to a question about the Ram Mandir donation theft case, the UP BJP chief said a Special Investigation Team was investigating the matter.

"Whoever is found guilty in the investigation will not be spared at any cost," he said, adding that law was taking its course, and strict action against the guilty would be ensured.

No India role in Najjar killing: Canada

Canadian authorities have charged four Indians in connection with the Nijjar killing, though Moreland declined to comment on the details of that parallel case.

Bilateral relations began to stabilise after Mark Carney took over as Liberal Party leader and Prime Minister in March 2025 following Trudeau's departure. Carney adopted a more pragmatic approach, separating security concerns from broader bilateral engagement.

Carney visited India in March this year for a standalone bilateral summit, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the G7 summit in Canada last year, helping restore normalcy in ties. The RCMP statement is being seen in New Delhi as a long-awaited course correction that validates India's consistent position on the issue. Officials had maintained that the Nijjar case was being exploited by elements hostile to India and that criminal gangs, not state actors, were responsible.

US-Iran ceasefire crumbles, as Trump...

The US said the license was revoked in retaliation for what it said were Tehran's attacks on ships in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran hit back with strikes on Bahrain and Kuwait.

US President Donald Trump said later that the interim agreement with Iran was "over" but he would allow talks to continue. That raised concerns that the wider conflict in the Middle East could resume — and oil prices shot up.

"For me, I think it's over," Trump responded when asked about the status of ceasefire. He added that US representatives can continue negotiations but he cast doubt on the outcome. "They can talk, but I think they're wasting their time," he said.

The crossfire came during the dayslong funeral for Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed on February 28 in the war's first moments. The funeral, which ends Thursday, was supposed to be a period of lower tensions -- though mourners have repeatedly called for the killings of Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The US military's Central Command said American forces launched strikes "to impose heavy costs for targeting and attacking commercial shipping crewed by innocent civilians in an international waterway."

It said it hit Iranian targets including air defense systems, radars and over 60 small boats used by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Those boats have been key to threatening ships in the strait, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil and natural gas passed before the war. Iran's ability to bring shipping in the waterway to a near halt during the war proved its greatest strategic advantage as rising prices for energy supplies, fertilizer and food put pressure on the US to make a deal. On Wednesday, the price of Brent crude, the international standard, spiked over 5 per cent after Trump's comments. Iranian state media reported explosions in several locations, including in Bandar Mahshahr, where a Guard member was killed. It also reported attacks on Bushehr, home to Iran's nuclear power plant complex.

On Wednesday morning, both Bahrain, home to the US Navy's 5th Fleet, and Kuwait, home to US Army forces, sounded missile alerts. The Guard issued a statement acknowledging targeting US military installations in both countries.

A similar spate of Iranian attacks on shipping and US retaliatory strikes occurred late last month -- which similarly drew Iranian attacks on Bahrain and Kuwait. Wednesday's strikes came as Trump was in Turkey for a summit of the NATO military alliance.

Before the strikes, the US revoked a license that authorized the sale of Iranian oil as part of the interim deal. That paused US sanctions and allowed Iran to conduct oil sales openly for US dollars for the first time in years. Iran long had been suspected of selling sanctioned crude at below-market prices to China.

The decision came after the strikes on shipping. One tanker was off the coast of Oman when it was hit and caught fire, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. Iranian state television said the tanker came under attack after ignoring warnings but did not directly claim the assault.

Majed al-Ansari, a spokesperson for the Qatari Foreign Ministry, said the tanker was carrying Qatari natural gas and called the strike an "unacceptable attack" on international navigation and global energy security. He said Qatar, which has been a key mediator alongside Pakistan in the talks, holds Iran "fully legally responsible."

Iran and the United States agreed as part of the interim deal to allow ships to pass through the strait without paying charges for 60 days. But Tehran has insisted it must control the vessels' routes and vowed to later charge fees for passage. That would upend decades of practice in the waterway. The ships attacked Tuesday all appeared to be using a route close to Oman's shore, rather than one ordered by Tehran.

The US and many Gulf Arab states say they will not agree to Iran charging for passage through the strait.

India to help restore Prambanan temple

India's involvement builds on its proven expertise in heritage restoration across Southeast Asia, including earlier documentation of the Borobudur Temple Compounds by the ASI.

Upon arrival at the Prambanan complex, located approximately 17 kilometres northeast of Yogyakarta city, Modi was accorded a traditional welcome. Accompanied by President Prabowo, he took a detailed tour of the ancient site, received a briefing on its history through a ceremonial panel titled 'Indonesia-India Collaborative Cultural Heritage Conservation for Prambanan Temple Compound', and unveiled a plaque commemorating the launch of the project.

"President Prabowo Subianto and I inaugurated the UNESCO World Heritage Prambanan Temple Compound Restoration and Conservation Project," Modi posted on X. "The magnificent Prambanan Temple stands as a timeless symbol of our cultural and spiritual links. Preserving such heritage is about safeguarding the traditions that continue to inspire generations."

Modi expressed India's privilege in partnering with Indonesia. "As nations with deep cultural connections, India and Indonesia will continue to work together to celebrate our shared past while building an even stronger future," he said.

In his address at the temple site, with the towering spires forming a majestic backdrop, Modi called the visit a "Chaitanyapurn chhann" — a moment filled with divinity. "In conversations I hear, the winds here carry a scent of culture. That scent which we feel every moment on the soil of India. This scent, this cultural heritage, connects us," he remarked emotionally.

He thanked the people of Indonesia and its past rulers for preserving the heritage with "devotional faith" for over 1,200 years. Modi offered prayers at the temple for stronger bilateral friendship, the welfare of citizens of both countries, and rapid development of the two nations. The warmth between the leaders was palpable, seen in firm handshakes, waving to the gathering, and a concluding warm hug.

The Prambanan Temple, Indonesia's largest Hindu temple, features a sophisticated rectangular layout with outer, middle, and inner courtyards divided into higher and lower terraces. The higher terrace houses the principal shrines dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma, flanked by smaller temples of their animal vehicles. Intricate Ramayana reliefs adorn the inner walls of the Shiva temple, while statues of Lord Shiva, Goddess Durga, and Lord Ganesha underscore its Hindu roots.

Modi highlighted the site's significance: "In Southeast Asia, this is the second-largest identity of our heritage. For centuries, people have offered worship at this temple, and today I, too, had the fortune to visit this temple and offer prayers." Experts see the high-profile visit and joint project as a strategic move by New Delhi to elevate cultural diplomacy in its Act East policy framework. With strong people-to-people and historical linkages, the conservation effort is expected to boost tourism, particularly from India, and deepen bilateral cooperation in heritage preservation.

India has reiterated that its support reflects an "enduring commitment to preserving shared civilisational heritage." As work begins, the project promises not only physical restoration of the magnificent spires and sculptures but also the strengthening of a civilisational partnership that continues to inspire both nations in the 21st century.

Ram temple trust tightens purse strings

The trust says this change, which takes effect immediately for all SBI accounts, is part of wider efforts to restore public trust.

Krishna Mohan, who leads the committee, is a 73-year-old retired Indian Forest Service officer from Maharashtra. He comes from Chandrapur village in Hardoi district, Uttar Pradesh, and has been involved with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the RSS. Known as a quiet organiser, Mohan was recently made a trustee by unanimous decision. He is now in charge of daily administration until a permanent general secretary is chosen.

Chandan Rai, serving on the committee, brings financial expertise. While Afale, an IIT-trained engineer who has played a key role in the temple's construction from the start, helps ensure financial decisions align with the needs of construction and maintenance of the temple. The cost of the temple has exceeded several thousand crores, since its inception, with the majority allocated to construction, capital works and fixed deposits. While the SIT continues its detailed re-audit of the past five years' accounts, including construction expenditure and in-kind donations such as jewellery, the new committee is presented as a step toward greater transparency and accountability.

Mahadev Book kingpin held in Oman

Chandrakar was briefly detained in the UAE in October 2024 after an Interpol Red Notice and placed under house arrest. Although an extradition request was made, it was unsuccessful. He escaped again but was caught recently in Oman while attempting to enter the country using a fake passport.

Chandrakar, who ran a chain of juice shops in Bhilai, built Mahadev Online Book with his associate Upaal in 2018-19, turning it into one of India's biggest illegal online betting networks in a short time before moving to Dubai. The platform allowed bets on sports like cricket, football, tennis, badminton, poker, card games, and even election results, all of which break Indian gambling laws.

From Dubai, they operated mainly through a franchise model, opening branches in Indian cities under a 70-30 profit split. Users joined, betting IDs were created, and money was moved through fake bank accounts and *hawala* channels. At its peak, the operation reportedly generated ₹200-240 crore per day. The ED estimates the total proceeds of crime at about ₹6,000 crore. Chandrakar and Uppal reportedly lived in luxury in the UAE, renting several villas for their staff. A lavish wedding in the UAE, reportedly costing crores in cash, also drew attention. The Mahadev case became a national scandal because of alleged links to top politicians and bureaucrats in Chhattisgarh.

Uppal, is still missing. He was held in Dubai for a short time in December 2023 following an Interpol Red Notice before being released soon after. In November 2025, UAE authorities informed Indian agencies that Uppal had left the country. Investigators think he went to Vanuatu, a country that does not have an extradition treaty with India. Reports say he may have Vanuatu citizenship or a passport. In November 2025, the Supreme Court told the ED to find and secure him, stating that kingpins cannot treat courts and investigating agencies as "mere instruments to play around with."

LeT commander killed in J&K

Early Wednesday morning, the security forces tracked down the hiding LeT terrorist and neutralised him while searches were going on to track down his accomplice. The Army's specialised counter-insurgency unit, Victor Force, had deployed additional personnel to seal all possible escape routes through the thick orchard foliage, besides lighting up the area.

"You Can Run But You Can't Hide ! One Lashkar terrorist neutralised by SOG Shopian, in a Jt Op, along with RR and CRPF," the Jammu and Kashmir Police said in a post on X.

The slain terrorist has been identified by the Srinagar-based Chinar Corps as Zakir Ahmad Ganie, a self-styled commander of the proscribed LeT outfit. Ganie (26), a resident of Motalhama area of the neighbouring Kulgam district, had on September 27, 2023 left his residence for Dialgam to undertake shuttering work but failed to return home, the officials said. They said after an unsuccessful search by his family members, a missing report was lodged at Kulgam police station on October 3, 2023.

Officials claim, Ganie subsequently joined The Resistance Front (TRF) terror outfit, an offshoot of the LeT. They said he has been implicated in an FIR registered at Kulgam police station under various sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Meanwhile, the Anantnag police apprehended three Over Ground Workers (OGWs) through the Facial Recognition System on Wednesday. According to a police spokesman, the Facial Recognition System (FRS) installed by Anantnag Police generated timely alerts regarding three suspicious individuals while they were passing through the Sarbal area, who were subsequently arrested.

Corbett's wildlife pays the price for growing...

Loud music, high-intensity lighting and overnight vehicular movement are also said to be disturbing wildlife in the surrounding forest areas.

Wildlife experts believe it is essential to maintain a balance between tourism and environmental conservation in ecologically sensitive areas like Corbett. They warn that if regulations are not enforced strictly, the long-term impact could affect both wildlife conservation and the region's natural identity. Corbett director Saket Badola said that people visiting the region solely for partying and obscene activities are not in keeping with the true spirit of tourism in Corbett. He said it is the responsibility of resort owners and operators not to permit such unethical activities and to ensure that tourism remains responsible and respectful. He also stated that the Corbett administration has been taking consistent action against resorts violating norms related to late-night DJ systems and high-intensity lighting.

BJP hails PM's Indonesia visit as strategic breakthrough

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The BJP on Wednesday hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Indonesia as a "major strategic breakthrough" after the two countries agreed to jointly develop the strategically located Sabang Port. The party also accused previous Congress Governments of failing to leverage India's geographical advantage in the Indo-Pacific.

India and Indonesia on Tuesday agreed to jointly develop the strategically located Sabang Port, which overlooks the Strait of Malacca and is about 160 kilometres away from India's Great Nicobar Port project.

Reacting to the development, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said the agreement, along with the Great Nicobar Transhipment Port project, will significantly strengthen India's strategic footprint in the Indo-Pacific.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Indonesia has delivered a major strategic breakthrough. India and Indonesia will jointly develop Sabang Port in Aceh, near the Strait of Malacca, one of the world's busiest and most consequential maritime chokepoints," Malviya said in a post on social media.

BJP IT department head Amit Malviya

"Together with Great Nicobar Transhipment Port, this will significantly strengthen India's strategic footprint in Indo-Pacific and create powerful operational synergies across the region," he said.

The BJP leader said the Strait of Malacca carries nearly one-third of global trade and serves as the principal maritime artery for East Asia, including the overwhelming majority of China's energy imports and commercial shipping.

"A credible presence around this sea lane translates into enormous geopolitical and economic leverage," he said. Targeting the Congress, Malviya alleged that despite India's "unmatched geographical advantage" through the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, successive Congress Governments failed to capitalise on the strategic opportunity. "Instead of investing in world-class maritime infrastructure, strengthening India's position around the Malacca Strait and leveraging geography into national power, decades were lost to strategic indecision and neglect," he alleged.

Malviya claimed that under Modi, India is charting a different course now by converting its geographical advantage into strategic power.

"From the Great Nicobar mega transhipment project and the strengthening of the Andaman and Nicobar Command, to SAGAR and now the joint development of Sabang Port with Indonesia, Prime Minister Modi has transformed India's maritime outlook from passive observation to proactive leadership," he said. "For too long, India's greatest strategic advantage lay underutilised. Today, it is being converted into a decisive geopolitical asset," Malviya added. "Geography gave India an advantage. Prime Minister Modi is turning it into a strategic power," Malviya concluded.

ED raids 11 locations connected to ex-SP MLA Deep Narayan

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
New Delhi/Lucknow

On Wednesday, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) searched 11 locations across Uttar Pradesh as part of a money-laundering investigation involving former Samajwadi Party (SP) MLA Deep Narayan Singh Yadav and his associates. According to officials, nine of these places were in Jhansi district, and two were in Lucknow.

The searches, carried out under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, focused on homes and businesses linked to the former legislator, his family, and related entities. Deep Narayan Singh Yadav, also called Deepak Yadav or Deepak Dadda, was the MLA for the Garautha assembly seat in Jhansi from 2007 to 2017 on an SP ticket.

The ED investigation began after an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) was filed, based on a First Information Report (FIR) from the Uttar Pradesh Vigilance Establishment. The vigilance case claims that Yadav had assets beyond his known sources of income, along with 23 other complaints. Early findings by the ED suggest that money from alleged crimes was moved through a network of companies and Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) involved in real estate, construction, and other businesses.

The ED is reviewing financial transactions, beneficial ownership, and the acquisition of assets suspected to be linked to illegal activities. During the searches, the ED seized documents, digital devices, and records related to properties and financial dealings. These materials will be further examined to trace the flow of the alleged illegal funds. Reports indicate that nearly 60 cases have been registered against him, including charges of cheating, forgery, extortion, attempted murder, and dacoity under the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Additional cases have been registered under the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act and the Goondas Act. Earlier, the Uttar Pradesh Police had attached properties worth approximately ₹130 crore in Jhansi district under the Gangsters Act.

The ED investigation is ongoing, and no arrests have been made yet in connection with Wednesday's raids. The agency will continue to investigate the financial trail and any possible links to offences under the PMLA to determine the full extent of the alleged financial misconduct. More information may come out as the investigation continues and documents are reviewed. As of late Wednesday evening, the former MLA had not made any public statement about the raids.

Political observers believe these recent actions will strengthen the fight against corruption and send a strong message that no individual is immune to investigation, regardless of their past political position or social status.

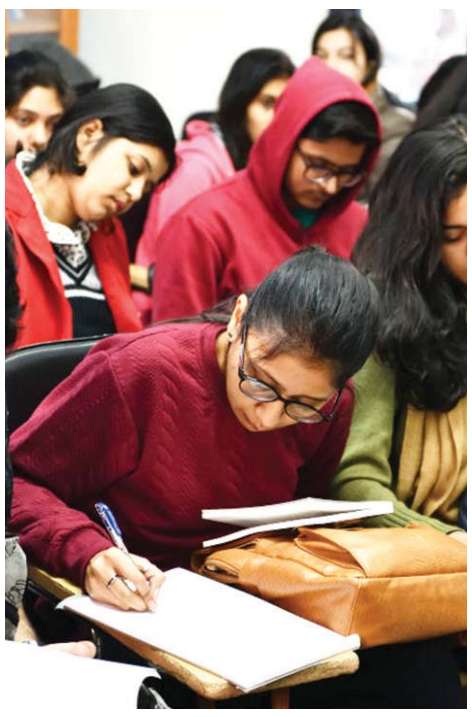
Higher education enrolment rises by over 1 crore since 2014: AISHE report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The enrolment in higher education increased by over 1.08 crore since 2014 with 42 per cent increase in female enrolment, according to central Government's AISHE report.

The Ministry of Education on Wednesday released the Reports of the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for the years 2022-23 and 2023-24.

The AISHE collects detailed information from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the country through a web-based Data Capture Format (DCF). Institutions upload data on



student enrolment, faculty and staff, infrastructure, examination results etc. on the AISHE portal.

AISHE serves as the primary source of official statistics on higher education in India and provides critical insights for policy formulation, planning and monitoring of the sector.

The participation of HEIs in 2022-23 was 56,180 out of 60,380 HEIs registered and 59,533 out of 64,756 registered HEIs in 2023-24. "The enrolment in higher education has been continuously increasing from 3.42 crore in 2014-15 to 4.46 crore in 2022-23 and 4.50 crore in 2023-24 (i.e. 31.5 per cent increase since 2014-15)," the report said.

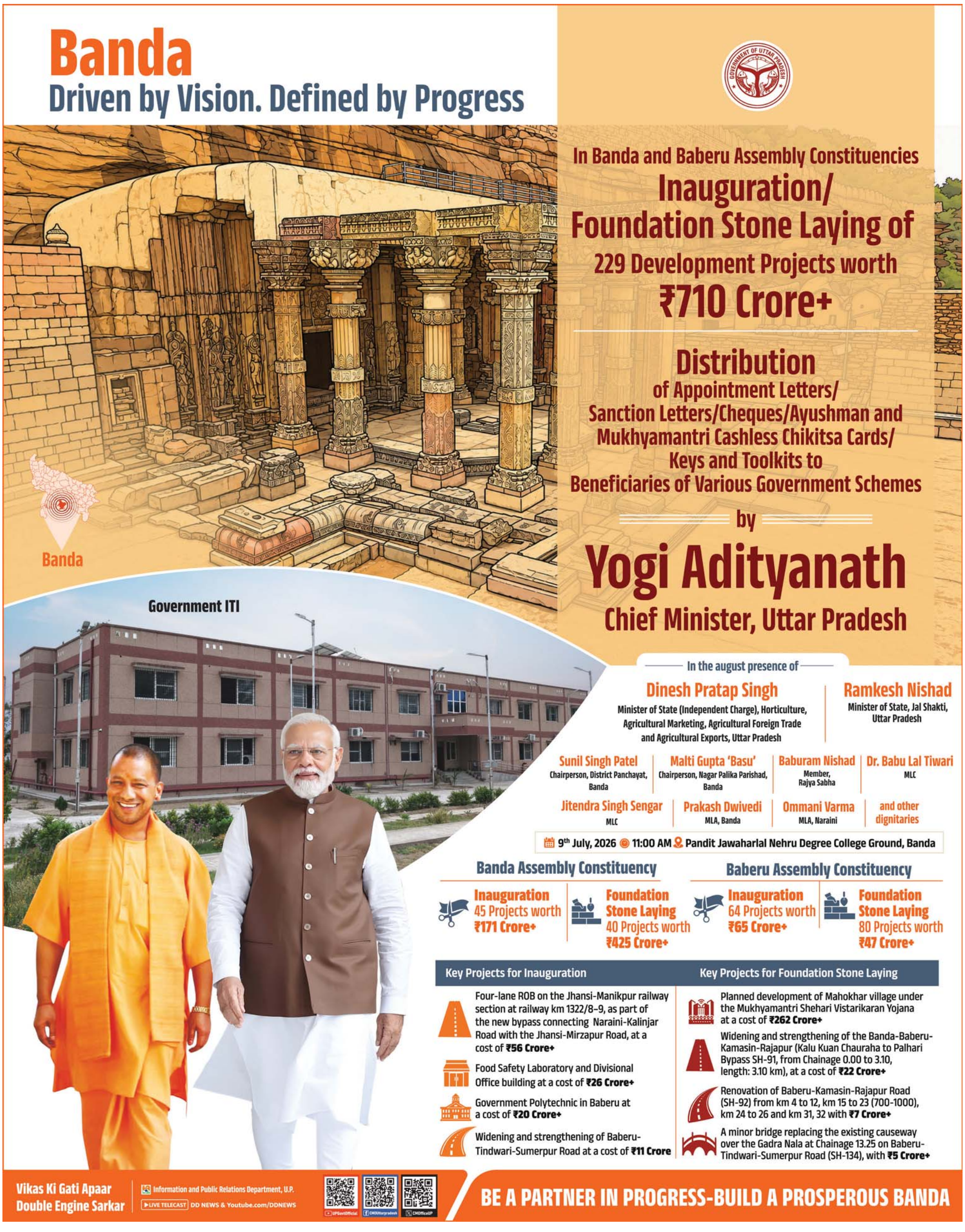
"It is commendable increase in female enrolment in higher education from 1.57 crore in 2014-15 to 2.18 crore in 2022-23 and 2.24 crore in 2023-24 (42.2 pc increase since 2014-15)," it added.

The enrolment of SC students has increased to 69.72 lakh in 2023-24 from 46.07 lakh in 2014-15 (an increase of 51.4 per cent since 2014-15).

"The enrolment of ST students has increased to 28.83 lakh in 2023-24 from 16.41 lakh in 2014-15 (an increase of 75.7 per cent since 2014-15). Similarly, the enrolment of Other Backward Classes (OBC) students has increased to 1.80 crore in 2023-24 from 1.13 crore in 2014-15 (60.2 per cent increase)," it added.

STEM enrolment has risen significantly over the past decade, from 91.5 lakh in 2014-15 to 1.02 crore in 2023-24, reflecting the growing emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education in the country.

"The total number of faculty increased to 17.32 lakh in 2023-24, of which 55.1 pc are male and 44.9 per cent are female. The female faculty strength has increased from 5.69 lakh in 2014-15 to 7.37 lakh in 2022-23 and further to 7.78 lakh in 2023-24," it said.



NIA searches 20 sites across 10 States in terror probe

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
New Delhi

In a major crackdown on online extremism, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday carried out coordinated searches at 20 locations across 10 states and Delhi, uncovering an alleged conspiracy to radicalise vulnerable youth and push for an Islamic state through violent jihad.

