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No India role in Nijjar killing: Canada

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ 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,"



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

Moreland told *CBC News*. 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 offi-

cials 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 Dhandra.

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.



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.

The ByStander



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, Jattoon Barrage in Simaur 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.

LeT commander killed in J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ 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



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

PTI

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.

India to help restore Prambanan temple



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

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ 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 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.

Mahadev betting app accused Saurabh Chandrakar arrested in Oman; India begins extradition process

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Raipur

Saurabh Chandrakar, an alleged key operator of the Mahadev Online Book betting network, has been arrested in Oman on the basis of an Interpol Red Notice issued at the request of Indian agencies, with the Centre initiating the process for his extradition, according to media reports.

Chandrakar, a native of Bhillai in Chhattisgarh, was reportedly detained by the Royal Oman Police after allegedly entering Oman using a forged Indonesian passport. He is currently lodged at the high-security Al Khoud Detention Centre in



Muscat, reports said.

Indian authorities have submitted a formal extradition request through the Ministry of External Affairs, accompanied by the required judicial documents, officials familiar with the matter were quoted as saying. According to the

Enforcement Directorate (ED) and other investigating agencies, Chandrakar is among the principal accused in the Mahadev Online Book case involving allegations of illegal online betting, money laundering and financial transactions estimated at around Rs 6,000 crore. The allegations are under investigation and have not yet been adjudicated by a court.

Investigators allege that Chandrakar moved to Dubai in 2019 and, along with associate Ravi Uppal, expanded the Mahadev betting network by operating online platforms that facilitated betting on cricket, football, tennis, badminton, poker, Teen Patti, virtual games

and other events.

The ED launched its probe into the alleged betting syndicate in 2022, claiming that the network operated through franchise-based online panels from the UAE while routing betting proceeds through hawala channels and other illegal financial mechanisms.

The agency has attached assets and filed prosecution complaints in connection with the case.

The extradition request will now be examined by the Omani authorities in accordance with their domestic laws and the applicable bilateral legal framework before any transfer to India is considered.

Ram temple trust tightens purse strings

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ 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.

Chhattisgarh Cabinet approves Ease of Doing Business Bill, power payment reforms, other key proposals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Raipur

The Chhattisgarh Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai at Mantralaya on Wednesday, approved a series of proposals, including reforms related to ease of doing business, power payment security, taxation, industrial promotion and higher education.

The Cabinet approved replacing the existing tripartite agreement with a Direct Debit Mandate (DDM) system, in accordance with Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines, to secure payments made by the Chhattisgarh State Power Distribution Company to Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs)

for power procurement.

The new mechanism will ensure uninterrupted power supply from NTPC and other CPSUs, while aligning the payment security system with RBI norms. The state government will not face any additional financial burden, as the existing payment mechanism and Letter of Credit (LC) system will continue, whenever required.

The Cabinet also approved amendments to the Chhattisgarh Police Special Executive Force (Bastar Fighters), Fighter Constable Service (Recruitment and Conditions of Service) Rules, 2026.

It gave approval to the draft Chhattisgarh Private Universities (Establishment



and Operation) (Amendment) Bill, 2026, aimed at making provisions for setting up private universities more practical and quality-oriented. The amendment proposes replacing the Endowment Fund requirement with a Reserved Fund to provide greater financial safeguards for students.

The draft bill also mandates that infrastructure,

libraries and academic facilities of private universities comply with standards prescribed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and other regulatory bodies.

The Cabinet approved the draft Chhattisgarh Value Added Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2026, providing for abolition of the Chhattisgarh Commercial Tax Tribunal. Following the implementation of GST and establishment of the GST Appellate Tribunal, pending VAT appeals will be transferred to the Board of Revenue for disposal.

The draft Chhattisgarh Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2026 was also approved. The amendments aim to simplify GST

compliance, speed up refunds and improve transparency, particularly for exporters and industries affected by an inverted duty structure.

To promote investment, the Cabinet approved the draft Chhattisgarh Industrial Investment Promotion (Amendment) Bill, 2026, aimed at creating a more investor-friendly environment and improving facilitation of industrial projects.

The Cabinet also approved the draft Chhattisgarh Ease of Doing Business (De-regulation and Facilitation) Bill, 2026. The proposed legislation seeks to simplify and digitise business processes through measures such as self-certification, third-party

verification, risk-based inspections and removal of duplicate licensing requirements.

The government said Chhattisgarh would become the first state in the country to introduce such legislation.

The Cabinet approved the One Time Settlement (OTS) Scheme, 2026, for providing relief in interest and surcharge on plots and constructed properties allotted by the Nava Raipur Atal Nagar Development Authority. The scheme aims to help eligible allottees clear outstanding dues and reduce disputes.

The Cabinet further approved placing before the Legislative Assembly a resolution adopting the Water (Prevention and Control of

Pollution) Amendment Act, 2024 in the state. The amendment seeks to simplify environmental compliance by decriminalising minor violations and introducing monetary penalties.

The draft Chhattisgarh Rent Control (Amendment) Bill, 2026 was also approved. The proposed changes are aimed at encouraging owners to rent out vacant houses and ensuring faster resolution of tenancy disputes in line with the Model Tenancy Act, 2021.

In another decision, the Cabinet approved allotment of government land for construction of a modern 2,000-seat auditorium in Rajnandgaon to strengthen cultural and public infrastructure in the district.

