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PIONEER IN SHORT

Man arrested for fraud

In a significant breakthrough, the East District Cyber Police Station of Delhi Police has arrested a man allegedly involved in laundering the proceeds of an online UPI fraud through multiple bank accounts. The accused, who had absconded from his native village and switched off his mobile phone to evade arrest, was eventually tracked down and apprehended in Jaipur, Rajasthan, following sustained technical surveillance, financial investigation and field intelligence. The investigation began after an e-FIR was registered at the East District Cyber Police Station based on a complaint filed by a woman, who alleged that she had been cheated of Rs 1,16,220 through a fraudulent UPI transaction.

Police rescues two missing minor girls

The Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) of the Delhi Police Central District has successfully rescued two missing minor girls who were traced and recovered from Bihar. According to a senior police official, the police team had launched sustained search operations to trace the two missing minor girls in separate kidnapping cases registered at Paharganj and Anand Parbat police stations, both under Central Delhi. The first victim, a 13-year-old girl and a resident of Paharganj, Delhi, who has been reported missing and allegedly kidnapped, following the registration of an FIR on July 6.

Election tensions rise as Brazil bars US officials

Brazil has denied visas to two senior US State Department officials, accusing Washington of attempting to interfere in the country's October presidential election by engaging with political leaders and electoral authorities ahead of the vote. The officials Riley M. Barnes, Assistant Secretary in the US State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and Samuel Samson, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the same bureau have applied for visas on July 20 to visit Brazil between July 27 and 30. According to Brazilian officials, the delegation planned to meet with presidential candidate Flavio Bolsonaro, son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, officials of Brazil's Superior Electoral Court, and several conservative political figures.

PM announces high-level panel for NTA reforms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday announced the constitution of a High-Powered Task Force on examination reforms under the leadership of technology entrepreneur and Aadhaar architect Nandan Nilekani, with the multidisciplinary panel entrusted with recommending structural and technology-driven changes to strengthen the National Testing Agency (NTA) examination system. Announcing the decision in a post on social media platform X, the Prime Minister said, "HIGH POWERED TASK FORCE on examination reforms under the leadership of Shri Nandan Nilekani constituted." In a video message accompanying the announcement, Modi said the newly formed panel would focus on strengthening and modernising the country's examination system. The announcement



comes amid growing concerns over the integrity of public examinations and increasing calls for comprehensive reforms following a series of paper leak incidents, examination irregularities and the cancellation of major competitive tests. The government subsequently clarified that the task force has been constituted specifically to recommend reforms for NTA examinations, with a strong emphasis on harnessing technology and introducing structural changes to make the

examination process more robust, transparent and credible. The panel will be chaired by Nilekani and brings together experts from diverse fields, including technology, education, science, intelligence and public administration. Its members include former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman S. Somanath, former Intelligence Bureau Director Tapan Deka, Indian Institute of Technology Madras Director V Kamakoti, former Education Secretary Anita

Karwal and logistics expert Amrit Lal Meena. The formation of the task force is the Centre's latest step to overhaul the country's examination ecosystem after repeated controversies over paper leaks and alleged malpractices in competitive examinations. The issue has sparked nationwide concern, with students, educationists and political parties demanding stronger safeguards to ensure fairness, transparency and accountability in the conduct of public examinations. The panel is expected to recommend a comprehensive set of reforms aimed at enhancing the security, reliability and credibility of examinations through greater use of technology, stronger institutional safeguards and administrative improvements. Nilekani, who led the implementation of India's Aadhaar digital identity programme, is expected to guide the panel's technology-centric approach, while the varied expertise of

its members is intended to address the operational, educational and security dimensions of examination reforms. The initiative also complements the Centre's broader efforts to reinforce the legal and institutional framework governing public examinations. The government will also move an anti-cheating legislation in Lok Sabha on Monday while it has repeatedly asserted that organised examination fraud and paper leaks will be dealt with firmly. Examination reforms have remained a politically sensitive issue following repeated allegations of paper leaks and irregularities, with the matter featuring prominently during the ongoing Monsoon Session of Parliament. Opposition parties have demanded greater accountability from the government and called for sweeping changes to prevent future lapses in the conduct of competitive and public examinations.

Congress targets Centre over new exam reform panel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh on Sunday attacked the Centre's decision to set up a new High-Powered Task Force on examination reforms, alleging that the Narendra Modi government had failed to implement the recommendations of an expert panel constituted after the 2024 examination controversies and was now attempting to salvage the Prime Minister's "irretrievably compromised image."