According to the NIA, the accused and their associates were allegedly indoctrinating young people nationwide by sharing violent jihadi content and misinformation. The operation also revealed that the accused maintained online contact with foreign handlers to spread jihadi ideology and advance an alleged anti-India conspiracy.

The searches, conducted as part of an ongoing investigation, targeted premises in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat and the national capital. NIA teams seized multiple digital devices, including phones, laptops and storage media, which are now undergoing forensic scrutiny to trace communications, propaganda material and recruitment trails.

The conspiracy, the agency said, aimed at establishing an Islamic state in India by promoting violent jihad against the democratically elected Government. The accused allegedly used the internet to share graphic videos, religious interpretations and false narratives intended to fuel anger and alienation among the youth.

The NIA's preliminary findings indicate that the accused and their associates created online echo chambers, where

young people were gradually exposed to extreme content. Misinformation about Government policies, communal issues and global events was used to portray India as an enemy of Islam, pushing impressionable minds toward radicalisation.

The accused were in regular online contact with handlers based abroad, who allegedly provided ideological guidance, propaganda material and instructions to expand the network inside India. These handlers, linked to ISIS and AQIS ideologies, used encrypted platforms to stay in touch, coordinate activities and direct the dissemination of jihadi content.

The NIA described the module as a case of hybrid terrorism, where technology bridges the gap between local sympathisers and overseas masterminds. By using social media, messaging apps and dark web channels, the network sought to bypass traditional surveillance and reach youth in both urban and semi-urban areas across states.

The nationwide sweep reflects the growing sophistication of terror outfits that have shifted focus from physical training camps to digital indoctrination. The seizure of devices is expected to yield evidence, chat histories, deleted files, financial trails and links to other modules, once forensic experts complete their examination.

Security experts note that online radicalisation poses a challenge because it often occurs without physical meetings. The NIA's operation demonstrates how central agencies are adapting by combining intelligence inputs with swift, multi-state action. While the investigation is still in its early stages, the NIA has said it will pursue every lead to dismantle the network completely. The agency is also examining whether the accused received any material or logistical support from their foreign contacts.

"This case serves as a reminder of the evolving threat landscape. As digital spaces become a battleground for extremist ideologies, proactive policing and public awareness remain strong shields. The NIA's operation is aimed at sending a strong message that India will not allow any group, domestic or foreign-backed, to influence the minds of its youth or challenge its democratic foundations", an official said.

States Focus

BENGALURU'S 2ND AIRPORT TO COME UP IN SOUTH OF CITY: CM

Karnataka Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday said the city's second airport, planned to decongest Kempegowda International Airport, will come up in South Bengaluru. He said officials have been asked to submit a proposal to the Central Government after considering a location where land cost is low, which is technically feasible, and not too hilly. The CM chaired a meeting with Minister for Infrastructure Development MB Patil and top officials regarding the second airport near Bengaluru. "We asked to ensure that no villages are disturbed and villagers should not be displaced," Shivakumar told reporters. (*PTI*)

IAF CHIEF REVIEWS OPERATIONAL PREPAREDNESS IN LADAKH

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh, on Wednesday concluded his six-day visit to forward areas in the Ladakh sector, during which he reviewed the operational preparedness of the IAF units and interacted with troops deployed in high-altitude areas. Air Chief Marshal Singh, accompanied by Sarita Singh who is the president of the Air Force Families Welfare Association, visited the sector from July 3 to July 8, a public relations officer (PRO) said. The IAF chief was received at Air Force Station Leh by Air Vice Marshal Anand Sondhi and other senior officers. (*PTI*)

Online NEET-UG to be spread over at least 6 days from next year

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The NEET-UG medical entrance exam, which is set to be conducted as a computer-based test from next year, will be spread over at least six days across more than 1,000 centres, sources said. National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET)-UG is the largest undergraduate entrance exam in the country, with nearly 25 lakh candidates appearing for the crucial test.

Following a controversy over paper leak and irregularities in the exam, the Centre announced that the exam will be conducted as a computer-based test (CBT) rather than a pen-and-paper-based one. Detailed deliberations have been going on for several years between education and health ministries on whether to conduct the NEET-UG in pen and paper or online mode.

"Just like JEE, which is conducted for admission to engineering colleges, the exam will be spread over at least six days. The exam centres will be selected after scrutiny of their credibility and infrastructure availability," a source said,

adding that a detailed plan is still being firmed up. The National Testing Agency (NTA) conducts NEET every year for admission into medical colleges. A total of 1,08,000 seats are available for the MBSS course.

Of the seats available for the MBBS course, approximately 56,000 are in government hospitals and about 52,000 in private colleges. Admissions to undergraduate courses in Dentistry, Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha also utilise the results of the NEET for admission.

The idea of switching to CBT mode for NEET is not new and has been deliberated several times before.

DRDO successfully tests long-range Pinaka rocket

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted a successful flight test of Pinaka Long Range Guided Rocket (LRGR) at the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur on Wednesday, the defence ministry said.

Giving details, it said the rocket was tested for a user-defined minimum range of 60 kms. Demonstrating all in-flight manoeuvres as planned, the LRGR impacted on the target with textbook precision, exactly following the predicted trajectory. All the deployed range instruments tracked the flight throughout its trajectory.

The Pinaka LRGR rocket is designed by Armament Research and Development Establishment in association with High Energy Materials Research Laboratory, with support from Defence Research and Development Laboratory and Research Centre Imarat.

The flight trial was coordinated by ITR and Proof & Experimental Establishment. The rocket was launched from the in-service Pinaka launcher, demonstrating its versatility and providing launch capability of Pinaka variants of different ranges from the same launcher.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has congratulated the DRDO, the Indian Army and the industry on the successful flight test.

Don't defame Lord Ram: Mamata attacks BJP after street clash

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
Kolkata

Invoking Ram Temple controversy for the first time, former Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said "*Ram ka naam Badnam na karo*" (don't defame Lord Rama).

This even as an angry Trinamool Congress chief (Kalighat faction) lambasted the Bengal BJP Government for trying to gag the Opposition voice by "unleashing its goons on their peaceful rallies."

She said, "Those who looted the donations for Lord Ram are calling others thieves and today attacking our men when they go out in peaceful protest rallies... that too backed by a High Court order... they don't even have any regard for the High Court... we will file a contempt case against them."

Banerjee's outburst came moments after clashes

erupted between the BJP and TMC cadres, who fought pitched battles at noon on Wednesday along the Hajra Road, leaving several persons from both sides injured. The police and the central forces had a difficult time controlling the crowd.

The members of the pro-Mamata TMC group had organised a rally against atrocities on women in Bengal when they got embroiled in a skirmish with members of the BJP who had taken a counter rally along the same route.

Men from both the rallies were seen exchanging fisticuffs a few hundred metres from Banerjee's Kalighat house.

Air India plane tyres burst after near-miss at Mumbai Airport

ASHOKE RAJ
New Delhi

A potentially catastrophic runway incursion was narrowly averted at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport on the night of July 7 after an Air India flight bound for Delhi aborted its takeoff following an urgent instruction from Air Traffic Control (ATC), which alerted the crew that another aircraft was still on the active runway.

According to operational logs and airport sources, Air India flight AI816 (registration VT-ALT), carrying 225 passengers and crew, had begun its takeoff roll from Runway 27 after pushing back from the bay at 2129 hrs. At approximately 2150 hrs, ATC instructed the cockpit crew to "STOP IMMEDIATELY" as the preceding arrival, Air India Express flight IX1547, had not yet vacated the runway.

The flight crew, led by Captain N Vinay Divakar, carried out a high-speed rejected takeoff in accordance with standard safety

Representative image

procedures and safely vacated the runway. Simultaneously, another inbound aircraft, AI699, was instructed to execute a go-around as a precaution.

The aircraft subsequently returned to Stand S2, reaching the bay at 2215 hrs. A runway inspection conducted between 2154 hrs and 2158 hrs found no abnormalities or foreign object debris.

However, a post-incident technical inspection revealed that three tyres on AI816 had burst during the high-speed aborted takeoff due to the extreme braking forces involved. Air India personnel were informed of the tyre damage at around 2220 hrs. No injuries were reported among passengers or crew.

In a statement, Air India confirmed the sequence of events, saying the crew discontinued the takeoff after receiving instructions from ATC and returned the aircraft to the bay for mandatory technical inspections. The airline said alternative travel arrangements were being made for affected passengers and reiterated that passenger safety remains its highest priority.

The aircraft involved was operating the Mumbai-Delhi service, while the arriving aircraft that had not cleared the runway was an Air India Express plane operating from Bagdogra. Initial reports had suggested the flight originated from Kochi, but operational records confirmed Siliguri as its departure point.

The incident is the second reported serious ground safety event involving Air India aircraft within a month. In late June, an Air India aircraft and an IndiGo aircraft reportedly came into close proximity on the ground at Ahmedabad, raising broader concerns over runway and ground movement safety.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the Airports Authority of India (AAI) have initiated a joint investigation into the incident. The probe will examine runway occupancy management, ATC communication protocols, and operational procedures to determine why the arriving aircraft had not vacated the runway before takeoff clearance was issued and whether procedural or workload-related lapses played a role.

The Air India plane, understood to be around 16 years old, has been grounded pending detailed engineering inspections, including examinations of its braking system, landing gear, tyres and associated assemblies. While only the tyre damage has been confirmed publicly, engineers are also assessing the aircraft for any potential brake or engine stress resulting from the rejected takeoff.

All passengers were safely deplaned and are being accommodated on alternative flights.

The incident has once again drawn attention to the operational pressures at one of India's busiest airports and underscores the critical importance of strict runway separation and air traffic management standards. Further details are expected as the official investigation progresses.

Counter fake narratives fiercely: CEC to poll officials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar on Wednesday cautioned poll officials over the rising tide of false narratives on social media, urging them to proactively counter the spread of misinformation.

Addressing the officials, he emphasised that passive monitoring is no longer enough.

He stated that administrative teams must engage swiftly to neutralise fake news before it distorts public perception.

Rajasthan Govt ties up with International Solar Alliance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jaipur

The Rajasthan Government on Wednesday tied up with the International Solar Alliance (ISA) for an action framework to accelerate the State's transition towards clean energy through grid modernisation and solar power integration.

Rajasthan is the first state in the country to enter this partnership, according to a release.

The framework, titled "Advance Clean Energy, Driven Sustainable Development", was signed in the presence of Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma at the chief minister's residence. The agreement was signed by Energy Secretary Arti Dogra and ISA Director General Ashish Khanna.

The framework will help prepare an energy transi-

Representative image

tion plan for 2030-35, focusing on renewable energy expansion, strengthening transmission and distribution infrastructure, grid modernisation, energy storage, energy efficiency, demand management, policy reforms and institutional capacity building, the release said.

The initiative will also promote artificial intelligence-enabled digitalisation in the power sector.

A pilot project based on digital twin technology will be launched in Ajmer DISCOM to improve electricity demand forecasting, network planning, renewable energy integration and the reliability of power supply.

The chief minister said that the partnership would accelerate Rajasthan's transition towards renewable energy and help prepare a comprehensive plan for the expansion, transmission and distribution of solar power, leading to improved electricity supply and better quality power for consumers.

SIT finds proof against 8 in Ram temple donation row: Yogi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

On Wednesday, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the Special Investigation Team (SIT) investigating the alleged theft of donations at the Ram temple had found evidence against eight people out of nearly 150 involved in counting offerings. He added that the actions of a few should not tarnish the reputation of the entire Temple Trust.

Chief Minister accused the Congress and the Samajwadi Party of trying to harm Ayodhya's reputation because of this case.

While defending the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, Adityanath said at an event in Chitrakoot that after the case came to light, opposition parties became active and used it as a chance to criticise Ayodhya.

"You must have heard the recent reports. Congress and the Samajwadi Party suddenly became active. These are parties that have historically criticised Ayodhya, and they found an issue to exploit," he told the gathering in Chitrakoot.

The chief minister said the Trust informed the government that it had received reports of alleged theft during the counting of donations and asked for

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath interacts with school children during his visit to an exhibition stall at Trade Facilitation Centre (TFC) in Varanasi on Wednesday PTI

a high-level SIT to be formed.

"We accepted the Trust's recommendation and set up a high-level SIT. The investigation found evidence against six people directly involved in the theft and two others who were part of the conspiracy. Based on the SIT's recommendations, the Trust filed an FIR, and action was taken," he said.

He pointed out that about 150 people count offerings at the temple, but the alleged wrongdoing was limited to a small group. He urged devotees and citizens to stay alert to such incidents.

Questioning the Opposition's criticism, Yogi Adityanath said, "When action has been taken against the accused, what is the justification for defaming the entire Trust, questioning Ayodhya and insulting the legacy of Lord Ram? It appears the Congress and the Samajwadi Party have taken a contract to attack India's faith."

Woman delivers quadruplets in auto; newborns die after ambulance delay

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

A serious lapse in Madhya Pradesh's emergency healthcare system came under scanner after a 28-year-old woman delivered four premature babies inside an auto-rickshaw in Mandla district when a 108 ambulance allegedly failed to reach her in time. All four newborns died, while the mother survived.

The incident occurred on Tuesday in Naiganwa village, where Rajni Sindram, who was around seven months pregnant, developed severe labour pain. Her family said they immediately called the 108 ambulance service, but the vehicle did not arrive despite repeated requests for help.

With Rajni's condition deteriorating rapidly, the family was left with no choice but to hire an auto-rickshaw and rush her to the Ghutas Primary Health Centre with the assistance of an ASHA worker. After providing initial treatment, doctors referred her to the Bichhiya Community Health Centre for specialised care.

The referral, however, came too late. Before the auto-rickshaw could reach Bichhiya, Rajni delivered four babies one after another inside the vehicle. The accompanying ASHA worker assisted the delivery under extremely difficult circumstances and ensured that the mother reached the hospital safely.

Doctors at the Bichhiya Community Health Centre examined the newborns and declared all four dead.

Bichhiya Block Medical Officer Anoop Kumar Bharatiya said Rajni was approximately 30 weeks pregnant and the babies were born prematurely.

He said the delivery had already taken place before the woman reached the hospital. The mother was given emergency treatment and her condition is now stable.

Rajni's husband, Dhanesh Sindram, blamed the delay in the Government ambulance service for the tragedy.

"My wife was six to seven months pregnant. We had to take her to hospital in an auto-rickshaw because no ambulance was available. She delivered on the way. All four babies died, but my wife survived," he said.

ASHA worker Manto Singram said she was informed that the family was bringing Rajni in an auto-rickshaw after labour pains started suddenly. She met them en route and helped manage the emergency delivery before they reached the hospital.

The incident has once again exposed glaring shortcomings in the state's emergency medical response system, raising uncomfortable questions about the reliability of the 108 ambulance network.

The deaths of four newborns before they could receive medical care have intensified demands for accountability and a thorough inquiry into whether timely emergency transport could have prevented the tragedy.

Uriamghat tax demand linked to identified miscreants, not Naga community: Pijush Hazarika

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

The Assam Government on Wednesday clarified that the recent incident involving an alleged demand for ₹110 from households in villages along the Uriamghat border area was the work of a few identified miscreants and should not be associated with the Naga community or the Government of Nagaland.

Replying to a Notice under Rule 54 raised by MLA Nurul Huda in the Assam Legislative Assembly, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika said a report from the Superintendent of Police (Border), Golaghat, revealed that two individuals from Hukai Basti in Nagaland's Niuland district visited Rajapukhuri villages under Uriamghat Police Station on June 23.

They allegedly distributed letters to village headmen directing them to collect ₹110 per household as House Tax and Census Tax in the name of NSCN/GPRN (Nikki).

Hazarika urged people not to generalise the actions of a handful of anti-social elements or blame the entire Naga community, stressing that such assumptions could harm the long-standing cordial relations between the people of Assam and Nagaland.

The Minister informed the House that the identities of the two accused have been established, but they remain absconding.

The matter has been communicated to the CRPF, neutral forces and the Border Magistrate at Sarupathar, while police and security agencies have intensified search operations, patrolling and surveillance in the border areas.

According to the latest police report, no evidence has emerged to suggest that any money was actually collected from villagers.

Hazarika said the law and order situation in the area remains peaceful and is being closely monitored.

Reaffirming the State Government's commitment to the safety of border residents, the Minister said strict legal action would be taken against those responsible and that measures were being strengthened to prevent similar incidents in the future.

Amit Shah speaks to CMs of rain-hit States, assures help

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke with the chief ministers of Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday to review the impact of heavy rains. He assured them that the Centre would provide all possible help, officials said.

Officials said the home minister called Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah.

During these separate calls, Shah assured each chief minister that the Centre would offer all possible assistance to handle the rain-related situation, officials said.

Mumbai saw heavy rain on Wednesday, which delayed local trains and made commuting difficult for office-goers. The city had already faced heavy rain over the weekend, but experienced a short break on Tuesday. Long-distance trains to Gujarat were still disrupted due to waterlogging on the Vasai-Virar section in Palghar district and at several places in south Gujarat.

Train services on the Mumbai-Pune route had not yet fully resumed after landslides hit the Bhor Ghat section. Civic officials said Tulsi Lake, one of Mumbai's seven drinking water reservoirs, began overflowing late at night because of heavy rain in its catchment area.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast light to moderate rain in Mumbai and its suburbs throughout the day.

Southern Gujarat also received "extremely heavy" rainfall on Tuesday, with the worst affected being Surat district, where five people died in rain-related incidents. In comparison, 2,100 people were shifted from flooded areas to safe locations, officials said.

Kamrej taluka in Surat district recorded 305 mm of rain in just 10 hours ending at 4 pm on Tuesday, officials said. Schools and colleges in the Navsari district and Surat remained closed on Tuesday due to heavy rain.

Pedestrians make their way through a severely waterlogged road following heavy rainfall in Surat Gujarat on Wednesday PTI

"Extremely heavy rainfall occurred at isolated places in the districts of South Gujarat region, namely Surat, Valsad, Dadra & Nagar Haveli in the last 24 hours," the IMD said in its midday state forecast on Tuesday.

M Nagarajan, Commissioner of Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC), told reporters that about 2,100 people had been moved from different zones to safe shelters. A district disaster management official said five people had died in rain-related incidents over the past two days.

"Two deaths due to electrocuti"Two deaths due to electrocution were reported today, while another person died in the Kamrej area. On Monday, two individuals died from electrocution in the Rander area of Surat," the official had said.

Heavy rainfall struck the upper reaches of Thathri town in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district on Tuesday, partially damaging several houses, shops and vehicles.

It was the third similar incident in Doda and Kishtwar districts this week after heavy rain battered the region. Heavy rain in the upper reaches had triggered flash floods, bringing boulders, mud and debris into Thathri town. The Doda-Kishtwar highway was blocked at Thathri after the flash floods, disrupting traffic in the area.

GUJARAT CM REVIEWS RAIN SITUATION

Gandhinagar: Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel reviewed the prevailing rain situation across the state during a Cabinet meeting and directed the administration to remain on high alert as heavy rainfall continues to affect several districts.

Government spokesperson Jitu Vaghani said the Chief Minister will visit the rain-affected districts of Surat and Valsad on Wednesday to assess the ground situation, interact with affected residents, and personally review ongoing relief and rescue operations.

The Chief Minister also instructed local ministers and district in-charge ministers to visit rain-affected areas under their respective jurisdictions.

They have been asked to monitor the preparedness of the local administration, review disaster management measures, and ensure that relief efforts are carried out effectively.

During the Cabinet meeting, the State Government also paid tribute to 11 people who lost their lives in rain-related incidents, including accidents caused by collapsing walls, falling trees, and lightning strikes.

The Council of Ministers expressed condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for the departed souls.

The State Government said it will continue to closely monitor the evolving weather situation and coordinate relief measures in districts affected by heavy rainfall. (*PNS*)

ED freezes TMC's ₹440 crore funds after West Bengal poll loss

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ Kolkata/New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has frozen the Trinamool Congress (TMC)'s bank deposits worth ₹440.42 crore under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, dealing the party a severe financial setback at a critical juncture. The TMC, recently ousted from power in West Bengal by the BJP, now faces a paralysing restriction on its funds weeks after losing the state assembly elections.

The freeze hits the party when it is already reeling from internal rebellion and the challenges of operating as the principal opposition in the state. The ED has provisionally attached ₹440.42 crore lying in three private bank accounts of the All India Trinamool Congress under Section 17(1-A) of the PMLA.

This comes after Tuesday's raids at premises linked to Carewell Group and its aviation arm, Carewell Aviation. According to ED officials, the probe has uncovered transfers of around ₹160 crore from TMC accounts to Carewell Aviation and related entities between April 2023 and June 2026. These funds were allegedly used to purchase an Embraer Legacy 600 jet and an AgustaWestland 109SP helicopter for ₹112 crore, which were then rented back to the party.

The political implications of this freeze are profound and far-reaching for the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC. Having lost power in West Bengal for the first time in over a decade, the TMC is already in a weakened position. The freeze of nearly ₹440 crore, a substantial part of its war chest, severely limits its ability to mount an effective opposition, fund protests, support party workers, or fight legal battles against the new BJP Government.

The ED order comes just days after the Calcutta High Court directed banks to disclose the corpus in these accounts. It follows last month's debit freeze by Kolkata Police, triggered by complaints from rebel TMC MLAs. The party is now battling on multiple fronts, while its finances are locked.

As an opposition party, the TMC will find it extremely difficult to sustain large-scale political programmes, cadre mobilisation, or election-related expenses in the coming months. This could accelerate demoralisation among workers and leaders at a time when unity is most needed.

Political observers say that the attachment of such a large amount under the stringent PMLA sends a strong signal about the central agency's reach into the finances of a major regional party that was in power until recently. It places the Mamata Banerjee-led faction under intense political and financial pressure.

There has been no immediate response from the Trinamool Congress or Carewell Aviation to the latest development. For the TMC, already navigating the difficult transition from ruling party to opposition, the ₹440 crore lock-in could prove a long-term handicap in its efforts to regroup and challenge the BJP in West Bengal.

Congress battles factions ahead of MP's Datia by-election

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

With the July 30 by-election to Madhya Pradesh's Datia Assembly constituency fast approaching, the Congress finds itself balancing electoral strategy with internal party dynamics, even as both the Congress and the BJP are yet to announce their candidates.

The bypoll, necessitated by the disqualification of former Congress MLA Rajendra Bharti following his conviction in a decades-old bank fraud case, has emerged as a crucial political contest in the Gwalior-Chambal region.

While nominations close on July 13, the Congress leadership continues to deliberate over a candidate capable of retaining the seat without triggering factional unrest.

In a significant political development, Rajendra Bharti has publicly conveyed to the party leadership that his family need not be considered for the ticket if the Congress identifies a stronger candidate. He said he would campaign wholeheartedly for any nominee chosen by the party and work to ensure the party's victory.

Speaking over the phone, Bharti said the final decision had been left entirely to the party high command. "It is not necessary that I or my family contest. If the party finds a better candidate, I will support that person with full commitment," he said.