States Focus



80% SIR ENUMERATION FORMS DISTRIBUTED: KARNATAKA CEO

Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer V Anbukumar on Wednesday said that the process of the SIR was underway and that 80.85 per cent of the enumeration forms had already been distributed to electors across the State. A door-to-door house enumeration exercise under the SIR of the electoral rolls began on June 30, as per the directions of the EC, and will continue till July 29. Addressing a press conference, Anbukumar said, "We will be distributing the enumeration forms to every house in Karnataka, to every voter. In that process, 80.85 per cent of the enumeration forms have already been distributed to electors in Karnataka." Listing the figures, he said that Chitradurga district had achieved 98.95 per cent distribution as of 2 pm on Wednesday. (PTI)



VP TO LAUNCH DEEP SEA FISHING PERMIT SYSTEM IN ODISHA

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan will launch the Letter of Authorisation (LoA) for sustainable harnessing of fisheries in the high seas and Odisha Deep Sea Mission document during his visit to Bhubaneswar on Thursday, officials said. The Vice President is scheduled to arrive here on Thursday morning on a one-day official visit. He will launch the two programmes during an event, which will be attended by Odisha Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Union Ministers Rajiv Ranjan Singh, Dharmendra Pradhan, SP Singh Baghel and state minister Gokulananda Mallik. Radhakrishnan will distribute LoA to the fisheries cooperative societies including National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL) and fishing vessel owners, enabling eligible Indian-flagged fishing vessels to undertake regulated fishing operations in the high seas, an official statement said. The letter of authorisation is a mandatory provision under the guidelines for sustainable harnessing of fisheries in the high seas by Indian-flagged fishing vessels, 2025, it said. Designed as a transparent and accountable framework for Indian-flagged vessels undertaking fishing or fishing-related activities in the high seas, the LoA facilitates ease of compliance for fishermen and vessel operators. (PTI)

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 Transshipment 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. "Together with Great Nicobar Transshipment 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 geo-

graphical 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 transshipment 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.

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 Garutha 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.

Navi Mumbai Airport cleared for drug imports

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Union health ministry has recently inaugurated Navi Mumbai Airport in Maharashtra as a port for the import of drugs under the Drugs Rules, 1945, in a move aimed at strengthening the pharmaceutical supply chain and facilitating ease of trade, an official statement said on Wednesday.

The amendment to Rule 43A of the Drugs Rules, 1945, now includes Navi Mumbai in the list of airports through which drugs may be imported into the country, according to the statement issued by the ministry.

The gazette notification was issued after consultation with the Drugs Technical Advisory Board under the provisions of the Drugs and



Cosmetics Act, 1940, officials said. With the latest addition, the total number of notified ports of entry — across air, sea, road and rail — for the import of drugs has increased to 42, it said.

The amendment is expected to facilitate smoother movement of pharmaceutical consignments, strengthen logistics infrastructure, and provide greater flexibility to

importers by adding a new alternative for the import of medicines into India, the statement said.

The initiative is in line with the Government's continued efforts to strengthen the regulatory framework, improve trade facilitation, and promote Ease of Doing Business while ensuring effective regulatory oversight of imported drugs, it added.

465 farmer suicides recorded in Marathwada region in 2026

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar

As many as 465 farmers committed suicide between January and June 2026 in the Marathwada region of central Maharashtra with Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district reporting the highest cases at 109, an official report said on Wednesday.

In 2025, as many as 1,131 farmer suicide cases were registered with the administration in the region, which consists of eight districts.

In the current year, from January to June, Marathwada registered 465 farmer suicide cases, a report from the Divisional Commissioner office based in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar said. The



highest number of farmer suicides were recorded in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district at 109, while the lowest was in Latur district (26), it said.

According to the report, 215 suicide cases were found eligible for financial aid from the Government, while 26 were found unfit for compensation.

Currently, 222 cases are under scrutiny, and financial aid has been granted in 108 cases so far.

District-wise farmer suicides from January to June are as follows: Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (109), Beed (95), Dharrashiv (65), Nanded (61), Jalna (40), Parbhani (34), Hingoli (35) and Latur (26), the report added.

Assam Govt says only 196 of 36,358 foreigners repatriated since 2021

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

Over 36,000 people have been declared foreigners in the five years since 2021, and only 196 of them have been repatriated to Bangladesh so far, the Assembly was informed on Wednesday.

In a written reply to a query by Congress MLA Mohibur Rohman, Border Protection and Development Minister Atul Bora said a total of 36,358 persons have been declared foreigners by the Foreigners Tribunals (FTs) since 2021 to May 2026. "Out of them, 196 people have been repatriated to Bangladesh from Assam," he added. Giving year-wise breakups, Bora said 7,151 foreigners were declared



in 2021, followed by 9,028 in 2022, 6,859 in 2023, 6,178 in 2024, 5,106 in 2025 and 2036 in 2026 so far.

As per legal provisions, only the Foreigners Tribunals can declare a person a foreigner in Assam, and subsequently, higher courts can be approached if the verdict is not favourable. According to the Assam Accord, the names of all foreigners coming to Assam on or after March 25, 1971, would be detected, deleted from the electoral rolls, and steps would be taken to deport them.

Higher education enrolment rises by over 1 crore since 2014: Govt's 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.

Namami Gange unified sewerage systems across 3 Uttarakhhand towns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) on Wednesday said a sewerage network developed under the Namami Gange programme has brought the sewerage systems of Rishikesh, Tapovan and Muni Ki Reti under a single framework, transforming wastewater management in the region.

The NMCG emphasised that the transformation is not the result of a single project but of a comprehensive restructuring of the region's wastewater management system.

According to the mission, before the programme was launched, drains from Rishikesh flowed directly into the Ganga, sewage treatment capacity was limited, and the sewerage systems of Rishikesh,



Representational image

Tapovan and Muni Ki Reti operated independently.

The NMCG said the work began in 2017 to bring the three adjoining urban areas under a unified sewerage network as part of the Namami Gange programme.

The mission further informed that with an investment of ₹375 crore, the network established a total sewage treatment capacity of 55 MLD.