In a post on social media platform X, Ramesh recalled that the government had constituted a High-Level Committee of Experts under former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman K Radhakrishnan in June 2024 following what he described as the mishandling of several competitive examinations, including NEET-UG.

"Friends, in June 2024, after it bungled multiple examinations including NEET-UG, the Modi Government constituted a High-Level Committee of Experts headed by Dr. K. Radhakrishnan to 'ensure



transparent, smooth and fair conduct of examinations," Ramesh said.

His remarks came after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the formation of a High-Powered Task Force on examination reforms headed by technology entrepreneur and Aadhaar architect Nandan Nilekani. The multidisciplinary panel has been tasked with recommending structural and technology-driven reforms to strengthen the National Testing Agency (NTA) examination system amid renewed concerns over paper leaks and other examination irregularities.

Questioning the need for a fresh panel, Ramesh said, "In July 2026, after the Modi Government has yet again bungled the NEET-UG and other examinations, it has constituted a 'High Powered Task Force' to focus on examination reform."

PM's praise puts C'garh on national map: CM Sai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly radio programme Mann Ki Baat has evolved into a powerful platform for connecting with people and recognising inspiring initiatives, innovations and individuals contributing to nation-building.

Sai made the remarks after joining youth, public representatives and citizens at Daya Bhawan in Fafadih here to listen to the 136th episode of Mann Ki Baat.

He said the repeated mention of Chhattisgarh's achievements, cultural heritage and innovations in recent episodes was a matter of pride for every citizen of the state.

The chief minister noted that the prime minister had earlier highlighted Malhar's archaeological heritage, the Bastar Olympics and Bastar Pandum, while in the latest



episode he appreciated Korba's work under the Catch the Rain campaign, bringing national recognition to the state's innovation and community-driven development model.

Referring to the campaign, Sai said it promotes rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, restoration of traditional water bodies and tree plantation.

He said Korba was adopting scientific measures such as geospatial mapping, shallow

aquifer management and recharge wells to improve groundwater levels and ensure long-term water security.

"Conserving every drop of rain is essential for human life, agriculture and environmental sustainability," he said.

Sai said the state government was continuously promoting water conservation, rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, restoration of ponds and traditional water sources, and large-scale tree plantation. He stressed that these initiatives should become a mass movement with active public participation rather than remain confined to government programmes and appealed to citizens to join the Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign. Paying tributes to the soldiers who laid down their lives in the 1999 Kargil War, the chief minister said the prime minister began the programme by saluting the armed forces on the occasion of Kargil Vijay Diwas.

Iran ends retaliation as US halts strikes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Tehran

Iranian armed forces have stopped retaliatory strikes against US military positions in the Middle East after Washington halted its attacks on Iranian territory, Iranian Army spokesperson Mohammad Akraminia said on Sunday. "The [US] attacks continued until they stopped two days ago. Since our strategy is based on retaliation, Iran's counter-offensive operations have also ceased," Akraminia was quoted as saying by the Fars news agency. Iran's decision to pause attacks on US targets came after concerns over American weapons stockpiles and the risk of a wider regional conflict reportedly influenced Washington's decision to suspend its bombing campaign against Iran. The United States halted its strikes after nearly two weeks of air operations that began on June 8,



following warnings issued by President Donald Trump during the NATO summit in Turkey.

The pause followed discussions between Trump and senior advisers over options to intensify military action amid rising tensions between Washington and Tehran, including threats to target Iran's Fordow nuclear facility, referred to as the "Pickaxe Mountain" site.

The latest escalation began after Trump said that the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed with Tehran on June 17, was no longer valid following attacks on vessels in the Strait of

Hormuz.

According to US media reports citing US officials, Vice President JD Vance and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Caine raised concerns during a White House meeting over the possible expansion of the military campaign.

General Caine reportedly warned that continued strikes could put pressure on US weapons stockpiles and carry broader consequences if the conflict continued. A US Department of Defense source said on Saturday that "US military operations were on hold," while officials had not confirmed whether the pause was temporary or represented a wider change in strategy.

The development came as the Trump administration attempted to balance military pressure with diplomatic efforts, with talks between Washington and Tehran continuing while the possibility of further escalation remained open.