His statement is widely being viewed as an attempt to project party loyalty at a time when the Congress is trying to avoid a repeat of the internal discord witnessed during the 2023 Assembly elections. In that election, the party had initially

declared former Textbook Corporation Vice-Chairman Avdhesh Nayak as its candidate before replacing him with Rajendra Bharti following strong opposition from Bharti's supporters.

With Bharti now stepping back from pressing his family's claim, two names have emerged prominently in Congress circles — Avdhesh Nayak and two-time former MLA Ghanshyam Singh. Party leaders also indicate that a candidate from the Other Backward Classes could be considered if the leadership believes it would improve the party's electoral prospects.

Political observers believe Bharti's statement serves multiple purposes. It helps present him as a disciplined party leader willing to place organisational interests above personal ambition, while also reducing the possibility of resistance from rival aspirants during the ticket selection process. At the same time, his political past adds another dimension to the calculations. Bharti has previously switched parties after being denied a ticket and has served as an MLA on a Samajwadi Party ticket, making the Congress leadership cautious about managing competing interests within the organisation.

The bypoll itself was triggered after Bharti lost his Assembly membership following his conviction in a bank fraud case dating back to 1998. The case relates to alleged manipulation of a fixed deposit at the Datia Cooperative Rural Development Bank, where investigators alleged that bank records were altered to extend the tenure of an FD from three years to 15 years, enabling withdrawal of interest over several years. Bharti, who was then associated with the bank's management, was among those prosecuted.

On April 1, a special MP-MLA court in Delhi convicted Bharti in the 28-year-old case. A day later, the court sentenced him to three years' imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs 1 lakh. Although the court granted him time to appeal, the conviction remained in force.

For the Congress, the election is more than a routine bypoll. It is a test of its ability to manage factional equations while retaining a constituency it won in 2023. Candidate selection will be critical, as the party seeks to avoid alienating influential local leaders and maintain organisational unity.

Police shoot dead Baruipur gang-rape accused in encounter

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Suvendu Adhikari Government tended to walk its talk — against sexual attacks on women — dealing out on Wednesday the 'encounter treatment' for Probhash Mondal the prime accused in Baruipur gangrape and murder case even as he "tried to snatch a gun from the policemen, open fire and flee" before being shot dead.

"As he was continuously changing his statements the police team was taking him to the place of occurrence for reconstruction of the crime situation, when he suddenly snatched a gun from a policeman and opened fire... the accompanying policemen immediately fired back in self-defence hitting him in the chest and abdomen," a senior

Security personnel stand guard outside Baruipur Sub-Divisional Hospital, where the body of an accused killed in a police encounter has been kept, in South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal, Wednesday PTI

police officer said.

While Wednesday's was the first death in police firing after many years, perhaps after the naxalite movement of the seventies residents of Baruipur and the family members of the victim received the news contently.

"We have complete faith in Chief Minister Suvendu Babu ...he told us the other day that he will not spare the guilty and give a lesson that would be remembered by the future criminals, we are satisfied that at least one of them has been treated befittingly, as instead of repenting he was shamelessly attacking the police men," the brother of the victim said.

A 12-year-old girl was waylaid last Saturday by a gang of 5-6 youths at Baruipur, a suburban town south of Kolkata. She was then gangraped and brutally assaulted with several hits on her head. To ensure death, she was stuffed in a gunny bag and thrown into a pond so that she died from drowning. Her post-mortem reports confirmed lethal ante mortem injuries and death by drowning.

The incident triggered widespread outrage, with angry locals blocking the Baruipur-Joynagar Road, setting tyres ablaze and vandalising police vehicles, demanding immediate arrest and stringent punishment for those responsible.

Incidentally Adhikari as an Opposition Leader during one of his campaigns said that the BJP Government would teach the ultimate lesson to all the rapists adding "we 'deposit' them in the morning and 'spend' them in the evening before producing them in the court."

Meanwhile, senior Congress leader Adhir Chowdhury and TMC leader Mohua Moitra attacked the powers that be in the State for converting Bengal "officially into UP 2.0."

"Isn't it strange that the prime accused and the only witness in the rape and murder case has been shot dead in an alleged encounter... with him many information may have gone forever... it is a blood thirsty day... for the first time in Bengal we have seen an encounter killing. Bengal has officially become UP 2.0" she said wondering why the police could not aim at the feet which was the standard rule.

A joint delegation comprising representatives from the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, United Bodo People's Organisation and Bodo Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council called upon CM Himanta Biswa Sarma PIONEER PHOTO

Editor's TAKE

Delhi's ridge gets a second chance

Delhi has launched its most ambitious afforestation drive in years but it will mean little unless it is matched by cutting emissions at their source

Delhi's ridge – the northern extension of the Aravalli hills that runs through the capital – has long been called the city's "green lungs." This week, that metaphor was given fresh political weight whenUnion Home Minister Amit Shah and Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta planted saplings at the Central Ridge and Nanakpura Ridge to launch a campaign to plant 70 lakh trees across the capital, part of a broader push under the "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" initiative. The government has also launched a Green Drive Portal letting citizens book plantation slots, request free saplings and register as "Environmental Saviours,"with a focus on native, long-living species such as peepal, banyan, neem, arjun and jamun, alongside plans for 100 Oxygen Parks across the city.Crucially, Shah pointed out that 7,784 hectares of the Ridge were notified under the Indian Forest Act back in 1994, but the final notification has never been issued in the three decades since – leaving much of this land legally unprotected and vulnerable to encroachment.

Now, 5,000 hectares have been designated forest area, with a promise to extend legal protection to the entire Ridge. That promise, if kept, matters more than the sapling count.It matters because Delhi's pollution crisis is not seasonal bad luck – it is structural. Vehicular emissions contribute the largest share of the city's local PM2.5 pollution, at over half the total, while neighbouring districts add roughly a third more through dust and industrial emissions carried in from outside Delhi's borders. Winter brings crop-residue burning from neighbouring states, whose smoke gets trapped near the ground by temperature inversions and calm winds, producing weeks-long smog episodes. In 2025, Delhi's annual average PM2.5 concentration touched 99.6 micrograms per cubic metre, making it the fourth most polluted city in the world – a level nearly twenty times the WHO's safety guideline. Summers bring their own hazard, as dust storms and heatwave conditions push AQI readings past 400. This is a year-round, multi-source emergency. Given that, a plantation drive – however large – addresses only one layer of the problem. Trees absorb some particulate matter, stabilise soil, cool micro-climates and, over decades, rebuild an ecosystem that construction and encroachment have steadily eaten into. Delhi residents online have already voiced the obvious worry: past plantation drives have seen saplings die for lack of watering and follow-up care, and choosing hardy but low-value species like babool over biodiversity-rich natives has sometimes done more for optics than ecology.

A three-tier, native-species approach with dedicated maintenance – as this programme promises – is a meaningfully better design, if it is followed through. But real, sustained relief requires enforcing vehicular emission standards, cleaning up industrial discharge, cutting fossil-fuel power generation, and forging real coordination with neighbouring states on crop burning. The 300 electric buses flagged off alongside the plantation drive are a start on the transport front. The Ridge deserves its legal protection and its trees. Delhi's lungs need much more than that.

The weaponisation of the UN

As the war in Gaza continues to divide global opinion, a new United Nations report accusing Israel of grave violations against Palestinian children has reignited questions not only about accountability, but also about the credibility and consistency of international institutions

MANJARI SINGH

Two developments this week show how readily the great powers and multilateral institutions will settle the fate of another conflict in the Middle East. At Lake Lucerne, the United States and Iran agreed a roadmap to wind down the war in Lebanon and built a mechanism to govern the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, while Israel itself was given no seat at the table.

In Geneva, the UN Human Rights Council received a report accusing Israel of the gravest crimes in international law over its conduct towards the children of Gaza. India holds no stake in either battlefield, yet has reason to watch how this second judgment was reached.

The death of a child is the heaviest sorrow a society can carry, and that it is no lighter for the nationality the child happened to hold. A child killed in Gaza is an irreplaceable world ended; so is a child in Tel Aviv, or on a road in the Kashmir Valley. To ask how a child died, and at whose hand, is the seriousness that might protect the next one.

There is another moral question that deserves reflection in India. The massacres of October 7, in which Israeli civilians, including children, were murdered, kidnapped and brutalised, marked the beginning of this war. Yet many voices that now speak with certainty about Israel's conduct had little or nothing to say when those atrocities occurred. Moral concern cannot be selective. A standard that condemns civilian suffering only after one side responds, while remaining silent when the violence that triggered the conflict is unleashed, diminishes its own credibility. One may criticise Israel's actions and still recognise that any serious moral accounting of this war must begin with October 7. To omit that starting point is not impartiality; it is incompleteness.

In 2018 and again in 2019, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued reports on Jammu and Kashmir that New Delhi rejected as fallacious, tendentious and motivated. The objection was never that Kashmiri suffering was unreal; no honest Indian would say so. The objection was to the UN system. A UN office had assembled unverified figures, relied on interested testimony, set aside the long history of cross-border terrorism, and pronounced a confident verdict on a place it had no standing to judge. Governments in Delhi of every stripe have held that line since.

> A UN OFFICE HAD ASSEMBLED UNVERIFIED FIGURES, RELIED ON INTERESTED TESTIMONY, SET ASIDE THE LONG HISTORY OF CROSS-BORDER TERRORISM, AND PRONOUNCED A CONFIDENT VERDICT ON A PLACE IT HAD NO STANDING TO JUDGE. GOVERNMENTS IN DELHI OF EVERY STRIPE HAVE HELD THAT LINE SINCE.

That is the lens through which the Gaza report deserves to be read. This Commission is the only standing body in the UN system aimed permanently at a single country, created by a resolution that half the Council declined to support. It rests its conclusions on testimony it cannot independently verify and, in places, on its own previous reports; it reaches determinations on ballistics and military operations for which it has no evident expertise, then dresses them as legal findings, though it is no court and can convict no one. It allowed the accused state ten days to answer a hundred-page document covering three years of war. None of this certifies Israel's account of any single incident. But the report's central claims are precisely the kind an impartial process would treat as contested rather than settled.

Much turns on disputed ground. The Commission's own reports have not kept their ratios of children to combatants consistent. Its treatment of schools and hospitals sets aside a documented pattern of armed groups operating from within civilian sites, the fact that decides whether a strike was a crime or a tragedy of war: weapons recovered from a kindergarten, a tunnel shaft beneath an infant's cot, an attack on the Al-Taba'een site that the report lists without recording that the building had become a base for militants. The account of the Al-Ahli hospital explosion, attributed to Israel within hours, was later contradicted by American, British and Canadian assessments pointing to a misfired Palestinian rocket.

On starvation, the report passes over the more than a million children vaccinated against polio in coordination with the WHO, and the diversion of humanitarian aid by the armed groups themselves. One need not settle any of these to see the difficulty: Each judgment falls the same way, against the accused, and a tribunal whose every doubt resolves in one direction is not weighing evidence. It is ratifying a verdict it brought with it.

There is also a distinction that should matter to a democracy. A democracy carries the means of its own correction: courts that rule against the government, a free press, an electorate that removes it. Israel, whatever one concludes about its conduct, has these institutions; the armed movements arrayed against it offer their people none.

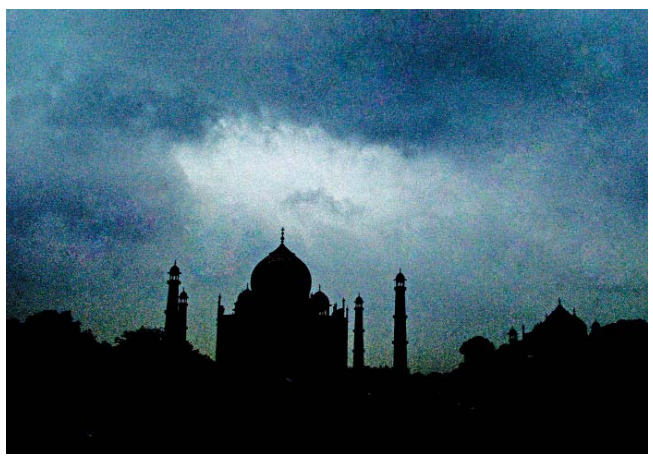
Candour is owed about the forum doing the judging. The human-rights machinery of the United Nations carries a long and uneven record, having seated serial abusers on its councils and trained a permanent focus on one democracy while openly repressive states drew little notice. Such a body has not earned the authority to pronounce final verdicts on a sovereign nation, and the principle does not bend according to which nation stands in the dock. Accountability imposed from outside, on evidence a state was never allowed to test, only imitates the rule of law.

This is the pattern India must recognise, because it was once turned against India itself. A standing body, insulated from accountability, selects a single sovereign state, assembles a record it does not let that state test, and converts a political campaign into the language of law and its gravest charges. The instrument is the human-rights report; the purpose is the weaponisation of the United Nations against an unfavourable state.

Verdicts handed down from Geneva harden the warring and embolden those who profit from grievance; they have never stopped a war or returned a child to a parent. Peace is made by states willing to talk, and made faster when the world resists anointing permanent villains and victims. India's instinct, shaped by its own experience, has favoured dialogue over denunciation. The children of Gaza and of Tel Aviv need a peace two peoples can be helped to build. That is the cause India should keep in view.

Dr Manjari Singh is a strategic affairs expert specialising in the Middle East and Greater West Asia

PIC TALK



Monsoon clouds hover over the Taj Mahal amid rainy weather, in Agra

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE
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Elder care is not optional, it is a social responsibility

GEETANJALI CHOPRA

2ND OPINION

In India, there was a time when caring for the elderly was not discussed as an option-it was simply a way of life. Respect and regard for ageing parents were not choices, but deeply internalised social norms woven into everyday living. Today, that understanding is steadily weakening. Elder care is increasingly being treated as a matter of choice, shaped by convenience rather than commitment. This shift reflects not just a cultural change, but a deeper gap in how India is preparing for an ageing society.

India is home to nearly 144 million senior citizens, and this number is expected to rise sharply in the coming decades. Yet despite these numbers, programmes focused on improving their living conditions remain strikingly few. As a result, ageing is rarely accompanied by dignity; instead, it is often marked by neglect and invisibility. Equally concerning is the growing proportion of elderly living alone or only with a spouse. These people are more vulnerable to fraud, theft and even violent crime due to limited mobility and predictable routines.

Beyond these visible risks lies a quieter crisis-elders battling illness without support, spending days without meaningful interaction, and in some cases, passing away unnoticed. These are not isolated incidents, but symptoms of a systemic apathy towards elder care. The reasons behind this shift are well known. Migration, expensive urban housing, demanding work lives and changing priorities have reshaped family structures. At the same time, many elderly individuals choose to remain in familiar surroundings, rooted in their communities. What has emerged is a widening gap between generations-not just physically, but emotionally. India is moving away from informal, family-led elder care, but has not built adequate formal systems to replace it. As a result, a growing number of seniors are left to navigate ageing largely on their own. India has legal provisions such as the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, which obligate children to provide for their parents' basic needs. Additionally, the National Policy on Older Persons and schemes under the Integrated Programme for Senior Citizens aim to provide financial security, healthcare access and shelter. While important, such frameworks address only one part of the problem. Care cannot be reduced to obligation alone. It is not just about financial support, but about presence, attention and dignity. Law can enforce duty, but it cannot create care or emotional security. Many elderly individuals remain unaware of their legal rights, limiting their ability to seek support. At the community level, Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) can play a far more structured role by maintaining registries of elderly residents living alone, enabling periodic welfare checks, and creating emergency response systems. Such decentralised mechanisms can significantly reduce both isolation and risk. Similarly, the role of local police must move beyond symbolic outreach. Old-age homes are an important part of the solution.

They provide shelter, healthcare and companionship. However, their limited reach and affordability prevent them from becoming a universal solution. There is also significant scope for corporate engagement. Elder care can be meaningfully integrated into Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), particularly through partnerships with credible non-governmental organisations to build community-based care models. In earlier days elder care was part of a social fabric that ensured continuity between generations.

Rebuilding this fabric requires more than policy-it demands a conscious effort to restore intergenerational bonds. Families, schools and communities must create spaces where younger generations remain connected to their elders. If ageing is to become one of India's defining realities, elder care must move from being seen as a private concern to a shared social responsibility.

The writer works for the elderly care and founder of Wishes and Blessings NGO

DOWRY DEATHS DEMAND STRONGER SOCIAL AND LEGAL ACTION

The tragic death of 28-year-old Akriti, barely 72 days after her marriage, is yet another grim reminder that the evil of dowry continues to claim innocent lives despite stringent laws. According to her family's complaint, the man she loved and married allegedly became abusive soon after the wedding, demanding dowry, seeking control over her salary, forcing her to quit her job, and subjecting her to relentless physical and mental harassment. Her repeated warnings that her husband might kill her make this case particularly shocking and heartbreaking.

Such incidents expose not only the failure of legal deterrence but also the persistence of regressive social attitudes that treat women as commodities rather than equal partners. While every person involved in such harassment must be brought to justice, the husband bears the primary responsibility for either protecting or persecuting his wife. The law must ensure swift investigation, speedy trials, and exemplary punishment for those guilty of dowry-related crimes.

At the same time, families, educational institutions, women's organisations, and civil society must work together to eradicate this social evil and create an environment where every woman can live with dignity, safety, and respect after marriage.

The fight against dowry demands uncompromising enforcement of the law, greater social awareness, and a collective rejection of practices that commodify women. Only when society treats daughters with dignity and refuses to tolerate dowry will such tragic deaths finally come to an end.

RS NARULA PATIALA

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India must closely watch developments in PoK

Pakistan's violent crackdown on protesters in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) reflects its growing unease over the rising public demand for basic rights and political freedom. The increasing demonstrations reveal deep public resentment against prolonged political neglect, economic hardship, and denial of democratic rights.

Faced with mounting internal and external pressure, Islamabad appears to be suppressing dissent in PoK instead of addressing the legitimate grievances of its people. Such heavy-handed measures are only likely to intensify public anger and further destabilise the region. India should closely monitor developments in PoK and continue highlighting the human rights situation through diplomatic and international forums. While respecting international norms,

New Delhi should extend moral and humanitarian support to the people who are seeking justice, dignity, and fundamental freedoms.

The international community must also take note of these developments and urge Pakistan to uphold democratic values, respect human rights, and refrain from using force to silence peaceful voices.

DR DVG SANKARA RAO | VISHAKHAPATNAM

Bharat Taxi must build passenger trust

Bharat Taxi has the potential to emerge as a credible, people-centric alternative to app-based cab aggregators, but its long-term success will depend on much more than offering affordable fares. As highlighted in the report, the cooperative model can succeed only if it consistently delivers a safe, reliable, and respectful travel experience.

If drivers engage in the same practices that have frustrated passengers on other platforms—such as refusing rides, demanding extra money, or behaving discourteously—the initiative will quickly lose public confidence. Therefore, accountability must be built into the system from the outset. Transparent, surge-free pricing, digital receipts, and an efficient grievance redressal mechanism should be made mandatory. Since Bharat Taxi drivers are co-owners of the cooperative, repeated misconduct should invite strict disciplinary action, including suspension of membership and loss of cooperative benefits. More importantly, drivers must recognise that every instance of misconduct damages the reputation of the cooperative. Bharat Taxi can become a truly dependable mobility solution only by upholding passenger trust through discipline & professionalism.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD

Social media challenges need urgent action

Social media has become an influential platform for communication and entertainment, but it is also increasingly being misused to spread misinformation and promote dangerous online trends. In recent years, viral challenges have encouraged reckless behaviour, putting countless young lives at risk. Earlier, the infamous 'Blue Whale' challenge was linked to several tragic deaths worldwide. Now, equally hazardous trends such as the 'Momo' challenge and the 'Kiki' challenge have exposed users, particularly teenagers, to unnecessary risks.

The Kiki challenge, which dares participants to step out of a moving vehicle, dance alongside it, and jump back in while being filmed, has resulted in numerous accidents and injuries across countries. The pursuit of online fame through likes, comments, and shares often overshadows concerns for personal safety. Parents, schools, social media companies, and law enforcement agencies must work together to educate young users about the dangers of such trends. Technology platforms should promptly remove harmful content and discourage challenges that threaten public safety. Responsible digital behaviour and stronger content moderation are essential to ensure that social media remains a tool for creativity and communication rather than a source of preventable tragedies.

JAYANTHY SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

Beyond E20: Making India's ethanol transition truly sustainable

As blending targets rise, the focus must shift beyond percentages alone. The long-term success of India's ethanol strategy will depend on balancing energy independence with water security, agricultural sustainability, environmental safeguards, vehicle compatibility, and food security

DEBAJIT PALIT | AKANKSHA JAIN

India's ethanol-blending programme has evolved rapidly over the last decade from a limited effort to blend with petrol to now one of the central pillars for India's energy security and clean mobility strategy. The country has already achieved E20 blending ahead of schedule, increasing it gradually from 1.5% in 2014. The central government is now preparing for higher blends through the recent notification and recent launch of flex-fuel vehicles (FFVs).

The rationale for ethanol blending has been to reduce fossil oil imports and thus provide a degree of insulation from global oil price volatility, supply shocks and geopolitical disruptions. According to government reports, this transformation has helped save over ?1.84 lakh crore in foreign exchange over the years and substituted more than 300 lakh metric tonnes of oil imports. Ethanol blending has thus been positioned as a strategic tool to reduce fossil oil consumption, lower foreign exchange outflows, build domestic fuel resilience and at the same time create additional income for farmers. However, the blending has also been questioned by critiques citing many challenges and thus they need to be addressed for better acceptance of the programme.

On the consumer side, an often-cited challenge is the issue of fuel efficiency and impact of fuel blends on the engine. As ethanol has ~30% lower energy density than petrol, ethanol blends reduce vehicle mileage, particularly for vehicles that are non-E20 compliant. Furthermore, the hygroscopic property of ethanol can lead to moisture accumulation, corrosion of fuel system components, and potential breakdowns of non-compliant vehicles. In this scenario, the recent FFV notification is an important policy step. By introducing engine compliance standards, the government has recognised that higher blending requires compatible vehicle systems.

On the supply side, India's ethanol ecosystem today remains dominated by first-generation (1G) feedstocks, particularly sugarcane, maize and broken rice. This has generated important gains for the farmers, as sugar mill arrears, historically a major source of farmer distress, have reduced significantly. Because of the rising demand from the distilleries, maize cultivation has expanded. For policymakers, ethanol has become an instrument that simultaneously addresses energy security, rural income generation, and agricultural market stability.

While a higher blend beyond E20 for the FFV has the potential to further reduce our fossil oil consumption and thus foreign exchange outflows, the next phase of India's ethanol programme must be evaluated through a broader 'systems' perspective that considers not only energy security but also ecological sustainability and long-term resource resilience. Sugarcane is among the most water-intensive crops cultivated in India and is often grown in regions already experiencing groundwater stress. Its cultivation is supported by significant electricity subsidies for irrigation and high fertiliser inputs.