The system comprises modern sewage treatment plants equipped with

automation and tertiary treatment facilities, while drains have been intercepted and diverted to prevent untreated sewage from entering the Ganga. According to the NMCG, six of the seven sanctioned projects have been completed, while one project is under construction.

The mission said the projects were approved in 2017, the construction of sewage treatment plants began in 2018, Tapovan was integrated into the network in 2019,

and Muni Ki Reti was connected in 2022.

The integrated system has strengthened Ganga conservation in the region by ensuring wastewater is treated before being discharged into the river, the NMCG said, adding that it has laid the foundation for cleaner stretches of the Ganga at Rishikesh, where the Himalayan river enters the plains.

"The result is visible in the Ganga. The water that once flowed untreated further downstream now reaches the river only after treatment. In the very city through which the Ganga passes as it descends from the Himalayas before entering the plains, the foundation of its cleanliness has already been laid," the NMCG said in a post on social media. "The city has changed. The Ganga has changed," it added.

CM Sai unveils Chhattisgarh SDG 2.0 framework, launches ‘Bastar Anjor’ initiative for outcome-based development

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Raipur

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Wednesday unveiled the Chhattisgarh Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2.0 Framework prepared by the State NITI Aayog, at Mahanadi Bhawan, in the presence of members of the Council of Ministers. He also launched the State and District SDG Indicator Framework 2.0, the Metadata Handbook, and the ‘Bastar Anjor’ initiative aimed at convergence-based, inclusive and outcome-oriented development of the Bastar division. Sai said effective implementation of government schemes, accurate data and outcome-based monitoring are essential for building a Viksit Chhattisgarh, adding that the SDG 2.0 Framework would strengthen evidence-based policymaking, inter-departmental coordination and regular monitoring of development programmes. He said the initiative would support the state’s Viksit Chhattisgarh @2047 vision by making governance more



transparent, measurable and accountable. Under the revised framework, the number of state-level indicators has been increased from 275 to 343, while district-level indicators have risen from 82 to 99, enabling more comprehensive and scientific monitoring of development works. The Metadata Handbook standardises the methodology for calculating and reporting each indicator to improve data quality and reliability across the

state. State Policy Commission Vice-Chairman Ganesh Shankar Mishra said ‘Bastar Anjor’ is a convergence-based development model designed to transform Bastar into the country’s most developed tribal region. Under its 3+4 model, three district-level initiatives—Niyad Nellanar 2.0, Bastar Munne (Pioneering Bastar) and Swasth Bastar—are integrated with four key national and state development frameworks, including SDG 2030, Viksit Chhattisgarh

@2047, and the Aspirational District and Development Block Programme, to deliver measurable improvements in education, healthcare, livelihoods and infrastructure without additional resources. Deputy Chief Minister Arun Sao, Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, Chief Secretary Vikas Sheel, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Subodh Kumar Singh, members of the Council of Ministers and senior administrative officials were present on the occasion.

C’garh HC refuses to cancel constable recruitment process, orders probe into 129 candidates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Bilaspur

The Chhattisgarh High Court has refused to cancel the entire police constable recruitment process over alleged irregularities and directed an inquiry into 129 candidates whose roles have been questioned.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Ramesh Sinha and Justice Ravindra Kumar Agrawal observed that scrapping the entire recruitment process due to the misconduct of a few candidates would be unjustified and unfair to those who were selected through a legitimate process.

The bench dismissed petitions filed by Vivek Dubey, Manohar Patel, Mityunjay Shrivats and Ashwani Kumar, residents of Bilaspur, who had challenged the recruitment process alleging irregularities during the physical efficiency test held at the Bilaspur centre. The petitioners had alleged



manipulation in events such as long jump, shot put and running, and had sought cancellation of the recruitment process along with a CBI probe.

The division bench upheld the order of the single bench and said that if the candidates involved in irregularities could be identified separately, genuine candidates should not suffer because of the wrongdoing of a few individuals.

The court noted that the matter did not indicate any large-scale or systematic corruption and said the department

had already conducted an inquiry into the alleged irregularities.

The High Court directed that a detailed investigation be conducted by a police officer into the 129 candidates identified as suspicious by the Superintendent of Police and those mentioned in the relevant communication.

The court further directed that if any candidate is found guilty, action including cancellation of appointment should be taken after providing an opportunity of hearing, as per law.

CG Sets New Benchmark in Digital Revenue Governance with Auto Mutation and Auto Diversion Reforms

Chhattisgarh has scripted a new chapter in revenue administration by leveraging technology to transform land-related public services. Under the Revenue, Disaster Management and Rehabilitation Department, the introduction of Auto Mutation and Auto Diversion has significantly streamlined land administration, making it faster, more transparent and largely free from manual intervention. The reforms have relieved citizens of repeated visits to government offices, prolonged waiting periods and proce-

dural hardships, while strengthening the foundations of citizen-centric governance. Until recently, property owners were required to submit separate applications and undergo lengthy physical verification after registration for mutation of land records. Today, backed by the State Government’s strong commitment to governance reforms, the mutation process is completed automatically. Likewise, applications for land-use conversion, premium determination and fee calculations have been

digitised, reducing errors and enhancing efficiency. Chhattisgarh’s digital governance model has now emerged as a noteworthy example for the country. Official figures released by the Revenue Department underline the scale of this transformation. Out of 1,40,607 registered deeds, 1,40,536 cases have already been successfully processed through Auto Mutation, leaving only 71 cases under process. This translates into an exceptional 99.95 per cent success rate, setting a new benchmark in digital service deliv-

ery. Similarly, under the Auto Diversion system, 5,661 applications were received, of which 4,739 cases have been redressed promptly, achieving an impressive 83.71 per cent redressal rate. The achievement demonstrates that even complex technical procedures can be made seamless and transparent through digital intervention. Since revenue services directly impact citizens’ property rights, investments and livelihoods, the reforms have accelerated residential, commercial and industrial activities across the state.

Mutation of land records following property registration is a mandatory legal process. Earlier, citizens had to make repeated visits to Patwari offices and tehsil headquarters, often facing months of delays and procedural uncertainty, conditions that also created opportunities for corruption. The situation has now changed dramatically. Of the 1,40,607 registered deeds, 1,40,536 have been mutated automatically, ensuring that rightful owners no longer have to struggle for recognition of their ownership.

Chief Minister Sai Launches Short-Term Loan Against Salary Scheme for Government Employees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Raipur

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai launched the Short-Term Loan Against Salary Scheme for government employees at Mahanadi Bhawan on July 8. On the occasion, he also unveiled the scheme brochure. Describing it as a significant initiative towards employee welfare, good governance and a sensitive administration, the Chief Minister said the scheme aims to provide government employees with dignified, prompt and hassle-free financial assistance during emergencies. Chief Minister Sai said that government employees are the backbone of the state’s development. He said that when employees are free from financial worries, government schemes can be implemented effectively to



benefit the last person in society. He added that employees will no longer have to depend on private money-lenders or borrow at high interest rates to meet emergency financial needs. Keeping their requirements in mind, the government has developed a system through which eligible employees can avail a short-term loan against salary without unnecessary paperwork. The Chief Minister said that the Finance Department has integrated

the facility with the e-Kosh system through effective use of information technology. He said the system is completely digital, paperless, secure and transparent, and does not impose any additional financial burden on the state government. Congratulating the Finance Department for the initiative, he urged all government employees to actively contribute towards the vision of a developed Chhattisgarh and good governance.

Finance Minister O.P. Choudhary said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, the state government is giving the highest priority to administrative reforms and employee welfare. He said that after introducing the cashless medical facility for employees, the government has now launched the Short-Term Loan Against Salary Scheme to provide interest-free financial assistance for immediate needs. He informed that within just two months of the pilot phase, more than 73,000 employees had registered for the scheme, while over 27,000 employees had already availed its benefits. He added that the government also plans to provide higher-value loans at competitive interest rates to employees with better credit scores in the future.

C’garh govt reshuffles IAS officers; transfers 5 district panchayat CEOs



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Raipur

The Chhattisgarh government on Wednesday carried out a partial reshuffle of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers, transferring five district panchayat chief executive officers (CEOs) and assigning new responsibilities to several officers, according to an official order. As per the order issued by the General Administration Department, 2011-batch IAS officer Remigius Ekka, Director of the Urban Administration and Development Department, has been given the additional charge of Chief Executive Officer of the State Urban Development Agency (SUDA). Gajendra Singh Thakur, CEO of Dhamtari Zila Panchayat, has been posted as Deputy Secretary in the Revenue,

Disaster Management and Rehabilitation Department. Prateek Jain has been transferred from the post of CEO, Bastar Zila Panchayat, to CEO, Korba Zila Panchayat. Suruchi Singh, CEO of Rajnandgaon Zila Panchayat, has been appointed Commissioner of the Bhillai Municipal Corporation. Jayant Nahata, CEO of Dantewada Zila Panchayat, has been posted as CEO of Dhamtari Zila Panchayat. M. Bhargava, Sub-Divisional Officer (Revenue), Dongargarh, has been appointed CEO of Dantewada Zila Panchayat, while Tanay Khatra, Sub-Divisional Officer (Revenue), Katghora, has been posted as CEO of Bastar Zila Panchayat. Durga Prasad Adhikari, Sub-Divisional Officer (Revenue), Gharghora, has been appointed CEO of Rajnandgaon Zila Panchayat, the order said.

CORRIGENDUM

EDELWEISS ASSET RECONSTRUCTION COMPANY LIMITED

CIN: U67100MH2007PL174759

Retail Central & Regd. Office: Edelweiss House, Off CST Road, Kalina, Mumbai 400098

It is informed to the general public that in the advertisement published in this newspaper dated 25.06.2026 Regarding "E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE". The sale of the property of the borrower Mrs. Maya Changan (Loan Account No. HL/0022/H/13/100129) scheduled to be held on 28.07.2026, has been withdrawn/ canceled due to technical reasons. All other details shall remain the same.

Place: Mumbai

Date: 09.07.2026

Sd/-
Authorized Officer

Edelweiss
Asset Reconstruction

NAME CHANGE	NAME CHANGE
It is informed to the general public that I, KETSHWARI DAS W/O RESHAM LAL DAS, resident of H.NO. 117, NEWARI, KAWARDHA, (C.G.), have changed my old name KETSHWARI DAS W/O RESHAM LAL DAS. So in future I should be recognized by my new name that is KATESWARI DAS W/O RESHAM LAL DAS in all Government and other documents.	It is informed to the general public that I, JANHAVI DAS D/O RESHAM LAL DAS, resident of H.NO. 117, NEWARI, KAWARDHA, (C.G.), have changed my old name JANHAVI DAS D/O RESHAM LAL DAS. So in future I should be recognized by my new name that is JANHVI DAS D/O RESHAM LAL DAS in all Government and other documents.
KATESWARI DAS H.NO. 117, NEWARI, KAWARDHA, (C.G.)	JANHVI DAS H.NO. 117, NEWARI, KAWARDHA, (C.G.)

सेन्ट्रल बैंक ऑफ इंडिया
क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, रायपुर (छ.ग.)

Central Bank of India
Regional Office, Raipur (C.G.)