Maize is also increasingly entering the fuel economy as ethanol demand rises. As more maize is diverted towards ethanol production, domestic availability for poultry feed, starch and other industrial uses becomes tighter, increasing pressure on food-feed-fuel allocation and, in some years, contributing to higher imports. The larger concern here is whether India's ethanol transition is substituting crude oil import dependence with growing dependence on subsidised groundwater, electricity for irrigation, imported fertilisers and, potentially, feed grain.

Furthermore, while ethanol may reduce tailpipe emissions, a rigorous comparative life cycle assessment (LCA) is essential to account for the full production chain, including fertiliser manufacture and use, groundwater extraction, electricity consumption for irrigation, transportation, distillation energy, land-use changes associated with feedstock cultivation, waste generation and treatment, and emissions across the value chain. Only such a cradle-to-grave assessment can determine whether higher ethanol blends deliver genuine net environmental gains under Indian conditions.

> WHILE INDIA'S ETHANOL PROGRAMME HAS UNDOUBTEDLY SUPPORTED RURAL INCOMES, ITS NEXT PHASE SHOULD BE GUIDED BY A 'SYSTEMS' PERSPECTIVE RATHER THAN BLENDING TARGETS ALONE. ENERGY SECURITY CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM GROUNDWATER STRESS, FERTILISER DEPENDENCE, AGRICULTURAL RESILIENCE, WASTE MANAGEMENT, AND LONG-TERM RESOURCE SUSTAINABILITY AND SECURITY

The environmental assessment must also extend beyond feedstock cultivation to include waste management. Distilleries reportedly generate large volumes of effluent with significant pollution potential, if inadequately treated. Although regulatory norms mandate treatment and reuse through bio-methanation, concentration or composting, a rapid expansion of ethanol production will proportionately increase waste volumes.

A major concern is also on the long-term impact on agricultural patterns. If ethanol demand continues to incentivise sugarcane and maize cultivation, what happens to crop diversification and soil resilience? Monoculture expansion may improve short-term farmer incomes, but over time weaken ecological stability and increase resource stress, thereby impacting the farmers themselves. There is also an implicit food security dimension. The current policy support still disproportionately favours rapid expansion of 1G infrastructure because it is easier to scale quickly. That may help India achieve blending targets and reduce foreign exchange outflow, but it risks locking into a resource-intensive biofuel pathway with longer term impacts on soil and groundwater. While surplus and waste 1G feedstocks should be used to produce ethanol, any expansion through additional cultivation must be preceded by a comprehensive and rigorous life cycle assessment (LCA).

This is precisely why India must work on prioritising second-generation (2G) biofuels. India generates up to 500 million tonnes of agricultural residues annually, much of which is burned, contributing to severe air pollution. Converting crop residues, municipal waste, and non-food biomass into ethanol offers a far more sustainable pathway than indefinite expansion of first-generation feedstocks. However, 2G ethanol remains commercially challenging due to high capital costs of pre-treatment and lower yields. Going forward, the policy should simultaneously focus on enabling 2G systems through targeted financial incentives, innovation support, technology partnerships, and long-term procurement certainty. The objective should not merely be increasing ethanol percentages but creating a genuinely sustainable low-carbon fuel ecosystem.

While India's ethanol programme has undoubtedly supported rural incomes, its next phase should be guided by a 'systems' perspective rather than blending targets alone. Energy security cannot be separated from groundwater stress, fertiliser dependence, agricultural resilience, waste management, and long-term resource sustainability and security. International experience, particularly Brazil's, offers valuable lessons but should be interpreted in context. Much of Brazil's sugarcane cultivation is rainfed and takes place under agro-climatic conditions that differ from India's, where irrigation and groundwater extraction play a larger role. Also, Brazil vehicle ecosystem for using blended fuels was simultaneously developed. India's biofuel strategy must be tailored to its own resource constraints and conditions. Ultimately, the next phase of India's ethanol transition should be evaluated not only as an energy security initiative, but also as a resource security strategy without impacting the vehicle users.

Dr. Akanksha Jain is a Research Associate and Dr. Debajit Palit is the Centre Head at the Centre for Climate Change and Energy Transition at Chintan Research Foundation

Litmus test awaits Jan-Suraaj in Bankipur

GYAN BHADRA

Even before the Election Commission of India issues a formal notification for the by-election to Bankipur assembly seat, the political temperature in Bihar-and Patna in particular-has already risen sharply. Political parties have begun a war of words to grab public attention, months ahead of the actual contest.

The seat fell vacant after the BJP's central leadership elevated Nitin Nabin-winner of five consecutive elections, including once from the erstwhile Patna West constituency before delimitation-to the post of national president. His new responsibilities require him to move to the Rajya Sabha, and he has accordingly resigned from the Bankipur assembly seat, triggering the by-election. The Election Commission is yet to announce the schedule, but parties across the spectrum are already positioning themselves for what promises to be a keenly fought contest.Bankipur is set to be one of the most closely watched contests in Bihar, for two broad reasons.

The first is the possibility that Prashant Kishor himself may contest. His candidature is yet to be formally cleared by Jan Suraaj's working committee, but the mere prospect has already drawn heavy media attention. If Kishor does enter the fray, a significant section of voters who did not back the Jan Suraaj candidate in the 2025 assembly election could shift towards him this time. His appeal has largely been to professionals, government employees, the middle class and students-precisely the kind of urban, educated electorate that dominates Bankipur, and one likely to respond to his reformist, development-focused pitch.

The real question, however, is whether Jan Suraaj can convert this goodwill into actual votes-a difficult task given the party's acknowledged weakness in booth-level organisation, an area where the BJP's decades of grassroots presence give it a considerable head start. Jan Suraaj's state president Manoj Bharti concedes as much: "Due to lack of skilled manpower, this has been our biggest mistake in the past. But this time around, we have rectified the mistake, strengthened the organisational power and honed up the necessary skills of booth management that could match up with those of BJP."

The second reason is Bankipur's status as a BJP bastion since 1990. The father-son duo of Navin Kumar Sinha and Nitin Nabin held the seat continuously from 1995 to 2025. Navin Kumar Sinha won from Patna West in 1995 and again in 2005, serving until his death in 2006. His son Nitin Nabin then won the ensuing by-election and went on to win four more consecutive terms through 2025. After the 2008 delimitation exercise, Patna West was renamed Bankipur.

The father-son duo, both Kayasthas by caste, benefited enormously from the constituency's social composition, which is dominated by upper castes-Kayasthas alone account for roughly 23 percent of the electorate. This allowed them to build a durable personal support base over three decades. Beyond Kayasthas, the BJP has also drawn steady support from other upper-caste communities-Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs, Vaishyas and Banias-making the seat nearly unassailable.

Manoj Bharti disputes this narrative of invincibility, arguing that voters are tired of the father-son duo and are actively seeking change, accusing them of doing too little for the constituency. He argues that Bankipur's problem has not been loyalty to the BJP but apathy born of a lack of alternatives. "The people of Bankipur often used to say: what difference will it make whether I cast my vote or not? Nitin Nabin is going to win anyway," Bharti says, adding that this time voters are showing greater willingness to turn out because they now see a genuine alternative. Bharti backs this with turnout figures: Bankipur has historically recorded voting percentages of just 34 to 39 percent, compared to 52 to 55 percent elsewhere in Bihar-evidence, he argues, of chronic voter disengagement rather than satisfaction with the incumbent. He also criticised the BJP-led state and central governments for failing to invite NITI Aayog members to Bihar to address the state's economic troubles.

The BJP, for its part, has already begun groundwork. According to Prabhat Malakar, the party's state media-in-charge, national president Nitin Nabin has held discussions with the president, vice-president and general secretary of each of the committees overseeing Bankipur's ten electoral wards, to assess ground realities. This was followed by a closed-door meeting involving Nabin, state president and chief minister Samrat Chaudhary at the CM's official residence. Malakar notes that since key election decisions are made in Delhi, the national president, chief minister and state president will jointly decide on the candidate once the Election Commission's notification is issued, after which the party's election committee will make its choice. On the likely candidate, Malakar indicated that the BJP is expected to field a Kayastha, given the constituency's demographic profile, with names such as Ajay Alok, Sanjay Mayukh and Rituraj Sinha doing the rounds.

He expressed confidence that no rival party poses a real threat, citing the welfare schemes implemented by the father-son duo over the years, including new roads. He specifically highlighted Nitin Nabin's role in transforming the Mandiri Nala into a covered box drain topped by a two-lane smart road-a project that eliminated foul odour, reduced flood risk in central Patna, and eased traffic congestion.

Malakar also pointed to a broader electoral pattern: the party that wins an assembly seat in a general election typically retains it in a subsequent by-election. Even so, should Prashant Kishor enter the race, retaining Nitin Nabin's 2025 vote share of 62 percent would be no easy task for the BJP's candidate, even in victory. Any noticeable dip in that margin would be read as a referendum on the state government's popularity and the party's organisational strength-making Bankipur's outcome a matter of political prestige as much as electoral arithmetic. Unsurprisingly, the BJP is expected to spare no effort in ensuring its candidate wins by a commanding margin.

The author is a columnist

US-Iran peace talks fail: Lasting peace in West Asia remains as elusive as ever

JITENDRA K OJHA

The fragile US -Iran peace process that followed the Memorandum of Understanding at Bürgenstock and Lucerne has collapsed following July 8, 2026, Iranian strike on three commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, including a Qatari LNG tanker and a Saudi crude oil super tanker. The United States retaliation with overwhelming force, hitting more than 80 Iranian military targets underscored the poor trust, broken commitments, competing threat perceptions and strategic irreconcilability of the stakeholders that has defined the peace process right from the beginning. President Trump declared at the NATO summit in Ankara that the ceasefire had "finished". He described the MoU as "a waste of time," and labelled Iranian leaders as "liars" and "sick people." Meanwhile, oil prices surged over 5% convulsing the global markets.

Iran has defended the attacks as assertion of sovereignty in quest for a "new Iranian order" in Hormuz. Despite enduring serious losses in leadership, infrastructure, and civilian lives, Tehran appears emboldened and the theocratic regime has entrenched itself further. This was manifest in global diplomatic acknowledgment in form of large-scale representation from major powers. Iran clearly appears to be exploiting limits of conventional US-Israel military power to conclude the war in a complex geopolitical theatre, where Iran has so far appeared to enjoy advantages in asymmetric warfare.

It is intriguing that a regime that appeared poised to end its half a century long global isolation with removal of all sanctions and offer of a major economic reconstruction programme is seeking squander this opportunity. While an accidental re-ignition of conflict was always expected in the prevailing ambience of distrust, such deliberate confrontation indicates deeper underlying causes. Despite progress on formation of technical working groups on sanctions relief for Iran, agreement on nuclear issues through a closer inspection, and mechanisms to secure maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, as well as de-escalation of tensions in Lebanon, deeper security, ideological and geopolitical faultlines that fueled the war had remained unresolved. It is clear failure of stakeholders to stretch their capacity, commitment and innovation to translate the "agreement on a 60-day roadmap toward a final settlement" into an endurable peace and stability in the region.

American firepower with its formidable surveillance and precision strike capacity, stealth technology, logistics network and overall force projection, backed by Israel's high tech-intelligence prowess has so far failed to vanquish Iran. Iran has largely held its ground, despite losing almost its entire top political-military leadership, thousands of trained IRGC personnel, almost half of its

air, naval and ground military assets, besides suffering tens of thousands of civilian casualties. Massive infrastructure damage, assessed in hundreds of billions of dollars, and big hits on key economic installations and ports also failed to dent Iran's spirit. Low-cost high-impact Iranian drones, manufactured and deployed in very large numbers with flexibility, compelled US-Israeli forces to expend interceptor missiles costing 50 to 500 times more.

While direct U.S. military losses are estimated only around $50 billion, with cumulative losses assessed at $100 billion, the overall threat to American credibility and goodwill in the region and beyond appears profound. Energy production disruptions and infrastructure damage is assessed to have caused estimated GDP contraction to the tune of 3-6 percent for American allies in the gulf. Yet it appears that Iran's success in low cost war, terms of MoU in Switzerland and global response to Khamenei's funeral has emboldened Iran to indulge in an audacity that has tested the patience of Trump .

Why Sustainable Peace Shall Be Difficult

Iranians had always suspected that Trump may use diplomacy as a smokescreen to topple the Iranian regime. Such apprehension is grounded in experiences of the past. US had initiated this war in February, just a day after Omani Foreign Minister had declared that an understanding had been reached between the two sides on all key issues. It appeared that Americans were preparing for the war using diplomacy as a distraction. Even in the current US retaliation, there appears detailed planning. Simultaneously, President Trump's frequent recourse to high-risk deception, bluff, bullying and unpredictability may be effective bargaining strategy in tactical corporate deals. But these have dented his credibility as a responsible statesman. Iranians cannot be faulted from apprehending a possible reneging of Trump from terms of MoU signed at Switzerland.

Simultaneously, Netanyahu has been the most potent threat to US-Iran peace. His intermittent attacks even after signing of MoU only corroborate this. The very character of Iranian regime poses an existential threat to Israel. But Netanyahu needs to keep the pot boiling in Iran to deflect his potential indictment in corruption charges. He may attempt a more audacious strike on Iran further doom the fate of peace in the region. Further, a degree of indirect Chinese support to Iranian regime is assessed to have bolstered the latter's capacities to challenge the combined US-Israeli might. China has appeared clear about its strategic objective to expel US and NATO from whole of Asia. Its proximity with Iran, and even others in West Asia, complicates the search for an endurable peace.

Simultaneously, Iran's adversaries remain sceptical of Tehran's long-term intentions. Iranian attacks on strait of Hormuz is likely to further deepen this distrust making the peace more elusive. Many Iranian regime insiders have continued to openly state that a nuclear weapon alone offered a credible deterrence against future aggressions. These are only going to exacerbate anxieties for other gulf states in the region.India and the Emerging Strategic Landscape As one of the world's largest energy importers, India remains vulnerable to disruptions and instability in the Gulf, which impact energy prices, economic growth and inflation at home. It has not been able to leverage its wider acceptability across internal divides in the region. As a large nation with serious constraints, India needs stronger strategic capabilities, greater institutional agility and a deeply calibrated approach to influence and shape its external surroundings to a certain level. This is an existential necessity in an increasingly interconnected world where geopolitical conflicts and tensions deeply impact development and security far beyond theatres of conflict.

The writer is Geo-strategic thinker, former civil servant, Head of Intelligence Training

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Delhi court slams CBI, directs defreezing of bank accounts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Observing that the freezing of bank accounts of without a direct link to a crime is "draconian", a Delhi court has directed the CBI to defreeze three accounts of an individual whose son-in-law is an accused in a ₹3-crore bribery case.

Slamming the agency for its "completely arbitrary" action of freezing the accounts, the court said the probe of the alleged offences "cannot be made a tool for harassing ordinary citizenry only because their relatives are suspected of having committed certain offences".

Special Judge Sushant Changotra was hearing the plea of one Gulshan Kumar, moved by his advocate Prateek Som, challenging the freezing of his three bank accounts as illegal.

In an order passed on Tuesday, the court said, "In the application at hand, the applicant (Gulshan) is the father-in-law of one of the accused."

It said according to the CBI, the applicant was not involved in the entire sequence of events relating to the demand, acceptance or transportation of the bribe amount. The court also said the investigating officer (IO) had not recorded any reasons for freezing the bank accounts.

While the CBI alleged that the applicant aided his absconding son-in-law's concealment, the court observed a discrepancy that the accused was arrested on June 16, yet Gulshan's accounts were not frozen until two days later.

Judge Changotra said, "The investigating agency can proceed to freeze bank accounts of individuals, but it has to be done with the object of safeguarding and preventing the loss of proceeds of crime."

He said that in the present case, there was apparently no connection between the proceeds of crime and the bank accounts of the applicant, and there was not "a whisper of allegation" that accused Prabhat Kumar (Kapoor) had transferred any amount to his father-in-law's account after an alleged conspiracy meeting on May 14.

On June 2, while rejecting the CBI's plea seeking further custodial interrogation of Haryana cadre IPS officer Deepak Gahlawat, arrested in the alleged bribery case linked to the agency's probe into a fake drug manufacturing racket, the court had also noted that there were no financial transactions in Gahlawat's bank account after a conspiratorial meeting with other co-accused persons on May 14.

In its order, the court highlighted that before freezing the bank accounts of an individual, the IO must have a reasonable basis to assume that the bank account was used directly or indirectly in receiving or layering the proceeds of crime.

But in this case, the court said that the CBI did not even have the statements of accounts before taking the "arbitrary decision" to freeze them.

"The arbitrary exercise of the above-mentioned discretion in freezing the bank accounts of individuals who do not have any direct or remote connection with the commission of offences is completely draconian in nature, and the investigating agency cannot proceed to arbitrarily attach/freeze/seize the bank accounts or other valuable assets of individuals on their whims," the court said.

Deprecating the action, it said that an investigating agency is bound to act within the four corners of the law and the probe of the alleged offences "cannot be made a tool for harassing ordinary citizenry only because their relatives are suspected of having committed certain offences".

"It is extremely important that such draconian and arbitrary practices are shunned to protect the valuable rights of law-abiding citizens," the court said.

It said that prima facie the freezing of Gulshan's bank accounts was "completely arbitrary and devoid of any plausible explanation".

The court then directed the defreezing of the three bank accounts.

Order Order

Tribunal awards compensation to kin of road mishap victim

The Motor Accident Claims Tribunal in Thane has awarded a compensation of ₹31.43 lakh to the family of a man killed in a road accident, while holding him 15 per cent contributorily negligent for staying too close to the vehicle ahead.

In its order on Tuesday, the MACT directed the owner of a tempo involved in the accident and its insurer to jointly and severally pay the amount to the family of victim Rajaram Narayan Mhatre with 9 per cent interest per annum from the date of the petition.

According to the order, Mhatre was driving his Innova behind an Eicher tempo on the Pune-Nashik road on December 25, 2020, when the tempo driver suddenly applied brakes without any signal or indication. Mhatre's car crashed into the tempo, resulting in his death.

While the insurance company argued that Mhatre was solely responsible for the crash as he rammed the vehicle from behind, the Tribunal Member RV Mohite noted that both drivers shared responsibility.

The tribunal also noted that Mhatre did not maintain a "safe distance" between the tempo and his Innova car.

Assessing the negligence of the tempo driver at 85 per cent and Mhatre at 15 per cent, the tribunal initially computed the total compensation at ₹36.98 lakh.

After taking into account Mhatre's contributory negligence, it directed the opponents to pay ₹31.43 lakh. (*PTI*)

Quota benefits: TN moves SC against Madras HC verdict

The Tamil Nadu Government has approached the Supreme Court, challenging a Madras High Court judgment that held a person converting to Islam is not entitled to claim reservation under the Backward Class (Muslim) category solely on the basis of conversion. The appeal has been filed by the secretary to the state Government against the high court's decision, which declared unconstitutional a Government Order (GO) issued on March 9, 2024.

The impugned GO had permitted persons belonging to Backward Classes (BC), Most Backward Classes (MBC), Denotified Communities (DNC), or Scheduled Castes (SC) who subsequently converted to Islam to be treated as BC (Muslim) and obtain community certificates under one of the seven notified Muslim communities for the purpose of availing reservation benefits.

A division bench of Justices GR Swaminathan and PB Balaji struck down the GO and held that it was contrary to binding judicial precedents of both the Supreme Court and the Madras High Court.

The high court had observed that a person converting to Islam could only be treated as a Muslim and could not, by virtue of conversion alone, be classified as belonging to any specific notified Backward Class Muslim community for reservation purposes.

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

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

Chhattisgarh HC dismisses plea against Saraswati Vandana prayer directive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Bisalpur

The Chhattisgarh High Court has dismissed a petition against the state's directive introducing the recitation of Saraswati Vandana and Gayatri Mantra in Government schools, noting the order contains no mandatory or coercive direction compelling students to act against their faith. A single bench of Justice Amitendra Kishore Prasad, in the judgment on July 2, termed the petition premature.

The judgment was uploaded on the HC's website on Tuesday.

The petition, filed by three persons, challenged a June 12 circular issued by the state's School Education Department directing all schools under it to conduct a series of daily cultural, educational and value-based activities from the 2026-27 academic session. The circular directed the recitation of the national anthem, national song, deep mantra, Saraswati Vandana, Guru Mantra, Shanti Mantra and accounts of the lives of great personalities during the morning assembly, and the state song, Gayatri Mantra and Shanti Mantra at the close of the school day.

The petitioners claimed the directive violated Articles 14, 21, 25, 28(1), 29 and 30 of the Constitution, arguing that students from minority communities could feel compelled to participate in religious practices not belonging to their faith.

Aamir Khan, counsel for the petitioners, submitted in the HC that educational institutions wholly funded by the state cannot enforce prayers associated with a particular religion, as doing so would be contrary to the constitutional principle of secularism.

The petitioners asserted that the chanting of Saraswati Vandana, Gayatri Mantra, Guru Mantra and Shanti Mantra amounts to imparting religious instructions and promoting a particular religion in Government schools, which is constitutionally barred.

Khan argued that compelling students to recite such mantras would infringe upon their freedom of conscience and religion, forcing them either to act against their beliefs or forego their education.

Opposing the plea, Deputy Advocate General Anand Dadariya argued that the petition was politically motivated and based on speculative apprehensions rather than any concrete injury.

He submitted that the June 12 circular was in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and sought to promote Indian knowledge systems and cultural awareness.

The state Government has merely operationalised these national pedagogical goals within its valid executive domain under Article 162 of the Constitution. Such policy measures cannot be labelled as unconstitutional or communal, he said. The state also informed the court that the policy had already been implemented across Government schools without any complaint from students, parents or teachers.

SC agrees to hear plea filed by CBSE class 9 students from Gulf countries

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to hear a plea challenging the CBSE's March 27 assessment scheme for regular students who were affected by the cancellation of Class XII board examination in Gulf countries due to the Iran-US war.

A bench of Justices KV Viswanathan and Alok Aradhe sought responses from the Centre and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on the plea filed by 30 regular students from Gulf countries.

The bench also sought responses from the Centre and the CBSE on a separate plea filed by a Class XII student from a Gulf country challenging the June 21 notification on the assessment of private candidates affected by the cancellation of examinations.

Advocate Raj Kishor Choudhary, who appeared for the petitioners, told the bench that students were not satisfied with the assessment scheme.

While issuing notice on the petitions, the bench said that a copy of the pleas should also be served on the office of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta.

It posted the matter for hearing on July 14.

Advocate Vineet Jindal also appeared for the petitioners. The plea filed by 30 students sought quashing of and/or suitably modifying the March 27, 2026 assessment scheme. It also sought a direction to the authorities to adopt a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory evaluation mechanism.

Besides several other directions, it urged that the CBSE be directed to conduct a special fresh examination and special improvement examination for affected students in all subjects, without any restriction on the number of subjects that may be opted for, and to permit such students to retain whichever result is more beneficial to them.