PUBLIC NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF
IMMOVABLE/MOVABLE PROPERTIES MORTGAGED TO CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable property mortgaged/ charged to the Secured Creditor 'Central Bank of India', Physical /Symbolic Possession (specifically mentioned against the property of which has been taken by the Secured Creditor, under the hypothecation agreement will be put for auction and will be sold on 'As is where is', 'As is what is' and 'Whatever there is', as mentioned below against the properties, for the recovery of amount due to the Central Bank of India- Secured Creditor from the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s). The reserve price and the earnest money deposit of the respective properties are mentioned herein below:

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrowers	Details of property/ secured assets & owner of the property/ Type Of Possession	Date of Demand Notice	Reserve Price	Branch Name/ Contact Person & Contact Number
			Outstanding Amount	EMD	
01	1. Mr. Abhishek Sharma S/o Mr. Jagdish Prasad Sharma, 2. Mrs. Damyanti Bai Sharma W/o Mr. Jagdish Prasad Sharma and 3. Mr. Akhilesh Sharma (Deceased) S/o Mr. Jagdish Prasad Sharma Through his Legal heirs: 2/1. Mrs. Damyanti Bai Sharma M/o Mr. Akhilesh Sharma, Address of all are : In front of Bedikarkhana, Near Tarun ADLABS, Ward No-03, Santra Badi, Durg, Dist. Durg (CG)	All the Parts and Parcel of Residential Land & Building situated at Kh. No. 1179/32, PHN. 24, Behind Tarun Talkies, Santra Badi, Ward No-26, Durg, Total Area 750.00 Sq Ft in the name of Mr. Abhishek Sharma S/o Mr. Jagdish Prasad Sharma, Akhilesh Sharma S/o Mr. Jagdish Prasad Sharma & Mrs. Damyanti Sharma W/o. Mr. Jagdish Prasad Sharma. Boundaries: North- Road, South- Property of Mr Rathore, East- Road, West- Road.	11/04/2025	₹ 34,01,000/-	Mr. Tudu Ji Mob. 96859 95255
			₹ 6,62,484.00 Plus further interest and expressed thereon	₹ 3,40,100/-	
			12/06/2026	₹ 1,00,000/-	
02	M/s. Alam Tyre Works Prop. Mohammad Noor Alam and Mohammad Noor Alam S/o Mohammad Asgar Ali, Resident of Shop No. 04, New Bus Stand, Ward No. 29, Tehsil & Dist. Durg (CG)	All the Part & parcel of Leased Shop situated at Shop No. 71/04, New Bus Stand Shopping Complex, Ward No. 29, RNM- Durg, Tehsil & Dist. Durg (CG), Area- 48.0 sq. ft., in the name of Mohammad Noor Alam S/o Mohammad Asgar Ali. Bounded by: North- Satish Electricals, South- Vijay Motors Parts, East- Land of Irrigation Deptt, West- Road.	30/11/2024	₹ 4,01,000/-	Mr. Bhairav Tudu Ji Mob. 96859 95255
			₹ 3,01,664.00 Plus further interest and expressed thereon	₹ 40,100/-	
			19/02/2025	₹ 10,000/-	
03	M/s. Bajrang Kirana Stores, Prop. Mr. Nand Kishore Agrawal, Ward No. 03, Dewangan Mohalla, Behind Venkateshwar Talkies, Sanjay Nagar, Supela, Bhillai, Dist. Durg (CG) 490023 & Mr. Nand Kishore Agrawal S/o Mr. Shri Ram Agrawal, House No. 229/K, Sanjay Nagar, Supela, Bhillai, Tehsil & Dist. Durg (CG) and Guarantor Mr. Kamal Agrawal, S/o Mr. Nand Kishore Agrawal, Ward No. 03, Dewangan Mohalla, Sanjay Nagar, Supela, Bhillai, Dist. Durg (CG)	All the Part and Parcel of Lease hold Residential Land & Building situated at S.A.D.A. Bhillai-Durg, Mouza Sanjay Nagar, Supela, Ward No. 04, Under Nagar Palik Nigam Bhillai, Tehsil & Dist. Durg (CG), Area 427.35 sq. ft. (Lease Agreement Deed Registered at Sub-Registrar Office, Durg Vide Granth No. A-1/10430, Page No. 61 to 68, Document No. 7813) in the name of Mr. Kamal Kant Agrawal S/o Mr. Nand Kishore Agrawal. Boundaries: North: Sita Kaur, South: Road, East: Sita Kaur, West: Pradeep.	05/06/2025	₹ 12,95,000/-	Mr. Gautam Krishna Mob. 85188 82062
			₹ 20,06,744.00 Plus further interest and expressed thereon	₹ 1,29,500/-	
			10/10/2025	₹ 50,000/-	
04	Mrs. Parul Patel W/o Mr. Ashish Patel and Mr. Ashish Patel S/o Ashok Bhai Patel, Both are resident of Flat No.508, Princess Palace Apartment, Kailash Ward No. 29, At & P.O. Rajnandgaon, Dist. Rajnandgaon (CG)	All that Part and Parcel of Residential property situated at Sheet No. 48 D, Part of Plot No 6/3, 4 from Part of Khasra No. 296/31, Part B, Floor No. 3 (G+ Fourth), Flat No. 508 (3 BHK), located at "Princess Palace Apartment", Area 862.52 Sqft, Ward No. 27, Timber Market Road, Tehsil & District - Rajnandgaon (CG) in the name of Mrs. Parul Patel W/o Ashish Patel. Bounded by: North- Open Space, South- Flat No 507, East- Open Space, West- Open Passage.	30/08/2022	₹ 22,59,000/-	Mr. Shyam Sundar Panda Mob. 96790 50259
			₹ 10,36,230.00 Plus further interest and expressed thereon	₹ 2,25,900/-	
			22/11/2022	₹ 1,00,000/-	

Date of Inspection & Time	Last date and time for deposit of EMD Amount	Date and Time of E-auction
On 24/07/2026 Between 02:00 AM to 04:00 PM	07/08/2026, Till 03:00 PM	10/08/2026 FROM 11:00 PM TO 03:00 PM

The E-auction is being held on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is basis".

- To the best of knowledge and information of the Authorized Officer, there is no encumbrance on the property. However, the intending bidders should make their own independent inquiries regarding the encumbrances, title of property put on auction and claims/ rights/ dues/ effecting the property, prior to submitting their bid.
- Bidders have to complete following formalities well in advance : **Step 1**– Bidder/ Purchaser Registration : Bidder to register on e-Auction portal <https://www.baanknet.com> using his mobile number and e-mail ID. **Step 2** – KYC Verification: Bidder to upload requisite KYC Documents. KYC documents shall be verified by e-Auction service provider (may take two working days). **Step 3** – Transfer of EMD amount to his Global EMD Wallet : Online/ Off-line transfer of fund using NEFT/ Transfer, using challan generated on e-Auction portal. Step 1 to Step 3 should be completed by bidder well in advance, before e-Auction date. Copy of proof of address, without which the bid is liable to be rejected.
- For detailed Terms & Conditions of e-Auction, please refer the link <https://www.baanknet.com> & Secured Creditor's website i.e. www.centralbankofindia.co.in before submitting their bids and taking part in the e-Auction.

The successful bidder shall remit 25% of the bid amount (less EMD) on the next day of declaration of successful bidder & rest 75% within 15 days in the account as mentioned in the sale intimation letter (that will be issued to him/ her). If he/she fails to deposit the amount as mentioned in the sale intimation letter, the amount already deposited will be forfeited and new auction of the property will be conducted. The bidders may participate in the e-auction by quoting / bidding from their own offices / places of their choice. Internet connectivity shall have to be ensured by each bidder himself. Bank/ Service Provider shall not be held responsible for the internet connectivity, network problems, system crash down, Power failure etc.

STATUTORY 30 DAYS SALE NOTICE UNDER THE SARFAESI ACT, 2002

The borrower/ guarantors are hereby notified to pay the sum as mentioned above along with up to date interest and ancillary expenses before the date of e-Auction, failing which the property will be auctioned/ sold and balance dues, if any will be recovered the interest and cost.

Date : 08.07.2026	Place : Raipur (C.G.)	Authorized Officer / Central Bank of India
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Woman delivers quadruplets in auto; newborns die after ambulance delay

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

A serious lapse in Madhya Pradesh's emergency health-care 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 Ghatas 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 Nuland 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 officegoers. 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 Bor Ghat section. Civic officials said Tuls 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



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

Navsari district and Surat remained closed on Tuesday due to heavy rain.

"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 electrocution" 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

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)

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.

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 Prohash 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



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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 contributory 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)



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

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

Chhattisgarh HC dismisses plea against Saraswati Vandana prayer directive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bilaspur

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 stu-



dents 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.

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 Chandrasekhar, 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 Chandrasekhar 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 pos-

sessing 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. A 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.



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.

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.

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 when Union 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.

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

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 con-

cerning 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

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

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.

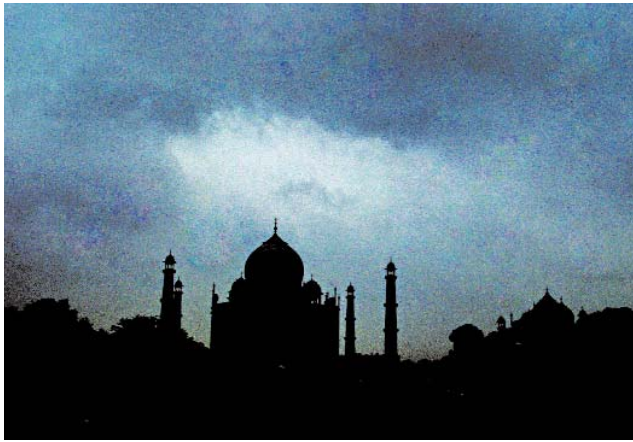
At the same time, families, educational institutions, women's organisations, and civil society must work together to eradicate this social evil and create an environment where every woman can live with dignity, safety, and respect after marriage.

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.

PICTALK



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

PHOTO: PTI

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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



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

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

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.

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 rain-fed 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.

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, Bhumihsars, 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

Chhattisgarh’s Diamond Discovery: A New Spark on the Horizon of Development and Prosperity



ASHISH MISHRA
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh has long been celebrated not only for its rich cultural heritage but also for its abundant natural wealth, which has earned the state a distinctive place on the global resource map. After iron ore, coal, bauxite, and tin, the recent discovery of natural diamonds promises to add yet another brilliant facet to the state’s mineral legacy. The identification of five natural diamonds in the Baloda-Belmundi region of Mahasamund district is far more than a geological milestone; it signals the emergence of a new chapter in Chhattisgarh’s developmental narrative. Beneath its soil lies not merely mineral wealth, but the potential to reshape the state’s economic future—a vision that the present government has already begun to translate into reality.

Officials entrusted with evaluating the state’s diamond reserves have every reason to be optimistic. History demonstrates that the discovery of a handful of diamonds does not automatically guarantee vast commercial deposits. Yet it is equally true that the world’s leading diamond-producing nations—including

Botswana, South Africa, Canada, and Australia—began their journeys with similarly modest discoveries before uncovering world-class reserves. The Baloda-Belmundi find points in the same promising direction, warranting comprehensive scientific exploration and rigorous resource assessment.