On June 22, the Centre had informed the apex court that the CBSE has come up with a new policy for the evaluation of private students who were affected by the cancellation of Class XII board examination in Gulf countries due to the war.

The Solicitor General, appearing for the Centre and the CBSE, had said that a fresh all-India policy was framed to address the concerns of similarly situated students affected by the cancellation of examinations in the Gulf countries due to the regional conflict.

The top law officer had said that under the new policy, which was notified on June 21, a distinct formula for evaluating private students appearing for the board exam was developed.

Delhi extortion case: HC seeks police stand on plea by Sukesh aide

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought Delhi Police's stand on a petition by a close aide of alleged fraudster Sukesh Chandrasekhar, challenging the framing of charges against her in a ₹200 crore extortion case.

The trial court on June 3 framed charges against Chandrashekar, Pinky Irani and 19 others for various offences, including under the stringent MCOCA provisions.

Justice Madhu Jain issued notice to Delhi Police on Irani's revision petition assailing the trial court order and granted two weeks to the investigating agency to file its response.

The bench also issued notice on Irani's plea seeking a stay on the trial court proceedings and listed the matter for further hearing on September 10.

Irani's counsel argued that she has been wrongly charged in the case, asserting that there was no basis to sustain the MCOCA provisions against her.

He submitted that MCOCA could be invoked when there is an involvement in an IPC offence, which was admittedly not the case here. MCOCA, or the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999, is a law enacted to combat organised crime syndicates and terrorism.

The act equips authorities with special powers to track,

intercept and penalise gang-related criminal activities that normal penal codes fail to deter.

Delhi Police's senior counsel opposed the petition and sought time to file response.

The trial court earlier ordered framing of charges against Chandrashekar for personating a public servant, extortion, cheating, criminal intimidation, criminal conspiracy, along with IT Act provisions and MCOCA sections for committing an organised crime and possessing unaccountable wealth on behalf of members of an organised crime syndicate.

Charges were directed to be framed against other accused persons as well for various penal offences, and under the IT Act and MCOCA provisions for committing organised crime.

The police's charge sheet has alleged that Irani used to portray Chandrasekhar as a business tycoon and was instrumental in facilitating his meetings with certain Bollywood personalities.

It has stated that the police had recorded the statements of several people, including Bollywood actors Jacqueline Fernandez and Nora Fatehi.Â

Chandrasekhar, who is currently in jail, is accused of cheating many people, including high-profile individuals such as former Fortis Healthcare promoter Shivinder Mohan Singh's wife Aditi Singh.

Police has alleged that Chandrasekhar and his associates reportedly took money from Aditi after posing as Government officials and promising to secure bail for her husband who was in jail in a money laundering case.

Chandrasekhar reportedly persuaded Aditi to transfer money by impersonating as a central Government official over a spoof call while he was lodged in Rohini jail and promised to manage bail for her husband, it alleged.

The high court had granted bail to Irani in the case on October 20, 2023.

Calcutta HC adjourns hearing in TMC bank accounts' case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kolkata

The private bank where three bank accounts of the Trinamool Congress party have been debit-frozen filed a report before the Calcutta High Court on Wednesday as per its direction to disclose the corpus held in those accounts.

Taking note of personal difficulty expressed by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who is representing the Bidhannagar police in this matter, Justice Saugata Bhattacharyya adjourned the hearing until Thursday.

Hearing a petition by the Mamata Banerjee-led faction of the TMC challenging the debit-freeze of the party's three bank accounts, Justice Bhattacharyya had on July 2 directed the private bank to disclose the corpus held in those accounts. The court did not open the report which was submitted because the hearing was adjourned.

Bringing to the court's notice that a few more bank accounts of the Trinamool Congress have also been debit-frozen, the Mamata Banerjee-led faction's lawyer Kishore Dutta stated that he will file a supplementary affidavit in this regard on the next date of hearing.

Justice Bhattacharyya said he is contemplating appointment of retired Calcutta High Court Judge Subrata Talukdar as a special officer over the debit-frozen bank accounts, but since his son represents one of the respondents as lawyer, he would seek the views of the parties in the matter if appointment of special officer is finally directed. Justice Bhattacharyya had on July 2 said the court is contemplating whether these three accounts can be allowed to be operated by joint special officers, who would be retired judges of the court, during the pendency of the petition.

Justice Bhattacharyya, during the hearing on July 2, also allowed the Bidhannagar Police to place records before the court on the next date regarding the complaint and the investigation into the resultant FIR. The debit operations of three bank accounts of the Trinamool Congress have been frozen following complaints by rebel party MLAs seeking a probe into the source of the funds.

Some MLAs aligned with the Ritabrata Banerjee-led faction of the TMC complained to the cyber crime police station of the Bidhannagar Police Commissionerate, seeking a detailed investigation into the accounts.

Kerala HC issues contempt notice to bureaucrat over sanction order in KSCDC graft case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kochi

The Kerala High Court on Wednesday issued a contempt notice to a bureaucrat over the contents of a Government order granting sanction to the CBI to prosecute KSCDC officials in a 2015 corruption case.

Justice A Badharudeen said he would not spare the official concerned, as the order granting sanction to prosecute several accused, including former KSCDC chairman R Chandrasekharan, who is also the state president of the Indian National Trade Union Congress, appeared to blame the judiciary. The court was referring to the contents of an earlier sanction order issued by the Government on July 2.

The Government had subsequently issued a fresh sanction order on July 6.

"Both disciplinary and contempt action should be taken against him (the official). I won't spare this man from contempt proceedings. He will be proceeded against. Strict action will be taken. There will be no leniency. There is no question of accepting an apology," Justice Badharudeen said, referring to the first sanction order.

The court also observed that the official — K Biju — appeared to be trying to save the accused in the case "for reasons known to him".

"That is the dangerous aspect of the order. How can an IAS officer say such things? He is saying the sanction order was passed because the court said so. It was an order to be issued based on the facts, dehors the prosecution records, and on primary satisfaction on merits. It was not to be issued based on what the court said," the judge observed. The court said that it was not a sanction order but one intended to "target the judiciary and the system".

"It is a very dangerous attitude on the part of the officer," it said, and ordered the personal appearance of the official on the next date of hearing, July 10. The court said the official should state in person why contempt of court proceedings should not be initiated against him.

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Stock markets slump 2% as US-Iran tensions rise

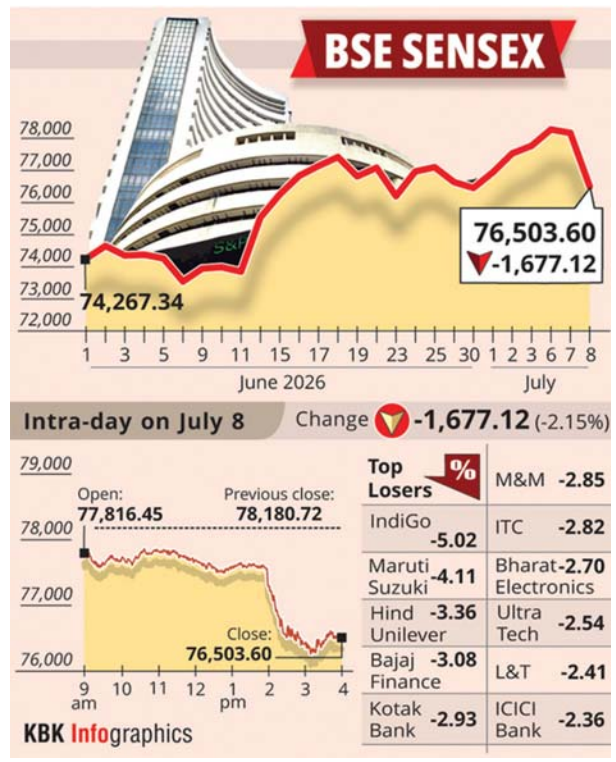
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Mumbai

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled over 2 per cent on Wednesday after US President Donald Trump said the interim agreement with Iran is over, leading to a sharp rally in crude oil prices.

Besides, investors shifted to a risk-off mode following pre-earnings anxiety over sluggish first-quarter forecasts amid a negative trend in global markets, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 1,677.12 points, or 2.15 per cent, to settle at 76,503.60. During the day, it plummeted 1,921.69 points, or 2.45 per cent, to 76,259.03.

A total of 3,211 stocks declined, while 1,070 advanced and 173 remained unchanged on the BSE. On similar lines, the 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 516.65 points, or 2.12 per cent, to end at 23,882.05.



"Indian equity markets witnessed a sharp sell-off as US President Donald Trump declared the interim peace deal with Iran is 'over' following Iranian attacks on commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, reigniting geopolitical tensions and raising fresh concerns over global energy supplies,"Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm.

The renewed escalation triggered a sharp rebound in crude oil prices, which surged nearly 7 per cent, sending shockwaves across global financial markets, he added.

All firms in the Sensex pack ended in the red. InterGlobe Aviation, Maruti, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finance, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra were major laggards.

The BSE MidCap Select index tanked 2.14 per cent, and the SmallCap Select index dropped 1.61 per cent.

All sectors ended lower. Services fell sharply by 3.21 per cent, PSU Bank (2.76 per cent), MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (2.74 per cent), FMCG (2.54 per cent), Financial Services (2.49 per cent), Bankex (2.46 per cent) and Top 10 Banks (2.34 per cent). Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 6.18 per cent to $78.74 per barrel.

Meanwhile, the rupee tanked 59 paise to settle at 95.55 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday.

"A global equity market sell-off triggered a massive correction in domestic benchmarks as investors turned risk-averse following a fresh wave of conflict in West Asia. A strong upsurge in crude oil prices, coupled with a sharp fall in the currency against the dollar, dampened sentiment,"Ankur Punj, MD & Business Head at Equirus Wealth, said.

Indications that a ceasefire between the US and Iran might fall apart also prompted investors to exit stocks at will, he added.

Investors' wealth erodes by ₹8.96 lakh crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Investors' wealth eroded by ₹8.96 lakh crore on Wednesday as equity markets went into a tail-spin after US President Donald Trump said the interim agreement with Iran is over, leading to a sharp surge in crude oil prices.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 1,677.12 points, or 2.15 per cent, to settle at 76,503.60. On similar lines, the 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 516.65 points, or 2.12 per cent, to end at 23,882.05. Tracking the bearish trend in equities, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by ₹8.96 lakh crore to ₹4,71,23,612.10 crore ($4.95 trillion).

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 6.18 per cent to $78.74 per barrel. "Indian equity markets witnessed a sharp sell-off as US President Donald Trump declared the interim peace deal with Iran is 'over' following Iranian attacks on commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, reigniting geopolitical tensions and raising fresh concerns over global energy supplies.

"The renewed escalation triggered a sharp rebound in crude oil prices, which surged nearly 7 per cent, sending shockwaves across global financial markets,"Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

All firms in the Sensex pack ended in the red. InterGlobe Aviation, Maruti, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finance, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra were major laggards.

India, ASEAN assess progress of FTA talks

India and the 11-nation ASEAN bloc on Tuesday took stock of the progress of talks for the review of free trade agreement in goods between the two sides, the commerce ministry said on Wednesday.
The India-ASEAN free trade agreement in goods was signed in 2009. ASEAN is a key trade partner of India with about 11 per cent share in India's global trade.
The progress of talks was reviewed during the 13th ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) Joint Committee (JC) and related meetings here.
"The Joint Committee provided strategic guidance to the Sub-Committees in their respective areas of work and urged them to expedite the finalisation of the outstanding chapters under the AITIGA review,"it said.
Bilateral trade between India and ASEAN reached USD 128 billion in 2025-26. *(PTI)*

Flipkart scraps ₹1,000 price cap to offer zero commission on fashion

E-commerce marketplace Flipkart has extended its zero-commission policy to include all products within its fashion category, removing the previous price cap of ₹1,000. The move will allow around 90,000 transacting sellers in the fashion segment to retain full margins, Flipkart said in a statement on Wednesday.
Previously, the platform applied the zero-commission policy only to fashion items priced up to ₹1,000.
"By extending this seller-first initiative across the entire fashion category, we are making a long-term investment in our sellers so they can invest more confidently in innovation, assortment expansion and brand building,"Kapil Thirani, Vice President of Flipkart Fashion, said.
Established in 2007, Flipkart has a registered user base of over 500 million and hosts more than 1.4 million sellers on its platform. *(PTI)*

Oil marketing companies, paint makers, aviation stocks tumble as crude oil prices jump

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Shares of oil marketing companies, paint manufacturers and aviation firms ended lower on Wednesday following a sharp surge in crude oil prices amid fresh tensions between the US and Iran.

The stock of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd tumbled 4.60 per cent, Indian Oil Corporation dropped 3.51 per cent and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd declined 3.20 per cent on BSE.

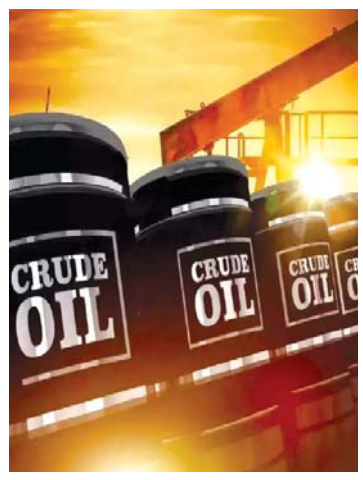
Among aviation firms, shares of InterGlobe Aviation tumbled 5.02 per cent and SpiceJet declined 3.04 per cent.

The stock of Shalimar Paints dropped 4.44 per cent, Indigo Paints fell by 4.18 per cent, Asian Paints edged lower by 2.49 per cent, Berger Paints dipped 2.26 per cent and Kansai Nerolac Paints slipped 1.95 per cent.

Crude oil is a key raw material for paint manufacturing companies.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 6.18 per cent to $78.74 per barrel.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 1,677.12 points, or 2.15 per cent, to settle at 76,503.60. On similar lines, the 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 516.65 points, or 2.12 per cent, to end at 23,882.05.



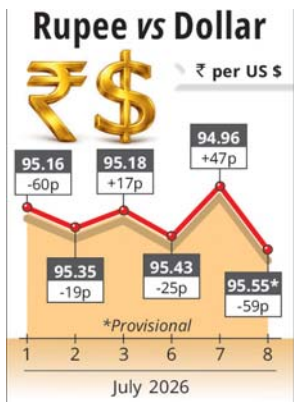
"Markets witnessed a sharp sell-off on Wednesday, with benchmark indices posting their steepest single-day decline in over two months amid adverse global cues.The sharp decline was triggered by renewed geopolitical tensions after the US President indicated that the US-Iran peace deal is 'over', reigniting concerns over a prolonged conflict in the Middle East,"said Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

The escalation pushed Brent crude prices sharply higher, reviving worries over inflation and its potential impact on India's macroeconomic outlook, he added.

Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said, "Indian equity markets witnessed a sharp sell-off as US President Donald Trump declared the interim peace deal with Iran is 'over' following Iranian attacks on commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, reigniting geopolitical tensions and raising fresh concerns over global energy supplies."

Energy markets also came under renewed pressure as the escalating conflict heightened concerns over potential disruptions to crude oil supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical energy transit routes, he added.

Rupee tanks 59 paise to close at 95.55 against US dollar



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The rupee tanked 59 paise to settle at 95.55 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday as the US launched fresh strikes on Iran after Tehran struck three ships in the Strait of Hormuz, pushing up crude oil prices and strengthening the dollar.

The US military attacked Iran early Wednesday after it said Tehran struck three ships in the Strait of Hormuz, part of an American effort that also revoked the Islamic Republic's ability to openly sell crude oil in the world market. Iran retaliated with strikes targeting Bahrain and Kuwait. Following the strikes, global crude oil prices rose exponentially. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading higher by 6.16 per cent at $78.73 per barrel in futures trade.

Weak domestic equity markets further weighed on the local unit, according to forex traders.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 95.15 against the US dollar and traded in the range of 94.98-95.61 during the day. It eventually settled at 95.55 (provisional), down 59 paise from its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee appreciated 47 paise to close at 94.96 against the US dollar.

"The rupee opened weaker against the dollar and continued to remain volatile intraday... the dollar was bought on dips as the equity markets were down and dollar index was up. Overall, today's rupee weakness was externally driven, mainly by higher crude oil prices, stronger US dollar, and geopolitical uncertainty,"Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said.

The rupee is expected to remain in the range of 95.25 to 96.00 on Thursday, he added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 101.13, up 0.11 per cent.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex crashed 1,677.12 points, or 2.15 per cent, to 76,503.60, while Nifty plummeted 516.65 points, or 2.12 per cent, to 23,882.05.

Foreign institutional investors purchased equities worth Rs 393.19 crore on a net basis on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

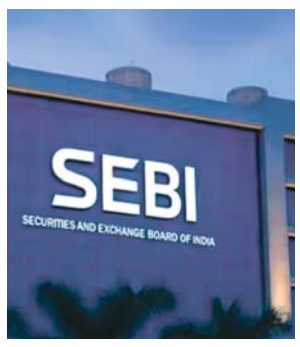
SEBI amends registration fee rule for FPIs; directs payment in rupee terms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Markets regulator SEBI has replaced the existing US dollar-denominated registration fee for Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) with a rupee-based fee structure.

To implement the change, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has amended the rules governing FPIs. The revised provisions will come into effect after six months, SEBI said in its notification dated July 3.

As per the notification, the regulator has revised the registration fee for Category-I FPIs from $2,500 to ₹2.3 lakh.



Similarly, registration fee for FPIs belonging to Category II has been revised from $250 to ₹23,000 The regulator has also revised the application fee for seeking general relaxations or exemptions from strict enforcement of regulations from $1,000 to ₹90,000 in eligible foreign exchange equivalent.

The markets watchdog has also updated the common application form used for FPI registration.

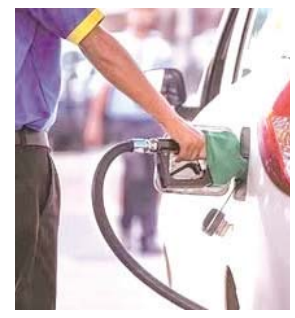
It has mandated including the applicant's date of birth or date of incorporation in the common application form to facilitate Permanent Account Number (PAN) allotment.

ISMA calls E20 petrol safety claims misleading, urges reliance on official data

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) on Wednesday said recent claims about E20 petrol damaging vehicles, attracting insects, invalidating insurance, or involving the direct mixing of sugarcane juice with fuel were 'misleading and factually incorrect'.

The industry body urged that public discourse on ethanol-blended petrol be guided by scientific



evidence, verified data and official clarifications.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has said India's Ethanol Blending Programme is scientifically validated, rigorously tested, and continuously monitored, in consultation with oil marketing companies, automakers, fuel testing agencies, and other stakeholders. The government said no incidents of engine failure or vehicle breakdown had been linked to E20 petrol since its rollout.

The ministry said fuel-grade ethanol is produced through industrial processes such as fermentation and distillation and does not resemble its original agricultural feedstock. It is made from multiple sources, including sugarcane juice, molasses, broken rice, and maize, and must meet fuel-quality standards before being blended with petrol, the ministry said.

ISMA said automakers, oil companies and industry bodies including the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), the Federation of Indian Petroleum Industry (FIPI) and the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI) have publicly defended E20, saying concerns about vehicle breakdowns stem from 'hearsay, misinformation and misunderstanding'.

Monsoon rains to pick up in July, boost kharif crop sowing: Shivraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Monsoon rains are expected to strengthen in July, aiding the sowing of kharif crops after a slow start to the season, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Wednesday.

The overall rainfall deficit narrowed to 24 per cent in July from 33 per cent in June, Chouhan told reporters after a high-level review meeting.

The number of rainfall-deficient districts fell to 178 from 262 as several parts of the country received good rain in recent days, he said.

The government is closely monitoring the situation in 13 states, including Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Bihar, Jharkhand, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal and Odisha, Chouhan said.

Gold falls ₹2,308/10g in futures on strong dollar, higher crude oil

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Gold futures slumped by Rs 2,308 to Rs 1.43 lakh per 10 grams on Wednesday, tracking losses in global markets as a rally in crude oil rates dented the appeal of the precious metal amid escalating tensions in West Asia.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, the yellow metal for August delivery declined by ₹2,308, or 1.59 per cent, to ₹1,43,084 per 10 grams in a business turnover of 10,440 lots.

Traders said rising crude oil prices following fresh hostilities in West Asia stoked inflation concerns, strengthening the US dollar and prompting investors to trim exposure

to precious metals.

"Gold prices traded lower in the domestic markets on Wednesday amid renewed geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, and concerns over potential supply disruptions through the Strait of Hormuz boosted oil prices and strengthened the US dollar,"Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

Aamir Makda, Commodity & Currency Analyst, Technical Research, Choice Broking, said, "Gold prices extended losses for the third consecutive session as concerns around inflation and higher interest rates rose after fresh US strikes on Iran lifted oil prices".

In the international markets, Comex gold futures for August delivery fell $94.69, or 2.28 per cent, to $4,062.71 per ounce in New York. Gold prices fell in the overseas trade as investors remained cautious ahead of the release of the US Federal Reserve's June meeting minutes, which are expected to provide further clarity on the interest rate outlook, Garg said.

He added that although weaker US macroeconomic data have supported expectations of future interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve, a firm dollar and profit-booking have kept precious metals under pressure.

IMF pares India's growth forecast to 6.4% for 2027 fiscal from 6.5% in April

SAGAR KULKARNI
Washington

India's economy is expected to grow at 6.4 per cent in fiscal year 2027, a tad slower than the 6.5 per cent projected in April, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Wednesday. The IMF, in its update to the World Economic Outlook (WEO), projected India to grow at 6.7 per cent in fiscal year 2028, an increase of 20 basis points from the 6.5 per cent growth projected in April.

"India remains among the fastest growing major economies, with growth projected at 6.4 per cent supported by strong momentum in private consumption and services activity,"the IMF said.

"Factors that are underpinning the forecast revisions are basically twofold. On the upside, we have the better-than-expected out turn in the most recent data, but we also have high-frequency indicators through April showing quite a bit of resilience in overall economic activity,"Deniz Igan, Division Chief (World Economic Studies), told reporters here on projections for India. But these positive effects are then more than offset for 2026 by the higher energy prices in the baseline and in the July update, as well as the greater pass-through of those higher oil prices to prices at the pump in India, she said.

"Moving into 2027, the IMF expects a strengthening of the economy with the energy shock dissipating and medium-term growth being estimated at around 6.5 per cent, and output closing we expect some pickup there," Igan added. *(PTI)*

FROM THE WORLD

BANGLADESH

5 children die in landslide

A landslide caused by monsoon rains killed at least five children as it swept through an Islamic school at a camp for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's southeastern Cox's Bazar district, a fire official said. More than 1 million refugees live in the camp. Dollar Tripura, local chief of the Fire Service and Civil Defence, said the landslide hit as children were attending classes.