The credit for this achievement belongs to the meticulous efforts of the Department of Mineral Resources, working under the guidance of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, who also heads the state’s mining portfolio. The dedication of geologists, mineral experts, and senior officials deserves recognition for executing this survey through advanced scientific methodologies and cutting-edge technology. According to Mineral Resources Director & MD CGMDC Mr. Rajat Bansal, the confirmation of these natural diamonds came only after internationally accepted procedures, including stream sediment sampling, geophysical surveys, exploratory drilling, and the scientific processing of nearly 200 tonnes of bulk samples. This accomplishment reflects a significant transformation in India’s mineral exploration landscape, where scientific evidence has replaced speculative assumptions as the foundation of



The Pioneer
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resource discovery.

The discovery is particularly significant because, until now, Mainpur in Gariaband district had been regarded as Chhattisgarh’s principal diamond-bearing zone. The success at Baloda-Belmundi suggests that diamondiferous geological formations may extend far beyond previously known boundaries. Should future investigations validate this possibility, Chhattisgarh could witness the birth of an entirely new mineral economy.

also for their indispensable role in high-technology industries, precision engineering, advanced medical equipment, and industrial manufacturing. Therefore, if Chhattisgarh aspires to become more than a producer of rough diamonds—emerging instead as a centre for cutting, polishing, processing, and value addition—it could generate substantial employment while diversifying the state’s industrial landscape.

The Vishnu Deo Sai government now stands before a historic opportunity. This discovery must be integrated into a long-term mineral

policy that promotes investment, scientific research, technological collaboration, and skill development while ensuring that economic gains translate into meaningful social empowerment. Strong partnerships among geological institutions, universities, research organisations, and the private sector will be essential to accelerate scientific exploration and guarantee that the benefits of mineral wealth reach not only industries but also the communities that inhabit these resource-rich regions.

Chhattisgarh has consistently contributed to India’s economic progress through its abundant natural resources. The discovery of diamonds has the potential to become another defining milestone in that journey. However, its enduring success will depend not on the sparkle of the gemstones alone, but on whether this newfound wealth is accompanied by transparency, ecological balance, and inclusive development.

The true value of these diamonds will ultimately be measured not by their market price, but by the lasting prosperity they bring to every citizen of Chhattisgarh. The government’s commitment to realising this vision will determine whether this remarkable discovery becomes merely a geological triumph—or a transformative legacy for generations to come.

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



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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)

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 reg-



istration 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

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.

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 macro-economic 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.

SECL Director N. Franklin Jayakumar recommended as the new CMD of NCL

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bilaspur

South Eastern Coalfields Limited (SECL) extends its heartfelt congratulations to N. Franklin Jayakumar, Director (Technical) (Operations), SECL, on being recommended by the Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB) for the post of Chairman-cum-Managing Director (CMD), Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL) on July 2026.

A distinguished mining professional with over three decades of experience across coal and lignite mining,

Jayakumar first joined SECL as Director (Technical) (Project & Planning) in February 2024 and assumed charge as Director (Technical) (Operations) on 01 January 2025.

Prior to joining SECL, he served as Executive Director — Coal Coordination & Project Head, Talabira II & III OCP, NLC

India Limited, after holding several key leadership positions in NLC India. Earlier in his career, he served



a 5 MTPA coal mine in Indonesia for five years, bringing valuable international mining expertise. A Mining Engineering graduate from

The Singareni Collieries Company Limited for 18 years, gaining extensive experience in highly mechanized underground and open-cast mining. He also successfully led operations at

the College of Engineering, Guindy, Anna University, Chennai, Jayakumar has further earned a Post Graduate Diploma in Environmental Engineering & Management from the Central University, Hyderabad, and an MBA (Human Resource Management) from Alagappa University, Tamil Nadu. He is also a First Class Mine Manager's Certificate of Competency holder, awarded by the Directorate General of Mines Safety (DGMS), and a Fellow of the Institution of Engineers (India). Beyond operational excellence, Jayakumar has made significant

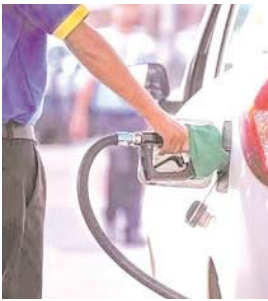
contributions to mine safety, skill development, and strategic policy initiatives. He has served as a Board Member of the Skill Council for Mining Sector (SCMS), held leadership responsibilities in the Tamil Nadu Mines Safety Association, and contributed to the Ministry of Coal's Crisis Management Plan, forming part of India's National Disaster Management framework. The entire SECL family congratulates N. Franklin Jayakumar on this well-deserved recognition and wishes him continued success in his leadership journey.

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 (FPI) 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.

BALCO conducts emergency mock drill at ash dyke

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

Bharat Aluminium Company Limited (BALCO) on Wednesday conducted an emergency mock drill at Ash Dyke-2 in the Jambahar village HT Tower area to assess disaster preparedness and the effectiveness of its emergency response mechanism.

The exercise simulated a scenario in which the ash dyke was damaged and overflowed following heavy rainfall or a cloudburst, prompting the activation of the site's emergency response plan. An emergency siren was sounded after information about the simulated incident was received, following



which rescue, relief and support teams rushed to the site. The teams secured the affected area, evacuated the injured, administered first aid, shut down equipment, cordoned off the site and shifted employees to safe locations. After all prescribed emergency response measures were completed, the

situation was declared normal, the company said. The mock drill was observed by officials from the district administration and other stakeholders, including Deputy Tehsildar Deepak Patel, police officials led by Ajay Singh, and Rohit Kumar from the regional office of the Chhattisgarh Environment

Protection Board. Representatives of nearby villages, including Parsabhata, Rogbahari and Jambahar, also participated. BALCO's emergency leadership team, headed by Deputy CEO (Power) Mantosh Kumar Sinha, supervised the exercise.