Tripura said they rescued another five injured children but suspected that more could be buried.The rescue operation continued Wednesday evening.Three days earlier, landslides killed at least eight people at Rohingya camps in the area.The weather office in the South Asian nation's capital, Dhaka, forecast more rain in the coming days. (*PTI*)

UK

Woman hanged gets pardon

The last woman to be hanged in the UK on the charge of murdering her boyfriend was on Wednesday granted a conditional pardon after more than 70 years by King Charles III, on the advice of the British Government. Ruth Ellis shot David Blakely and was convicted of murder after a trial and executed on July 13, 1955. The application for a pardon was brought by four of Ellis' grandchildren on the basis that her culpability was "profoundly" shaped by domestic abuse, trauma and circumstances that were never properly recognised at her trial. The UK has since abolished the death penalty in law. "For 70 years, the family of Ruth Ellis have fought for her story to be heard. We cannot change what happened 70 years ago, but we can recognise that this was an exceptional case," David, Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Secretary, informed Parliament. (*AP*)

Russian strikes kill 4 in Kyiv; Ukraine hits oil hubs

ILLIA NOVIKOV ■ Kyiv

Russian drones and missiles killed four people across Ukraine on Wednesday in attacks before dawn and at midday, as Moscow kept up its pressure on the capital of Kyiv in the latest phase of the over 4-year-old war.

Ukraine struck oil refineries in Russia's Saratov and Tatarstan regions, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who was in Turkiye to meet with US President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the NATO summit.

Answering reporters' questions with Zelenskyy, Trump said the US would give licenses so that Patriot air defence systems can be made overseas for Ukraine to counter Russia. Zelenskyy thanked Trump for his support and said Kyiv wanted to discuss weapons supplies, possible peace negotiations and a developing drone deal.

"Air defence is the priority," Zelenskyy said, adding that Kyiv wanted to share details of its needs under the Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List, or PURL, in which European allies and Canada are buying American weapons to help his country.

Zelenskyy also said Ukrainian and US officials had begun work on a drone deal, calling it "a very good beginning." Russia attacks Kyiv, hours apart In Kyiv, several explosions were heard shortly after midnight, even before authorities could issue an air raid alert to give civilians time to find shelter.

The early morning Russian attacks killed one woman and injured two others in Kyiv, according to city administration head Tymur Tkachenko. The State Emergency Service said the attack damaged several administrative buildings and warehouses, as well as a garage complex and several trams.

Hours later, another Russian drone struck Desnianskyi district, killing a second person, Tkachenko said. A total of eight people were injured in the Russian attacks on the Capital.

In Kharkiv, two people were killed and 20 others were injured in a series of overnight strikes, according to Mayor Ihor Terekhov. In Zaporizhzhia, Russian guided bomb injured a man and a woman Tuesday night, regional head Ivan Fedorov said. Ukraine's air force says Russia fired 169 long-range strike drones and seven missiles, including five ballistic missiles. Air defences shot down or jammed 139 drones, and two anti-radar missiles didn't reach their targets, it said.

All five ballistic missiles and 20 drones struck targets at 15 locations, the air force said, underscoring the continued strain on Ukraine's air defences. Russia's Defence Ministry said it struck an arms industry facilities in Kyiv, hitting a plant that manufactured components for Flamingo cruise missiles. (*AP*)

Rescue workers search for victims after a Russian air attack in Kharkiv, Ukraine AP

Sri Lanka former president Wickremesinghe awaits indictment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Colombo

The next hearing in the case of misusing public funds against former president Ranil Wickremesinghe will take place on September 30, a Sri Lankan court announced on Wednesday.

Wickremesinghe became the first president to be arrested after he was accused of misusing public funds to attend a graduation of his wife Maithri Wickremesinghe at the Wolverhampton University in the UK in 2023.

The former president now awaits indictment as the CID officials told the Colombo Fort magistrate on Wednesday that investigations have been completed and the report forwarded to the Attorney General for further action.

The magistrate then fixed the next hearing of the case to September 30. Wickremesinghe was arrested and remanded in August last year. He was released on bail after a week.

The prosecutors have argued that the former president attending his wife's graduation was a personal issue and therefore using public funds to attend it was an abuse of state resources.

Drone strikes on civilian vehicles kill 20 in Sudan, say rights groups

FATMA KHALED ■ Cairo

Drone strikes on civilian vehicles headed to social gatherings in Sudan have killed over 20 people in recent days, according to rights groups, as the use of unmanned aircraft becomes increasingly common in the north eastern African country's war.

A drone hit the outskirts of Khartoum killing 10 civilians, including five women from the same family, as they drove to a wedding, the Sudan Doctors Network said on Wednesday. The medical aid group, which has been tracking violence between the military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces throughout the war - which is in its fourth year - blamed Tuesday's attack on a road west of Omdurman, the sister city of the capital, Khartoum, on the RSF. All of those on the vehicle, which caught fire, were killed.

The group said that the strike "was deliberate and carried out using a guided drone" and called for the international community to pressure RSF leadership to stop targeting civilians. A separate drone strike on Tuesday hit a transport vehicle near a water facility in the province, killing two people, according to Emergency Lawyers, which tracks violence in Sudan.

The previous day, 13 civilians, including five women, were killed when a drone hit their vehicle as they headed to a wedding in a al-Shaatout town, in North Kordofan province, Emergency Lawyers said.

"This attack is part of an escalating pattern of drone attacks on civilians as drones continue to fly over the northern parts of the province... monitoring residents' movements," the group said in a statement.

North Kordofan has seen a surge in drone strikes amid repeated international concerns about the RSF closing in on the strategic city of el-Obeid, which is home to the army's 5th Infantry Division.

Drone strikes on the city have destroyed civilian infrastructure, including power facilities and neighbourhoods, and targeted bridges and key supply routes, according to the UN.

The war in Sudan, which started in April 2023 after long-simmering tensions between the army and the RSF, has killed at least 59,000 people, displaced some 13 million and pushed many parts of the country into famine. More than 30 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. (*AP*)

Jaishankar meets Kuwaiti crown Prince to boost ties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kuwait City

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday met Kuwait's Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and the two leaders discussed ways to enhance the bilateral cooperation in various fields as well as developments in West Asia.

In a social media post, Jaishankar said he conveyed the greetings of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Crown Prince.

"Deeply appreciate his commitment to take forward our bilateral cooperation. Thank him for his sharing of perspectives on developments in the Gulf," the minister said.

In a post on X, the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry said that the two leaders discussed historical ties between the two countries and ways to enhance bilateral cooperation in various fields. Jaishankar also met his Kuwaiti counterpart Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and reviewed bilateral ties. They discussed ways to strengthen and develop cooperation in various fields, it added.

The two sides also discussed the latest regional and international developments, it added.

The Kuwaiti foreign minister also hosted a luncheon in honour of Jaishankar and the accompanying delegation. Jaishankar arrived in Kuwait on Tuesday and was received at the airport by Deputy Foreign Minister Hamad Suleiman Mashaan Al- Mashaan.

The minister is on a visit covering Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman from July 5 to 10. The Gulf visit comes against the backdrop of fast-evolving political dynamics in West Asia following the signing of an agreement aimed at ending the US-Iran conflict.

Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar meets Kuwait's Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah PTI

Sri Lanka to establish prison in former hospital after riot kills 28

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Colombo

Sri Lanka has initiated steps to establish a new prison complex at an abandoned hospital near the southern port city of Galle following a two-day riot at the Negombo prison that left 28 people dead, officials said on Wednesday.

The violence at the Negombo prison on July 5 and 6 that killed 28 people, including eight prison officials, was triggered by a dispute between rival groups of inmates over drugs.

Severe overcrowding became a major factor that prevented authorities from containing the clashes, officials said.

The death toll rose from 27 to 28 on Wednesday.The prison at Negombo – a coastal city about 35-odd kilometres north of Colombo – housed around 2,400 inmates at the time of the riot against its sanctioned capacity of 700, the prisoners' rights organisation said.

Berlin court sentences doctor to life for murdering 15 patients under palliative care

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Berlin

A Berlin court on Wednesday convicted and sentenced a German doctor to life in prison on charges of murdering 15 of his patients who were under palliative care, in a case involving allegations he torched the homes of victims to try to cover up the crimes.

The 41-year-old doctor, who has only been identified as Johannes M in line with Germany's privacy rules, went on trial nearly a year ago at a Berlin state court.

Part of an end-of-life care team at a nursing service in Berlin, he was initially suspected of the deaths of four patients. Prosecutors eventually accused him of the deaths of 15 people between September 2021 and July 2024. The Berlin court found the physician administered a lethal mixture of various medications to 12 women and three men, German news agency dpa reported.

Murder charges carry a maximum sentence of life in prison in Germany. A ruling of particularly severe guilt - which prosecutors had sought - would mean he wouldn't be eligible for release. The ruling also aligned with the prosecutors' request for a finding of serious guilt and a call for him to face a lifetime ban from practising medicine. After months of silence, the doctor confessed last month to killing a dozen seriously ill patients during home visits, dpa reported. He claimed he had convinced himself he was doing the right thing and sparing patients suffering and illness.

At the close of the trial, he apologised again to the bereaved families, the dpa report said. The doctor allegedly administered an anesthetic and a muscle relaxer to the patients without their knowledge or consent. The drug cocktail then allegedly paralysed the respiratory muscles. Respiratory arrest and death followed within minutes, prosecutors said.

The victims' ages ranged from 25 to 94. Most died in their own homes. The suspect was taken into custody in August 2024, and the trial ran from last July through the end of January this year.

A special investigation team of police and prosecutors initially investigated 395 cases. In 95, initial suspicion was confirmed and preliminary proceedings began.

54 terrorists, 38 security personnel killed in Balochistan over four days

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ■ Islamabad/Karachi

At least 54 terrorists, 38 security personnel and four civilians were killed during the last four days in various incidents in the restive Balochistan province, the ISPR said on Wednesday.

The trouble began on the night of July 4 and 5 when Fitna al Khawarij terrorists attacked the innocent local population in Hanna Urak, Director General Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), military's media wing, told a press conference at Rawalpindi.

The state uses the term Fitna al-Khawarij to refer to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliates.

Four civilians were killed and six injured during that incident, he said. In the second incident, terrorists late Monday night carried out a multi-directional attack on a police check post, set up to guard a Pumping Station in Mangi Dam in Ziarat district, in which nine policemen, including two station house officers (SHOs), were killed. At least 15 terrorists were killed in a retaliatory clearance operation following the attack, the ISPR DG said.

Several police officials were taken as hostages, making the subsequent operation by paramilitary Frontier Corps, army personnel and other law enforcement agencies (LEAs) complicated, he said. (*PTI*)

Indian envoy meets President of CPIFA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Beijing

Indian Ambassador Vikram Doraiswami on Wednesday met Wu Ken, President of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), which focuses on China's exchanges with the international community.

Ambassador Doraiswami "expressed his appreciation for CPIFA's contributions to promoting people-to-people exchanges, including through Track II and Track 1.5 dialogues," the Indian Embassy here said in a post on X.

CPIFA is one of the oldest Chinese organisations focusing on public diplomacy and international exchanges to promote friendship, mutual understanding, and dialogue between China and the international community.

Vikram Doraiswami

Ebola front-line workers in Congo strike over unpaid wages as outbreak spreads

PROSPER HERI NGORORA
■ Bunia

The healthcare workers at the epicentre of Congo's Ebola outbreak are walking off their jobs to protest delays in their payments, threatening efforts to slow the outbreak that officials said continues to spread faster than the response.

In Ituri province, the hardest hit among the three provinces in eastern Congo affected by the outbreak, some of the health professionals and other front-line workers said that they've not been paid their wages and bonuses since the outbreak was declared on May 15. They also alleged they were working with limited gear, and were being treated unfairly by authorities as well as response teams.

"Since the Ebola virus disease outbreak was declared, we've been demanding payment for our work," Dr Biensi Kano, a member of the epidemiological surveillance committee in Ituri's capital, Bunia, told *The Associated Press*.

The latest Government data shows 1,708 recorded cases, including 580 deaths, and that the first month of this Ebola outbreak was already the worst on record, health authorities said. The strike comes at the start of enrollment for clinical trials for the treatment of the Bundibugyo virus that is responsible for this outbreak.

The World Health Organisation representative in Congo, Dr Anne Ancia, said Tuesday that the virus continues to spread, fuelled by population movements and insecurity, while some treatment centres are at near-full capacity. The non-payment of benefits "exposes us and our families to significant socio-economic difficulties and seriously undermines our living conditions," said Kano. In an official notice to national and provincial authorities over the weekend, front-line workers in Ituri threatened to strike if the wages were not paid in 24 hours. By Tuesday, some had already stopped working although no official strike has been declared.

The aggrieved front-line workers also include safety and security teams, those that often embark on community outreach as well as those burying patients who died from Ebola.

Congo's Government did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the situation. Officials in Ituri, however, said they've met with the workers and their concerns are being addressed "The fact that Bunia airport is closed is hampering the very implementation of the response, particularly certain aspects of the flow of funds. This is one of the reasons that may account for the delay in payment," Akilimali Pierre, incident manager at Congo's National Institute of Public Health, told The Associated Press. Some of the workers organised a protest Monday outside the Rwampara Ebola treatment centre. (*AP*)

Trump slams NATO for rejecting Greenland claim

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Ankara

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, President Donald Trump and Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer during a group photo of NATO heads of State and Government at the NATO summit in Ankara, Turkey

President Donald Trump said Wednesday that the US will give a license for its Patriot air defence systems to be made overseas for Ukraine to counter Russian missile attacks, a huge coup for Ukraine which has badly needed the technology in the war now in its fifth year.

Trump made the announcement as he met Wednesday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the NATO summit in Turkiye, praising him as having "done an amazing job" and "been very effective" in the war.

"We'll give them the right to make Patriots. We'll show them how to do it," Trump said. Zelenskyy has long sought more of the defence systems, which are expensive, in high demand and take a long time to manufacture. He has been pressing for Ukraine to be granted a license to manufacture the technology. Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen on Wednesday rejected President Donald Trump's renewed demands that the US should take control of Greenland from NATO ally Denmark, saying that "Greenland is of course not for sale."

"We hope that all, including all allies, will respect the Greenland people's right for self-determination," Frederiksen said ahead of a meeting of the leaders of NATO member countries in Turkiye. "We are sovereign States and we need everybody to respect our territorial integrity and our sovereignty." Trump reopened old wounds over Greenland on the eve of the meeting by insisting that the United States should control the semiautonomous island.

NATO is founded on the principle that its 32 members will defend each others' territory, not threaten to seize it.

Frederiksen said Denmark is "ready to defend every inch of NATO including our own territory" in the event of an attack, and would rely on NATO allies to honor their commitment to defend each other. Iceland's Prime Minister, Kristrun Frostadottir, said Greenland "belongs to the people of Greenland," and called for unity among the NATO allies in the face of external dangers.

"We have threats coming from outside the alliance," Frostadottir said. "Russia is their biggest threat when it comes to these NATO allies. We need to focus on us and how we stick together."

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said from Ankara on Wednesday that he believes the United States is fully committed to the military organization, and praised Trump for taking forceful action against Iran overnight.

Court to rule on final challenge to T&T's gay sex ban in UK

DANICA COTO ■ San Juan

A nearly 10-year battle for gay rights in Trinidad and Tobago could end Wednesday at a final appeals court in England. Supreme Court judges in London will hold a hearing on a landmark human rights case that could decriminalise gay sex in the eastern Caribbean nation, potentially setting a precedent for the largely conservative Caribbean region. The case was filed in February 2017 by Jason Jones, who argues that so-called "buggery" laws in the twin-island nation that date from the colonial era and prohibit gay sex are unconstitutional. Those found guilty could receive up to five years in prison. Opposing Jones are Trinidad and Tobago's Government, backed by the country's Council of Evangelical Churches and its largest Hindu organisation, Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha. The case has wound its way through several courts. In April 2018, Trinidad's High Court found the laws unconstitutional, but a local appeals court partially reversed that ruling in March 2025. In July of that year, Trinidad's Court of Appeals allowed Jones to seek a ruling from the final court of appeals in England. Now, the case is before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, and activists across the Caribbean are closely watching the outcome. In 1991, the Bahamas decriminalised homosexuality, while the UK Government repealed such laws in 2001 in Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Recently, judges have struck down similar laws in Barbados, Dominica, St Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda. Gay sex, however, remains a crime in Grenada, Jamaica, Trinidad. (*AP*)

UN urges west to engage Afghanistan to avoid instability

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Athens

It is crucial for Western nations to engage with Afghanistan to prevent the country from sliding back into instability that could have repercussions far beyond its borders, two top United Nations officials said. "The lesson of (the) recent past is that ignoring Afghanistan is not a good thing to do," the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Barham Salih, told The Associated Press in an interview Tuesday alongside the head of the United Nations Development Program, Alexander De Croo, during a joint visit to the country. Although many challenges and difficulties remain, "it's wiser to engage, to support and promote the right type of policies to making sure that Afghanistan remains safe and secure," Salih said, speaking via video link. "Without it, I think we may well risk instability, with all the implications of that instability," whether that is drugs, extremism, criminal activity or the movement of refugees, he said.

Israeli strike kills World Cup screening organiser in Gaza

WAFAA SHURAFA/SAMY MAGDY/ JULIA FRANKEL ■ Deir Al-Balah

An Israeli strike on Gaza just before the kickoff of the Egypt-Argentina World Cup match killed a top Palestinian aid official who helped organise public screenings of the game across the enclave, according to local health officials.

The blast turned what was supposed to be a moment of celebration - the live screening of a potential Argentina upset by an Arab team - into a reminder of how the near-daily Israeli strikes across Gaza are continuing to kill civilians despite a truce reached in October.

The bomb hit a car in the Sabra neighbourhood of Gaza City at dusk Tuesday, killing passersby Mohamed al-Wahidi, an official at the Egyptian Committee in Gaza, 10-year-old boy Hamza al-Deri and his 8-year-old brother Fari. Ahmed Daghmush, 33, the driver of the car, was also killed. That's according to Dr Mohamed Abu Selmiya, the director of Shifa Hospital which received the four bodies.

The Israeli military said that al-Wahidi, who helped organise the soccer screenings, was not a target of the strike. It said the strike was aiming for a Hamas militant and that it was checking if Daghmush was the target of the strike. Daghmush is a taxi driver not known to be affiliated with any militant group, Abu Selmiya said.

An Israeli strike hit the same street half an hour earlier, causing no casualties. The Egyptian Committee for which al-Wahidi worked is the relief arm of the Egyptian Government, which provides food, shelters and other assistance to Palestinians in Gaza. The committee also organised the initiative to put up screens across Gaza to watch soccer matches, it said.

Many in the Palestinian diaspora live right across the border in Egypt, which was a key mediator of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire. Team Egypt's Gaza fanbase has only grown since the start of the tournament, as coach Hossam Hassan has spotlighted the plight of the Palestinian people in press briefings and on the pitch. He dedicated his team's victory over Australia on Friday to both Egyptians and Palestinians and waved a Palestinian flag on the pitch.

In a Monday briefing before the match against Argentina, Hassan urged the world to do more for the Palestinian people.

"I urge you, I urge all media officers, all athletes worldwide, regardless of their identities, maybe we can convey a collective message that is as follows, let the Palestinian people be, let them exist, let them live a life of their own," he said. (*AP*)

Bus collision with truck leaves 14 dead in northern Uganda

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Kampala

At least 14 people have died and 28 others were injured after a bus collided with a truck in a remote area of northern Uganda, police said on Wednesday. The incident happened late on Tuesday at a trading centre along the highway to the northern city of Gulu, according to a police statement. "Preliminary reports indicate that the driver of the bus, who was allegedly speeding, attempted to avoid a pedestrian crossing the road, lost control of the vehicle and collided head-on with the oncoming trailer," the police statement said.Fatal road crashes are common in Uganda and elsewhere in East Africa, where roads are often narrow. Police usually blame such accidents on speeding drivers.

China allocates millions in new disaster relief after storms, landslide

KEN MORITSUGU ■ Beijing

China allocated millions of dollars in additional relief funding for disaster-hit areas Wednesday after severe storms destroyed homes and displaced thousands of people and a landslide killed 21 forestry workers.

The central Government allocated 50 million yuan ($7.4 million) to restore roads, schools and other facilities in central China's Hubei province and another 20 million yuan to help rebuild homes and resettle residents there, State media said. Eleven people died and hundreds were injured Monday night in violent thunderstorms and rare tornadoes.

The Government also allocated 30 million yuan ($ 4.4 million) to Gansu province, where the landslide buried the forestry workers. The money came on top of 100 million yuan ($14.7 million) allocated earlier for schools, hospitals, transport and other infrastructure in southern China's Guangxi region, where severe flooding inundated cities and stranded residents after heavier-than-expected rainfall from a tropical storm.

Lu Xiaofei, who works in Shenzhen, a tech hub near Hong Kong, said her brother's family was stuck at his house in Lu village in Qintang district. His brother was with his wife, his 9-month-old baby, their parents and grandfather.

"The water in the house is over one person's height. They have to all move to the second floor. The power has been out since yesterday morning, and now they don't have running water, either," Lu told The Associated Press in a phone interview.

Lu said her brother told her that the water level rose last night and their situation was so dire that drinkable water would be running out soon, and local authorities had not reached out to them. Many villagers nearby were facing the same challenges, she said.

Others called for help on social media, showing videos of their flooded surroundings and highlighting their lack of resources.

Reservoirs were breached or burst after Tropical Storm Maysak hit Guangxi, sending torrents of water into towns and cities. Six people were reported dead and about 1,30,000 have been evacuated. (*AP*)

Pakistan teams locates wreckage of missing plane in Arabian Sea

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi

Representative Photo

Pakistani search and rescue teams on Wednesday located and identified the wreckage of a private cargo aircraft that went missing with five crew members on board a day earlier, officials said.

The Pakistan Navy and the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) have successfully located and identified the wreckage of K2 Airways Cargo B737, which was declared missing last night, the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) said in a post on X. The wreckage was recovered from 53 NM South of ORMARA, it said, adding that efforts are underway to find the missing crew members.

The Boeing 737 cargo aircraft, operated by Karachi-based private airline K2 Airways, vanished from radar on Tuesday night after it was seen descending rapidly and making a sudden change in direction during the flight. The PAA earlier said that contact with the aircraft was lost at 09:21 pm (local time) on Tuesday, about 300 kilometres west of Karachi. The aircraft went missing while flying reportedly at an altitude of 34,000 feet. The aircraft was carrying five crew members — Captain Muhammad Rizwan Idris, First Officer Faisal Mahmood, Loadmaster Muhammad Taufiq Khan, Engineer Arif Siddiqui and Engineer Muhammad Hamid.

The aircraft reportedly had remained in Sharjah for about 10 days after developing a technical fault. The PAA earlier said that the cargo flight reported a navigational system issue at 09.18 pm (local time) on Tuesday and was promptly guided by Karachi Area Control Centre (ACC).