Senior officials from the company's operations, safety, environment, medical and security departments also took part. According to BALCO, such mock drills are conducted regularly to strengthen the disaster management capabilities of employees, business partners and associated agencies and to ensure a prompt and coordinated response during emergencies.

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

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 econom-

ic 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)

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 utilise 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 sup-

plied, 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 com-

petence 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

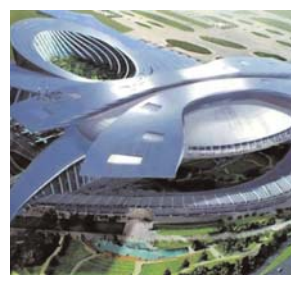
Amit Shah orders swift completion of immigration checkpoints at Jewar and Agartala airports

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 state- ment 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 touch-point. 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 touch-points across major airports.

ACA announces players' pool for inaugural Assam Premier League Auction



TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Assam Cricket Association (ACA) has officially announced the players' pool for the inaugural edition of the Assam Premier League (APL).

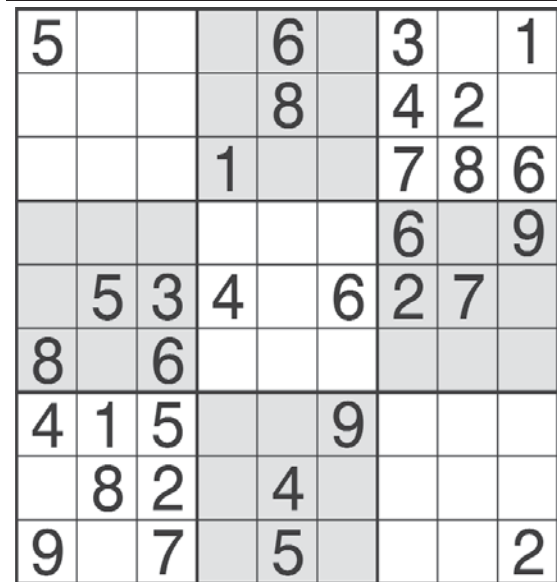
A total of 275 players has been shortlisted for the auction from among the registered players who expressed their interest in participating in the league. The shortlisted players will now go under the hammer in the APL Player Auction. The APL Player Auction is

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



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

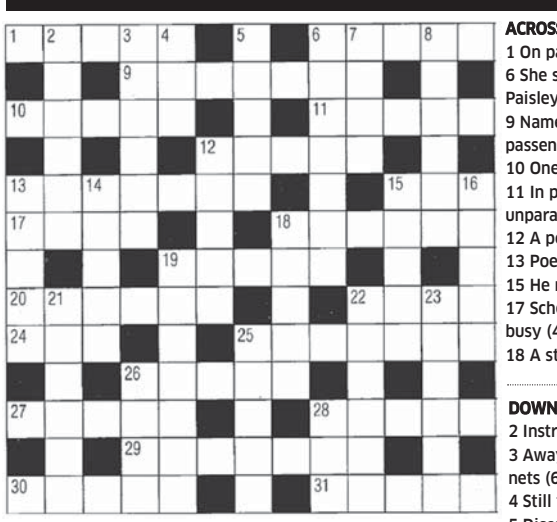
HOW TO SOLVE IT

Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9x9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3x3 box, using elimination and logical deduction—no maths involved.

SOLUTION (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

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 (5)
 - 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)
- 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? (5)
 - 28 Jim's sound place of exercise (3)

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 Government'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 I-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.

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 MBBS 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.

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 Hajira 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



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 pas-

senger 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."



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)

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 Idalis 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)

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. It is encouraging to see Indian volleyball moving in the right direction, reflected in the national team's rise from World No. 60 to World No. 42 in the FIVB rankings," added Joy Bhattacharjya, the league's CEO.

The FIVB has asked Volleyball Federation of India's interim head Virender Kanwar to work in "close coordination" with PVL for alignment of domestic calendar, player availability and integration of training camps among other things.

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 T20 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 vashni) 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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nottingham

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

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.



Samson has been given clarity on his omission, says Gambhir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nottingham

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."

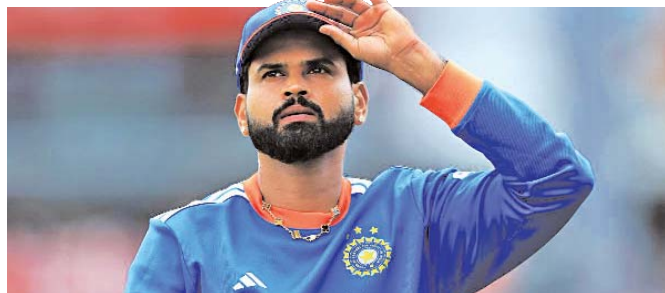
"...we are absolutely clear that what Sanju has done for India,



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.

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.

"I don't think it was a 200 wicket. We lost four wickets in the powerplay and that itself pushed us back. You can plan a lot but once you come to the ground you need to adapt. Try to figure out what is the right length. I felt the hard length was tough (to hit) and we didn't execute," he said.

Iyer believes that dwelling on failures would be of no use but at the same time the players need to think about making an impact which is paramount.

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."

The IOC also reiterated its "solidarity with the Olympic community of Ukraine" and ongoing financial support.

Barriers remain: The IOC's guidance to reintegrate Russians in international events is not binding for the governing bodies of individual sports.

"Our country's return to the Olympic family is a green light for international federations to restore the rights of our athletes," Russian Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyaryov said Tuesday.

Track and field is not following suit. (AP)

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 Turkey 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



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

AP

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)

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

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 Tareekh-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



Vikram Doraiswami

focusing on public diplomacy and international exchanges to promote friendship, mutual understanding, and dialogue between China and the international community.

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)