"However, at 09.22 pm (local time), the aircraft was observed on radar rapidly descending with a rapid heading change.

Subsequently, radar contact and communication were lost approximately 155 NM west of Karachi," it said.

Consul General of India in New York, Binaya Pradhan visiting INS Sudarshini in New York PTI

Funeral procession begins in Najaf for Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA ■ Najaf

Mourners carry the coffin of the late Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during funeral prayers held as part of the dayslong funeral ceremonies at the Holy Jamkaran Mosque in Qom, Iran PTI

Funeral processions for Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei began on Wednesday in the Iraqi city of Najaf with thousands of mourners present.

The Islamic Republic's days-long funeral for Khamenei began Saturday, with authorities shutting down streets, airspace and daily life in Tehran as mourners commemorate the life of the man who led Iran for decades with an iron fist while confronting the West.

His body will later be taken from Najaf to the city of Karbala before returning to Iran.

Khamenei was killed in late February in wide-scale US and Israeli strikes on Iran. He was among several senior Iranian leaders killed in strikes during the war. He was 86. Talks between the United States and Iran appear to be on hold until after the burial.

However, strikes from both sides in the Persian Gulf Tuesday and into Wednesday raised risks that the interim agreement to end the monthslong war that engulfed the Mideast could break down.

The US military attacked Iran early Wednesday after it said Tehran struck three ships in the Strait of Hormuz, before Iran launched retaliatory strikes on Kuwait and Bahrain.

Khamenei's body arrived Tuesday in Najaf, considered one of the holiest of cities for millions of Shiite Muslims worldwide. Mourners holding portraits of the late supreme leader welcomed the body and senior officials escorting it, including Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

The body was placed in a casket draped in the Islamic Republic's flag and encased in glass.

Some supporters performed self-flagellation on the streets, while others waved Iranian as well as red and black flags symbolising mourning and revenge.

Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim, a senior scholar at the Najaf seminary, led the funeral prayers at the Shrine of Imam Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law.

As the coffin was carried into the shrine, large crowds of mourners pushed and shoved their way to get close to it.

Some threw themselves onto the casket, as the al-Hakim struggled to control the crowd, urging the pallbearers to carry it closer to the ground for fear it might fall.

"We, the people of Iraq, will remain a thorn in the eyes of the enemies," said Jaafar Jawad, a funeral attendee. "(His body arriving here) is the greatest possible honour, and God willing, we will be loyal and repay a little of his debt in the holy city of Najaf."

The body is expected to arrive later Wednesday in Karbala, a holy city for Shiite Muslims where the Imam Hussein, the grandson of the prophet, was killed in 680 AD. Abdul Mahdi al-Karbalaei, a representative of Iraq's top Shiite religious authority, will lead the prayers at the Imam Hussein Shrine.

Iran's new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, has yet to make an appearance in the funeral ceremonies, which are unfolding over several days.

He is believed to be in hiding after reportedly being wounded in the airstrike that killed his father.

PROSPECT

MAJ GEN ANURAG VIJ VISITS EKTA CAMP AT NARANGI TRANSIT FACILITY AT GUWAHATI

Maj Gen Anurag Vij, ADG, NER visited the Ekta Camp at Narangi Transit facility at Guwahati.

The General officer witnessed an enthralling cultural program presented by Imphal Gp and Guwahati Gp cadets. ADG addressed the cadets and urged them to utilises the opportunity given by NCC to set aside their differences and enable the current generation of young minds to join the mainstream of India and be a part of progressive nation that we are. The General also interacted with the cadets in the camp area. The concept of Ekta Camp was envisaged to bring together different ethnic cities of State of Manipur. So that a sense of national unity, discipline can be inculcated. (*PNS*)

India's ethanol programme becomes more resilient: AIDA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

India's Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme continues to strengthen with a more diversified and resilient feedstock basket, according to the latest ethanol supply data released by the All India Distillers' Association (AIDA). The ongoing Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2025-26 reflects the growing maturity of India's biofuel ecosystem, with grain-based feedstocks continuing to dominate ethanol production while ensuring greater supply stability through a balanced mix of raw materials.

As of June 2026, cumulative ethanol supplies have reached 717 crore litres against contracted volumes of 1,048 crore litres, representing an overall supply achievement of 68% during the ongoing supply year.

The latest data reveals that grain-based ethanol accounts for nearly 67% of total ethanol supplied (480 crore litres), while sugarcane-based feedstocks contribute 238 crore litres (33%), reaffirming the strategic role of grain in sustaining India's ethanol blending programme. While maize continues to be India's single largest feedstock with 258 crore litres of ethanol supplied, latest supply pattern reflects an increasingly diversified feedstock ecosystem.

Ethanol produced from Surplus FCI grains has reached 177 crore litres, while Sugarcane Juice (SCJ) has contributed 144 crore litres, B-Heavy Molasses 82 crore litres, and Damaged Food Grains 45 crore litres. The balanced contribution from multiple feedstocks has significantly strengthened supply resilience, reduced dependence on any single agricultural crop and enabled ethanol availability.

Vijendra Singh, President, AIDA said: "The latest ethanol supply data demonstrates that India's biofuel programme has evolved into a robust and resilient ecosystem driven by diversified feedstocks. While maize continues to be the largest contributor, the increasing participation of surplus food grains and sugarcane-based feedstocks reflects the strength of a balanced supply chain." Bharati Balaji, Deputy Director General, AIDA added "India's ethanol programme is now transitioning from a capacity-building to resilience-building phase. The supply pattern reflects success of policy interventions that have encouraged multiple feedstocks to participate in programme."

Missing ingredient in corporate success: Spirituality

RAJIV K

Walk into the boardroom of any successful company and you will find discussions about strategy, market share, artificial intelligence, growth targets, and shareholder value. These conversations are essential. Yet there is another ingredient that rarely appears on the agenda but often determines whether success is sustainable: spirituality.

The word "spirituality" makes many executives uncomfortable. It is frequently mistaken for religion or a retreat from ambition. It is neither. Spirituality is about cultivating self-awareness, integrity, purpose, and the ability to remain centered amid uncertainty. Far from weakening ambition, it gives ambition direction.

The corporate world rewards intelligence, resilience, and execution. But today's business environment also demands emotional maturity. Leaders are expected to navigate disruption, inspire diverse teams, make ethical decisions under pressure, and create cultures where innovation thrives. Technical competence may earn a promotion, but character determines whether leadership endures.

History is full of examples of brilliant executives whose careers collapsed because success outpaced wisdom. We have also seen leaders who, despite enormous pressure, retained humility, treated people with respect, and earned trust across organizations. The difference was not simply experience or education. It was the presence of an inner compass.

Spirituality provides that compass. A spiritually grounded leader is not free from stress; rather, they respond to stress differently. Instead of reacting impulsively, they pause. Instead of allowing ego to dominate decisions, they listen. Instead of viewing colleagues as competitors, they recognize them as partners in a shared mission. These shifts may appear subtle, but over time they profoundly influence organizational culture. Perhaps the greatest misconception is that compassion and competitiveness cannot coexist. In reality, the strongest organizations often demonstrate both. Companies that foster trust, fairness, and respect consistently attract better talent, inspire greater loyalty, and encourage more creative thinking. Ethical leadership is not merely a

moral aspiration—it is a strategic advantage. Spirituality also changes the definition of success. Promotions, bonuses, and recognition remain meaningful, but they cease to become the sole measure of achievement. The more enduring questions become: Did I build trust? Did I develop people? Did I leave my organization stronger than I found it? Did my decisions create value beyond quarterly numbers?

This broader perspective does not reduce performance; it elevates it. Leaders who operate from purpose rather than ego often make better long-term decisions because they are less distracted by short-term applause and more committed to lasting impact.

The modern workplace is also confronting an epidemic of burnout. Many professionals are climbing the corporate ladder only to discover that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall. They have accumulated impressive résumés but neglected their inner lives.

Meditation, reflection, gratitude, and moments of silence are not luxuries reserved for weekends or retreats. They are practical disciplines that sharpen judgment, improve emotional regulation, and strengthen resilience.

None of this requires abandoning ambition. On the contrary, ambition becomes healthier when guided by values. One can negotiate fiercely without sacrificing fairness, compete vigorously without losing compassion, and pursue excellence without becoming consumed by ego.

The leaders who will define the coming decade are unlikely to be remembered solely for the size of their balance sheets or the speed of their growth. They will be remembered for the cultures they built, the lives they influenced, and the integrity with which they exercised power.

In the end, the corporate ladder is only a means, not an end. The true measure of success is not how high we climb but who we become in the process. Titles may open doors, wealth may create opportunities, and influence may command attention. Character, however, earns respect that outlasts any position.

As businesses navigate an increasingly complex world, perhaps the next great competitive advantage will not come from another technological breakthrough or management framework. It may come from leaders who combine strategic excellence with spiritual depth—leaders who understand that lasting success is achieved not by choosing between performance and purpose, but by allowing each to strengthen the other.

The writer is a thought leader and business evangelist

Amit Shah orders swift completion of immigration checkpoints at Jewar and Agartala airports

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday directed that authorised immigration checkpoints at the Jewar airport in Noida and the Agartala airport be made operational at the earliest.

Reviewing passenger facilities, security arrangements, and the immigration system at major airports with Union Minister of Civil Aviation Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu, Shah directed that 21 under-development airports and the remaining 41 airports be prioritised for development based on passenger traffic, in accordance with the security standards prescribed by the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS). Shah instructed that all 62 airports should be fully operational within two years, aiming to enhance passenger convenience while ensuring that commercial areas comply with established norms.

He stated that Foreigners

Regional Registration Office (FRRO) offices should be made operational at the headquarters of all States by 2027. "He also directed that the authorised immigration checkpoints at Agartala and Jewar airports be made operational at the earliest," the government said in a statement. To promote the Fast Track Immigration-Trusted Travellers' Programme (FTI-TTP), Shah suggested establishing a mechanism in coordination with airlines to send WhatsApp messages to passengers when booking international tickets, encouraging them to register for FTI-TTP.

Shah called for the phased installation of the Automated X-ray Tray Return System (ATRS) at all airports nationwide to reduce human resource costs and establish appropriate standards for this system.

The meeting was attended by the Union Home Secretary, Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Director General of Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Chairman of Airports Authority of India and several other senior officers of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Civil Aviation, the statement said. Shah directed the development of a comprehensive framework that considers the interdependence of entry lanes, check-in counters, security screening lanes, and immigration counters at airports to prevent disruptions in passenger flow at any touchpoint. He mentioned that a coordinated plan has been created for each touch-point at airports to ensure the seamless movement of passengers.

The Union minister also directed the Ministry of Civil Aviation to lay down norms for the number of aerobridges at all airports based on passenger traffic and air traffic, the statement said.

He highlighted that the baggage drop facility, currently available at 16 major airports, should be extended to other international airports with high passenger traffic as well. Shah emphasised the importance of maintaining the educational qualifications required for personnel of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) assigned to X-ray screening duties, stating that only officers and personnel meeting these educational criteria should be tasked with these responsibilities. The home minister said that the Civil Aviation Ministry and the Central Industrial Security Force should independently commission separate third-party studies during peak season to assess and reduce passenger delays at all touchpoints across major airports.

ACA announces players' pool for inaugural Assam Premier League Auction

ASSAM PREMIER LEAGUE
AAMAR AXOM, AAMAR GOURAB

TONY DAS
Guwahati

Assam Cricket Association (ACA) has officially announced the players' pool for the inaugural edition of the Assam Premier League (APL).

A total of 275 players has been shortlisted for the auction from among the registered players who expressed their interest in participating in the league. The shortlisted players will now go under the hammer in the APL Player Auction.

The APL Player Auction is scheduled to be held on 19th July, 2026, at the ACA Stadium, Guwahati, where the participating franchises will select players to form their respective squads for the inaugural season of the league.

The League will serve as a premier platform for showcasing cricketing talent and will also play a significant role in the identification and selection of players for the forthcoming BCCI domestic season.

Further details will be communicated in due course.

DAILY SUDOKU

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

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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 (8.7.26)

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

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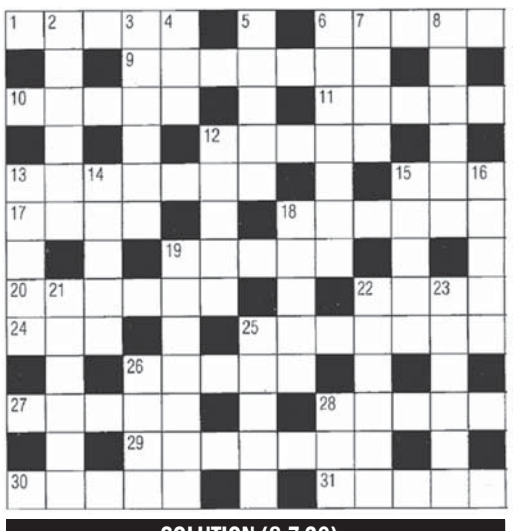
DOUBLE CROSSWORD
THURSDAY | JULY 9, 2026



ACROSS
1 On paper, a try (5)
6 She shows there's nothing very soft in Paisley's exterior (5)
9 Name or part of the number on a passenger vehicle (7)
10 One's personal box of vital possessions
11 In public transport, they are not unparalleled (5)
12 A penetrating product long handled (5)
13 Poetry the boy sent astray (7)
15 He robs tyrants of lots of money (3)
17 Scheme to keep the allotment holder busy (4)
18 A strong, firm fellow (6)
19 Food painfully taken? (5)
20 Getting back in less than a day is tiresome! (6)
22 To cheat some people is a bad thing to do (4)
24 He likes a drink, so starts tippling (3)
25 Generous politician? (7)
26 Great enthusiasm of a chap for a piano piece (5)
27 Good man, though he made a bad start in wrecking a boat (5)
28 Figure the general's about surrendered!
29 Being quite elderly, they've left school
30 Thin and weak, yet growing strong? (5)
31 My tea cannot possibly be vegetarian!

DOWN
2 Instructive group of artists? (6)
3 Away somewhere, like a sailor mending nets (6)
4 Still the old-fashioned shirt style (3)
5 Discontinue operations on the street (5)
6 When held up, it keeps airborne troops on the cool side (7)
7 Is he honoured for his warm heart? (4)
8 Dusty substance found in bloomers (6)
12 Just a yarn, so try to edit it (5)
13 Colorado beetle's favourite veg (5)
14 Saw up a piece of music! (5)
15 Out East, knotted cord used for furnishings, etc. (5)
16 The way a swimmer is often termed "cold" (5)
18 Her insurance liability is much reduced (5)
19 Some atlases are grey covered, very largely (7)
21 Money around which troubles are centred? (6)
22 Think up a way for Sid and Eve to get together (6)
23 Father torn from mother, maybe (6)
25 Such dancers bend over backwards to succeed (5)
26 The way one feels about a low number?
28 Jim's sound place of exercise (3)

SOLUTION (8.7.26)

ACROSS
9, For-E-bear
10, R-O-e
11, Imp-O-Rt
12, Un-fair
13, So-me-one
14, D-ove(r)
15, Carried out
17, Beetr-OO-t
18, Convert
19, Draw (rev)
21, Ac-Cu-se
24, Throws in the sponge
27, A-s-well
29, Tos-h (rev)
30, As-C-ends
33, Together
35, For-getting
36, No-L-a (rev)
37, E-X-perts
38, Letter
40, Settle
41, Eye (I)
42, Mi-shear-d

DOWN
1, Round-about
2, Beta
3, Hear hear
4, Press on
5, Demo bowler
6, Aide de camp
7, Spid-er (rev)
8, P-Revious
10, Remit (rev)
16, Reverse
20, Rates
22, Content
23, Gift wrapped
25, Well-heeled
26, End in tears
28, Show over
31, Seed-less
32, P-resume
34, Ex-acts
35, Force
39, T-I-es (rev)

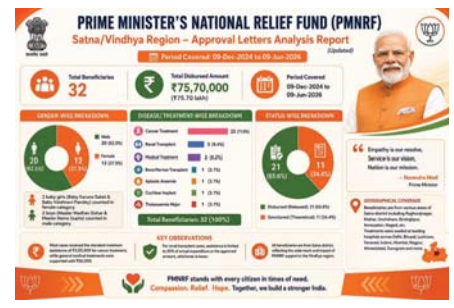
32 critically ill from Satna receive ₹75.78 lakh from PM's relief fund

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Reflecting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to ensuring that no citizen is denied medical treatment due to financial constraints, a total financial assistance of ₹75.78 lakh has been sanctioned from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund for the treatment of 32 critically ill patients from the Satna Parliamentary Constituency. The assistance was approved across various cases between December 9, 2024 and June 9, 2026.

Expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Satna Member of Parliament Ganesh Singh said that the Prime Minister's vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas" is not merely a slogan but a commitment that brings hope and relief to poor, distressed and vulnerable families. He noted that through the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund, the Central Government has provided timely financial support to families battling life-threatening illnesses, setting example of compassionate and people-centric governance.

MP Ganesh Singh stated that under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, governance today is focused not only on designing welfare schemes but also on ensuring that their benefits effectively reach the last person in the queue. He described PMNRF as a powerful manifestation of this humane



approach, providing economically weaker families with both financial support and hope during medical emergencies.

Among the 32 beneficiaries, 20 are men and 12 are women. Nearly 72 per cent of the patients were suffering from cancer, while financial assistance was also sanctioned for patients requiring renal transplants, bone marrow transplants, treatment for aplastic anaemia, cochlear implants, thalassemia major, and other critical medical procedures.

MP Ganesh Singh reiterated that, under the guidance of PM Modi, he remains committed to ensuring that every eligible and needy citizen in the Satna Parliamentary Constituency receives the benefits of Central Govern ment's welfare initiatives. He appealed to residents to approach the MP's office in cases of serious illness and avail themselves of assistance under PM's National Relief Fund.

Several trains rescheduled between Patli yard and Sultanpur Kaliawas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Due to power and traffic block for shifting of cross over point no. 62a and 62b in connection with Phase 1-B work i.e. connection of Patli yard to Sultanpur Kaliawas station several train will be rescheduled, Northern Railway said in a press release.

Train no. 19609 - Udaipur City - Yog Nagari Rishikesh JCO July 11, 2026 will be rescheduled for 14.45 hrs. ex Udaipur City (i.e. 60" late).

DN loop line will remain suspended after the block of 11/12.07.2026 and will be restored after the block of 12/13.07.2026. Stoppage of all down trains (08 trains) at PATLI will be skipped. List of trains stoppage skip at PATLI are Train no 74004 Rewari jn. - Delhi jn, Train no 14727 Shri Ganganagar - Tilak Bridge, Train no 54414 Rewari jn. - Delhi jn, Train no 54310 Hisar - Delhi Jn, Train non 14029 Shri Ganganagar - Delhi Jn and Train no 54411 Rewari jn. - Meerut Cant.

Punjab & Sind Bank gets approval to set up IFSC banking unit at GIFT City

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

State-owned Punjab & Sind Bank on Wednesday said it has received the licence from the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) to establish an IFSC Banking Unit (IBU) at GIFT City, Gandhinagar.

This marks a step in the bank's journey towards expanding its international banking presence and offering

world-class offshore banking services, Punjab & Sind Bank said in a statement.

The IBU will cater to the financing needs of corporate, financial institutions, importers and global investors through a range of foreign currency banking, trade finance, and other international financial services, it said.

The bank remains committed to supporting the Government of India's vision of developing GIFT IFSC into a leading global financial centre while strengthening its international business capabilities, it said.

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BRIEFLY

Naomi Osaka laments sore feet and getting old

Sure, Naomi Osaka is a four-time Grand Slam champion who also impresses with her fashionable outfits. On Tuesday, she sounded like the rest of us. The plantar fasciitis was acting up. She's working too much. "I'm just getting old," Osaka said. The 28-year-old Osaka's Wimbledon run and fashion show ended in a 7-6(4) 6-4 loss to Karolina Muchova in the quarterfinals of the grass-court Grand Slam.

Osaka, a former No. 1 player, had ousted top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka in the fourth round – with arguably some of her best tennis since returning from maternity leave – but couldn't find her rhythm Tuesday against her Czech opponent. "It's hard because I played so well in my last match, then today I just feel like I didn't play well at all and I didn't have any energy," said Osaka, who despite the loss still had her best result at the All England Club by reaching the quarterfinals. "I could feel it coming because I've played way more matches than I usually do before a Slam," she added. "I just wanted to try that to see the rhythm, you know? Obviously it worked out well. But I think I probably won't do that again. But yeah, I would say it was like an accumulation of playing two weeks straight without a day off." (*AP*)

A Cairo coffee house erupts, then goes silent

The small coffee house in Cairo turned into a tiny stadium. Several hundred people, mostly men and boys as young as 7, gathered around wall-mounted screens ahead of the kickoff whistle. The scene played out across the soccer-mad nation as Egypt faced the defending World Cup champion in the round-of-16 fixture in Atlanta. It was a historic day for millions of Egyptians even after their national team's adventure reached its end with Tuesday's 2-3 loss to Argentina. "It's a brutal scenario," Ahmed Saadany, a teacher, reflected after the game. "The journey shouldn't have ended that way." With their own star Mohamed Salah, Egypt reached the round of 16 by beating Australia 4-2 on penalty kicks after a 1-1 draw in the round of 32 on Friday. The Pharaohs advanced to the knockout stages – their first ever – after securing the second place in the Group G, behind Belgium. (*AP*)

EU lawmakers call for investigation into FIFA boss

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Brussels

Dozens of European lawmakers are gathering support to launch an investigation in the European Parliament of FIFA boss Gianni Infantino over his involvement in the decision to permit US striker Folarin Balogun to play despite an earlier red card.

Balogun was shown a red card during the US victory over Bosnia-Herzegovina on July 1, which normally would make him ineligible to play in team's next game, but FIFA lifted his suspension for a match on Monday after US President Donald Trump intervened with Infantino on behalf of the 25-year-old striker.

European Parliament lawmakers Barry Andrews, Lara Wolters and Niels Fuglsang said in a joint statement that FIFAs decision to "change the rule on red card suspensions mid-tournament is a disgrace and a perversion of justice."

"Once again, we've seen Infantino and FIFA surrender to the demands of the Trump administration," the statement said.

The lawmakers are asking the national football associations of the EU countries to spur the FIFA Ethics Committee to investigate Infantino and whether pressure from the Trump administration was a factor in the lifting of the suspension, as well as "other potential breaches of political neutrality" like awarding Trump the FIFA Peace Prize.

> FIFA HAS SAID THE LIFTING OF THE SUSPENSION WAS A DECISION OF A DISCIPLINARY PANEL

FIFA has said the lifting of the suspension was a decision of a disciplinary committee.

The lawmakers said that 35 colleagues have so far signed the letter. "The beauty of sport is that it is based on impartial and transparent rules. When Infantino allows political pressure to determine who gets to play, this sense of fairness goes out the window," they said.

Ruben Vargas sends Switzerland to World Cup quarterfinals

ANNE M PETERSON ■ Vancouver (Canada)

In a match with few fireworks, the Swiss were patient against the Colombians and their enthusiastic fans.

After a scoreless draw, Ruben Vargas converted the decisive penalty and Switzerland advanced to the World Cup quarterfinals, beating Colombia 4-3 in a shootout on Tuesday.

Switzerland will face defending champion Argentina on Saturday at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Missouri. Argentina defeated Egypt 3-2 earlier in the day.

Switzerland had not reached the quarterfinals of a World Cup since hosting the tournament in 1954. And the Swiss were short-handed Tuesday without young midfielder Johan Manzambi, who was injured in training on Monday.

Vargas, who has scored two goals in the World Cup, also left Monday's training early but came on in stoppage time at the end of regulation.

In the shootout, Colombia defender Davinson Sanchez's penalty attempt hit the crossbar and Switzerland goalkeeper Gregor Kobel saved an attempt by Cucho Hernandez.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino was among those at BC Place, where the sellout crowd of 52,497 was overwhelmingly clad in yellow in support of Colombia.

"They had the crowd on their side, so it was a tough game for us," Kobel said. "We know we had some stretches of the game where we had to defend and stay strong mentally. Obviously we had a few players missing so, yeah, it was a big challenge for us."

Colombia failed to qualify for the last World Cup in 2022. Los Cafeteros made the quarterfinals at the 2014 tournament in Brazil, defeating Uruguay in the round of 16 before losing to the host country 2-1.

"The dream was enormous," Colombia midfielder John Arias said. "The country showed us that it believed in us, that it lived every moment with us, and I think that only makes the pain even greater." (*AP*)

Lionel Messi scores his eighth goal, takes lead in Golden Boot race

MAURA CAREY ■ Atlanta

Lionel Messi let the tears flow at the final whistle, succumbing to emotion after Argentina conjured up an incredible two-goal comeback to beat Egypt 3-2 on Tuesday and advance to the World Cup quarterfinals.

Argentina's three goals came in the final 11 minutes of regulation and injury time. Messi played a direct hand — or foot — in two of them.

Messi helped get Argentina on the board in the 79th minute, assisting on Cristian Romero's header. Four minutes later, he levelled the match at 2-2, drilling a shot past Egypt goalkeeper Mostafa Shobeir. A sold-out crowd at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, and no one was surprised it was Messi who paved the way to victory.

"Watching Leo run the way he does, just pushing himself further every day — I just told him that he deserved it. He's our role model, our guide — the one who helps us at all times," Argentina forward Lautaro Martinez said. (*AP*)

Egypt seething after squandering two-goal lead and losing to Lionel Messi's Argentina

PAUL NEWBERRY ■ Atlanta

For Mohamed Salah and Egypt, what could have been a glorious celebration turned ugly at the end. On the cusp of upsetting the defending World Cup champion, the Pharaohs squandered a two-goal lead late in the game and fell to Lionel Messi and Argentina 3-2 in the round of 16 on Tuesday. The winning tally came two minutes into stoppage time and set off a wild scene in front of the Egyptian bench. A red card was shown to goalkeeping coach Saafan Elsaghir, who had to be physically restrained from going after French referee Francois Letexier. Multiple yellow cards were doled out to those griping vehemently about Argentina's final goal.

Egypt coach Hossam Hassan held up both arms in an "X" shape - the signal in soccer for calling out racial abuse - and stated flatly that his upstart squad was victimised by a soccer establishment that wanted Messi and Argentina to advance to the quarterfinals in their pursuit of a second straight title.

"We have been treated unfairly today," Hassan said. "We have suffered injustice."

In a tournament already marred by allegations that U.S. President Donald Trump influenced FIFA to overturn a one-game suspension for an American player, Egypt turned up the heat on soccer's governing body. "I just would like to say that we would have deserved to earn this win," Hassan said, "but we are leaving with honor, with pride, regardless of this defeat."

Hassan, who has been outspoken in his support of the Palestinians during the tournament, was upset that a potential second goal was overturned by a video review that showed a foul by Egypt at the start of an end-to-end play. Egypt took a 2-0 lead anyway on Mostafa Zico's goal in the 67th minute, but there was still enough time for Argentina to pull off a comeback for the ages in the stadium that is normally the home of NFL's Atlanta Falcons.

Cristian Romero gave the champions hope in the 79th. Messi blasted in the tying goal off the crossbar just four minutes later. And Enzo Fernandez won it for Argentina in the second minute of stoppage time - a play that began at the opposite end of the field with Salah being stripped of the ball as he tried to dribble into the penalty area, winding up face down on the turf. "The Egyptian Football Association cannot remain silent regarding the refereeing decisions witnessed during the match against Argentina as well as the failure to make appropriate use of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system," the EFA said in a statement Wednesday morning. "Several key incidents raised serious concerns and left profound questions about the consistency and fairness of decisions that directly influenced the course of the game."

Even retired NFL quarterback Tom Brady took note of the comeback, going on social media to point out this rivaled the one he pulled off against the Falcons in the Super Bowl on Feb. 5, 2017, when the New England Patriots rallied from a 28-3 deficit late in the third quarter to win 34-28 in overtime. "Yeah so that might top 28-3," Brady wrote on X. (*AP*)

Djokovic outlasts Auger-Aliassime after more than 5 hours to reach Wimbledon semifinals at age 39

ANDREW DAMPF/KEN MAGUIRE ■ London

Side to side. Corner to corner. Novak Djokovic kept pushing Felix Auger-Aliassime back and forth along the Centre Court baseline at Wimbledon to retrieve one shot after another.

Finally, on the 22nd shot of a grueling rally deep in a fifth-set super tiebreaker, Auger-Aliassime had a forehand in the middle of the court. Under normal circumstances it might have been just the shot he was looking for.

Not this time. Not after five hours of battling with the 39-year-old Djokovic.

Auger-Aliassime, a 25-year-old Canadian with one of the top-rated forehands on tour, had nothing left in his tank. He sprayed his forehand wide to give Djokovic a 9-4 lead. Then both players bent over in exhaustion and leaned on their rackets. Djokovic, while he was bent over, still found energy to encourage the crowd to cheer louder, waving his right arm for more noise.

One point later, the longest quarterfinal in Wimbledon history — at 5 hours and 15 minutes — was finished."These," Djokovic said, "are the kind of moments that I still play tennis for." Djokovic, the seven-time Wimbledon champion, prevailed 7-6 (10), 3-6, 6-3, 6-7 (4), 7-6 (4) on Tuesday to set up a semifinal against defending champion Jannik Sinner.

"I'm still able to battle these young guys that have 15 years less than me," Djokovic said. "I'm able to beat them at the tightest possible scoreline. ... In a sense, it is really a nice surprise. But at the same time, I always have the highest expectations for myself."

Djokovic continues to break records as he chases a 25th Grand Slam title. He's reached a record-setting eighth consecutive Wimbledon final four — moving him one ahead of Roger Federer for most consecutive men's singles semifinal appearances at the grass-court tournament.

"We know, because we've seen him so much, but it's so impressive that he does it time and time again," Auger-Aliassime said. The match ended just before the All England Club's 11 pm curfew took effect.

To celebrate, Djokovic raised his arms high and wide and took in the applause as he walked to the net to shake hands with Auger-Aliassime. Then Djokovic performed a little elbows-to-knees dance. He often mentions that his daughter, who was watching in the players' box, tries to teach him moves.

Later, Djokovic was asked to compare himself with another 39-year-old still performing at the highest of levels: Lionel Messi of Argentina.

"It would be nice to play 90 minutes like him," Djokovic said of the soccer great.

Rematch with SinnerSinner spent less than half the amount of time on court as Djokovic did when he beat Jan-Lennard Struff 7-5, 7-6 (4), 6-3 much earlier in the day on No. 1 Court.

Sinner beat Djokovic in straight sets in last year's Wimbledon semifinals; and Djokovic outlasted the Italian over five sets in the last four of this year's Australian Open.

"I wish it was finals, so I don't need to worry about how the body will feel tomorrow," Djokovic said. "I was telling the kids to go to sleep after the fourth (set) but they didn't want to listen. I'm glad they stayed because it was honestly one of the best matches I was part of on this court in my career."

Djokovic does get two days off before Friday's semifinals.

Medical time outLate in the first set, Djokovic dealt with what appeared to be a lower-leg issue. He took a medical time out and a trainer tested the stability of his left ankle and calf before massaging his calf muscle.

Djokovic had earlier leaned over to stretch his leg by pulling back the tip of his sneaker. He also stretched while standing at the back wall.

There was more stretching the rest of the way, too - especially late in the fifth set.

"It was really anybody's game in the super tiebreak in the fifth," Djokovic said.

Djokovic opposes roof closureDjokovic objected to the decision to close the Centre Court roof at 7:40 p.m. after Auger-Aliassime won the second set to level at a set apiece.

Djokovic told Wimbledon tournament referee Denise Parnell that they could squeeze in another set before the natural light faded. (*AP*)

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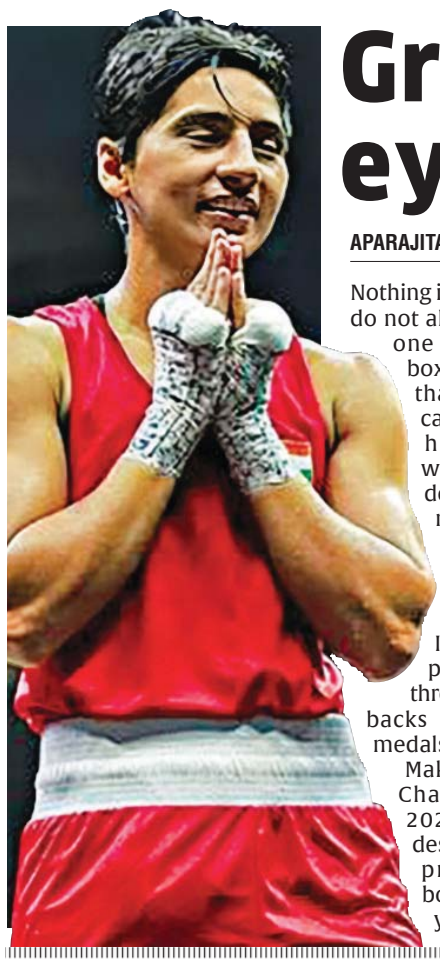


Grounded Preeti Pawar eyes CWG boxing gold

APARAJITA UPADHYAY ■ New Delhi

Nothing in life is certain and plans do not always work out the way one hopes. India's young boxer Preeti Pawar learnt that lesson early in her career, which is why she heads into Commonwealth Games with confidence from a stellar run of results but without taking anything for granted.

The 22-year-old bantamweight (54kg) boxer has emerged as one of India's brightest boxing prospects over the last three years, overcoming setbacks while steadily adding medals to her resume.

Making her senior World Championships debut in 2023, Preeti impressed despite bowing out in the pre-quarterfinals. She bounced back later that year by winning a bronze medal at the Hangzhou Asian Games and securing a quota for the Paris Olympics.

Her Olympic campaign, however, was disrupted after she contracted Hepatitis A just before the Games. Despite the illness affecting her preparations, she still reached the Round of 16.

The experience has made her more measured in her outlook.

"At the Commonwealth Games I want to perform my best and get a medal for India...a gold. Let's see what will happen because sometimes we plan something but it doesn't go our way," Preeti said.

Following a long break after the Olympics, Preeti returned to international competition in style, winning gold at the 2025 World Boxing Cup Final before claiming silver at Boxam Elite International tournament in Spain. (*PTI*)

India look to stay afloat in T20I series against England

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bristol

Faced with selection dilemmas and struggling to adapt in hostile conditions, the Shreyas Iyer-led India have their task cut out when they take on England in the series-deciding fourth T20 International here on Thursday.

The biggest selection conundrum surrounds Sanju Samson, who was dropped from the second and third T20I in favour of 15-year-old swashbuckler Vaibhav Sooryavanshi. The teenager has not done any worse or better than the rest of the team so far and given that the side is trailing 0-2 right now, India head coach Gautam Gambhir has not ruled out Samson's return.

In a matter of four months, Samson's career has swung from darkness to dizzying heights, only to return to square one.

While it would be unfair to blame skipper Iyer, who is chasing his first victory since being elevated to captaincy in a surprise decision during his comeback series, the onus lies heavily on the coaching think-tank led by Gambhir and Ajit Agarkar's selection committee. It remains to be seen if they can avoid the ignominy of another series loss. The tactical calls made by the team management have not gone down well with the fans too.

Chants of "We Want Sanju" echoed outside Trent Bridge stadium as the Gambhir-led contingent proceeded to the team bus following their crushing 125-run defeat in the third T20I on Wednesday.

If sidelining their T20 World Cup-winning skipper Suryakumar Yadav immediately after the historic triumph drew immense criticism, the decision to ignore hero of the same tournament, Samson, has now fuelled another public backlash.

The shocking capitulation at Trent Bridge has also laid bare the team's flaws and the management's lack of a clear vision. The batters failed miserably against a fast and furious pace attack led by Jofra Archer and Josh Tongue, who blew India away by sharing seven wickets between them, including the entire top five.

Tulika Maan eyes CWG gold to add to Birmingham silver

HARDIK SHARMA ■ New Delhi

Commonwealth Games silver medallist judoka Tulika Maan, who made a first-round first-round exit at the Paris Olympics, is determined to put that disappointment behind and upgrade the colour of her medal in upcoming CWG in Glasgow.

Maan's Olympic campaign ended in heartbreaking fashion after she lost her opening women's +78kg bout to Cuban great Idalys Ortiz in just 28 seconds in Paris Olympics two years back.

"Paris was like a black day for me," Maan told PTI on the sidelines of the Indian contingent's kit unveiling and send-off ceremony here.

"Making a comeback from there was very difficult because I knew the pressure was there. But it's okay. Because of my family, I am ready for the 2026 Commonwealth Games."

The Delhi judoka had claimed silver in the +78kg category at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham after going down in a hard-fought final to Scotland's Sarah Adlington.

Asked if she was looking to improve on that result, Maan made her intentions clear.

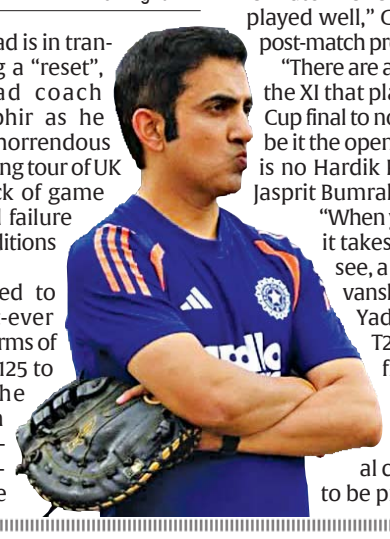
"Yes, for sure. It's not that I have to, I want to change it," she said. "Hopefully, I will win the gold. It will be a blessing for me because I will finally get the moment that I wanted in Birmingham."

Maan is set for another potential clash with Adlington in Glasgow, this time on the Scot's home turf, but the Indian is confident of not repeating the mistakes she made in the 2022 final. "Last time as well it was her home ground, but the mistakes were mine. I won't repeat them again.

"She is very experienced and I know what to expect. I am well prepared for that fight and really excited as well," she said. (*PTI*)

Need to adapt better, reset will take time: Gautam Gambhir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nottingham



India's T20 squad is in transition following a "reset", declared head coach Gautam Gambhir as he attributed the horrendous run in the ongoing tour of UK to an acute lack of game awareness and failure to read the conditions correctly.

India slumped to their heaviest-ever T20I defeat in terms of runs, losing by 125 to England in the third T20I on Tuesday. The visitors are now 0-2 down in the five-match series. "We just haven't played well," Gambhir said at the post-match press conference here.

"There are a lot of changes from the XI that played the T20 World Cup final to now. Be it the captain, be it the opening batsman. There is no Hardik Pandya, there is no Jasprit Bumrah," he pointed out.

"When you go for that reset, it takes a bit of time. If you see, a 15-year-old (Soorya vanshi) is opening, Prince Yadav is in his second T20I, Harshit is back from an injury. We look only at results, results are important in international cricket, but we have to be practical," he added.

Back to normal conditions here: Archer

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England pace spearhead Jofra Archer believes bowling in English conditions is a return to "normal" after playing on "easy wickets and smaller boundaries" in India particularly during the IPL.

Archer returned figures of 3/29 while fellow fast bowler Josh Tongue claimed 4/38 as India were skittled out for 76 in 11.4 overs while chasing 202 in the third T20I — their biggest defeat in terms of runs in the shortest format.

The defeat also left the revamped Indian side, led by Shreyas Iyer, still searching for their first T20I win after taking over from Suryakumar Yadav following the World Cup triumph in March.

"I think it goes back to normal here," Archer said at the post-match conference when asked how much his plans change while bowling to Indian batters after facing many of them in the IPL.

"You try to bowl the ball straight on a good length. Whereas over there, because the wickets are so easy and the boundaries are so small, you have to be really, really particular. Here, I feel your margin for error is a little bit bigger."

He further said a total of 200-plus at Trent Bridge was always going to be difficult to chase unlike in the IPL, where such scores are often considered below par.

"At the IPL, sometimes 200 isn't safe. With 200 on the board on that wicket, I don't want to say we were confident, but I felt it would have taken a really special innings to chase it down. I'm just glad everybody chipped in. Everybody who bowled got wickets today, so it was a complete bowling performance."

The Indian batters have found conditions in the UK far more challenging.

After losing the T20I series to Ireland, they have now slipped 0-2 behind England in the five-match contest after the opening game was washed out. Archer continued his new-found love affair with the tall Josh Tongue, who made his T20I debut in the second match.

Samson has been given clarity on his omission, says Gambhir

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India head coach Gautam Gambhir asserted that Sanju Samson has been given complete clarity about his role after being dropped from the playing XI and did not rule out a comeback for the wicketkeeper-batter in the ongoing T20I series against England. Samson has also been omitted from the squad for the upcoming tour of Zimbabwe. Gambhir maintained that the senior player remains in India's plans in the five-match series, which the visitors trail 0-2 after two losses and a washout.

"The clarity that should have been given to Sanju Samson, he has got from me," Gambhir said after India's 125-run defeat in the third T20I here on Tuesday.

"And that conversation is between a head coach and a player. The contents of that conversation are obviously not something I'll share with you.

"...we are absolutely clear that what Sanju has done for India, especially during the World Cup, has been phenomenal. Sometimes, though, you also have to look at the form of a certain player. There is no hard and fast rule that he cannot make a comeback in this series."

Samson, who was adjudged Player of the Tournament at this year's T20 World Cup, was replaced in the playing XI by 15-year-old batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi after scores of 5, 0 and 1 in his last three innings against Ireland and in the series-opener against England.

Prime Volleyball League gets FIVB recognition

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Prime Volleyball League has received world body FIVB's recognition as India's first division league for the sport and will return for its fifth season from November 30, the organisers announced on Wednesday.

The season 5 players' auction will be held in Goa on August 17 where franchises will assemble their squads for the upcoming season from a pool of India's top volleyball talent. "In a significant endorsement of its sustained growth and impact over the past four years, the Federation Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) has officially recognised PVL as India's first division professional volleyball league," stated a press release from the league owners.

In addition, the clubs participating in Prime Volleyball League will be eligible to compete in international tournaments under the Central Asian Volleyball Association (CAVA), Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC), and FIVB club competitions, subject to applicable regulations and qualification criteria. "This pathway creates new opportunities for Indian clubs to test themselves against top teams across Asia and globally."

"Season 5 marks a defining moment for the Prime Volleyball League. The FIVB recognition is a strong validation of the work that has gone in over the last four years to build a credible, competitive, and globally relevant league," said Tuhin Mishra, MD and Co-Founder, Baseline Ventures and Director, Prime Volleyball League. "From the outset, the aim has been to build a league that delivers both sporting excellence and long-term impact.

Our performance was atrocious and unacceptable: Shreyas Iyer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Nottingham

India captain Shreyas Iyer minced no words after his team's crushing 125-run defeat to England in the third T20 International, describing the performance as "atrocious" and admitting such a heavy loss was "not acceptable".

Under Iyer, India are yet to win a T20 International, and Tuesday's outing marked an abject surrender as they were bowled out for 76 in just 11.4 overs while chasing 202 to suffer their biggest defeat in the format in terms of runs.

"It was atrocious, losing by that margin is not acceptable. First things first, we have to accept the loss and go back to drawing board," Iyer said at the post-match presentation ceremony.

The win handed England an unassailable 2-0 lead in the five-match series ahead of the fourth T20I in Bristol on Thursday and the final in Southampton on Saturday. The opening match was a washout. Iyer felt that the bowling unit shouldn't have gone for 200 on this Trent Bridge track.

IOC eases path toward Russia returning with full team at 2028 LA Olympics

GRAHAM DUNBAR ■ GENEVA

Russia has moved closer toward having a full team with its national flag and anthem at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

The International Olympic Committee on Tuesday provisionally lifted a suspension of the Russian Olympic Committee and advised Olympic sports bodies to end a three-year program where Russian athletes had to be vetted for permission to compete as neutrals. The IOC said the timing was because qualifying events are starting for the L.A. Games, and "the need to offer equal access to these competitions to all athletes."

The move, which also signals a return for Russia in team sports, had been expected since the IOC advised two months ago that athletes from Belarus, which was Russia's ally when its military invasion of Ukraine started in 2022, should be allowed again to compete with their full national identity. "We don't want to hold athletes accountable for the actions of their governments," IOC president Kirsty Coventry said at an online news conference after she chaired an executive board meeting. A two-time Olympic gold medalist swimming for Zimbabwe, Coventry said it was a fair decision and noted: "I wouldn't be sitting here if I had to pay the price when my country was going through things and being sanctioned."

Ukraine's sports minister Matvii Bidnyi questioned why the IOC altered its rules when in the war "nothing changed. The situation became even worse."

Russia unleashed waves of missiles and drones at Ukraine early Monday, killing at least 22 people.

"So we don't understand it," Bidnyi told The Associated Press in an interview Tuesday. "In this day, when all of Ukraine (is) in a day of mourning, when our flags was a little bit lower because of so many people, our peaceful citizens was killed yesterday at night."

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Printed and Published by Kushan Mitra for and on behalf of CMYK Printech Ltd., 4th Floor, Sahara Shopping Centre, Faizabad Road, Lucknow-226016 and Printed at The Indian Express Pvt Ltd., C-26 Amausi Industrial Area, Nadarganj, Lucknow. Executive Editor Deepak Kumar Jha, Resident Editor Vijay Prakash Singh. RNI No. 2016/57. Lucknow.Telephones: 9415089265 Fax: 2345582.Kanpur Office: (0512) 2304006, 2304416.Delhi Office: 100K, Milap Bhawan, 8/A, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110 002, Phone: 011-40110455. Corporate Office:- 201-205, 2nd Floor, Pratap Bhawan 5, B.S.Z. Marg, New Delhi-110002 Phone: 011-46035729.