Iran in focus as Netanyahu schedules Trump meeting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Tel Aviv

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday he would discuss with US President Donald Trump "all the issues currently on the agenda, including the situation in Iran," during a planned meeting in Washington next week.

Netanyahu is scheduled to meet Trump at the White House on Tuesday during a visit that will also include attending the funeral of US Senator Lindsey Graham, whom he described as "one of Israel's greatest friends since the state's establishment."

Speaking at the start of Israel's weekly cabinet meeting, Netanyahu said he had spoken with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Saturday night, adding that Rubio had pledged that Washington intended to take action against the International Criminal Court.

The ICC, Netanyahu said, "endangers justice around the



world and also threatens the right of democratic, sovereign states to exercise their sovereignty."

The court, which issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and former Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant over alleged war crimes during the Gaza conflict, was "trying to subordinate [democratic states'] security to the decisions of corrupt bureaucrats in The Hague," Netanyahu said.

He accused former ICC prosecutor Karim Khan of issuing the warrants "to divert attention, to rally all of Israel's enemies around him, and essentially to create a

protective shield for himself."

"That shield has now been torn away, exposing both his true motivation and the lack of justice and deep corruption not only in the Prosecutor's Office but throughout the International Criminal Court," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu also addressed Israeli military operations in the occupied West Bank following a deadly clash on Friday, saying the army had been instructed "to enter villages, search them, seize weapons, and make arrests."

He added that Israel was "prepared to act more broadly against terrorist strongholds."

The visit to Washington will mark Netanyahu's seventh meeting at the White House during Trump's second term, according to the Israeli prime minister's office.

"At President Trump's invitation, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will depart for Washington on Monday for an official visit," his office said in a statement.

Jantar Mantar wears empty look after protest ends

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The iconic Jantar Mantar, one of the capital's most prominent venues for public demonstrations, returned to normal on Sunday after the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) called off its over-month-long protest following the resignation of union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday.

The protest site, which had witnessed massive crowds and heightened security over the past several weeks, wore a deserted look as demonstrators dispersed and normal movement resumed in the area. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) also restored normal operations, reopening the entry and exit gates of 18 metro stations that had been closed due to security concerns. In a post on X, the DMRC said, "All stations of the Delhi Metro network are open (both entry and exit) for passenger services." Around 18 metro stations had remained partially closed over the past few days as authorities tight-



ened security in view of the large-scale demonstrations at Jantar Mantar. The lanes surrounding the protest site, which until Saturday were packed with protesters, supporters and security personnel, appeared almost empty on Sunday, marking a sharp contrast to the scenes witnessed during the agitation.

Soon after the protest was called off, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) launched a large-scale overnight cleanliness and restoration drive across Jantar Mantar and adjoining areas.

Sanitation workers, civic officials and heavy equipment were deployed to clear waste, repair damaged infrastructure and restore public spaces. NDMC Vice-

Chairperson Kuljeet Singh Chahal personally monitored the operation throughout the night.

The clean-up covered Jantar Mantar Road, Tolstoy Marg, Sansad Marg, Jai Singh Marg and adjoining areas of Connaught Place, with sanitation teams working continuously to restore the area to normal.

According to the NDMC, Chahal remained at the site after the protest ended, overseeing waste removal, cleanliness, repair and restoration works. He instructed officials to complete the exercise expeditiously while maintaining high quality standards. He revisited the area on Sunday to inspect the completed work and ensure that public spaces were clean, safe and fully ready for commuters and visitors. Appealing to citizens, Chahal said maintaining cleanliness in public places and protecting public property was a shared responsibility, urging people to help turn Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Swachh Bharat Mission into a true people's movement.

States Focus



JAGAN TARGETS LOKESH OVER ALLEGED EXAM IRREGULARITIES

YSRCP supremo YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has demanded the resignation of Andhra Pradesh Education Minister Nara Lokesh over the alleged irregularities in the DSC recruitment examination.

His remarks came in the wake of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over the alleged NEET paper leak.

However, Lokesh on Sunday dismissed Jagan's demand, saying those preaching moral responsibility had a contrasting record of their own.

Jagan, in a post on 'X', said, "Taking moral responsibility for the NEET paper leak, Pradhan resigned, setting a benchmark for political accountability under the NDA government. We now ask the same question in Andhra Pradesh."

(PTI)



INS SUDARSHINI DEPARTS BOSTON AFTER SAIL 250

INS Sudarshini, the sail training ship of the Indian Navy, departed Boston, USA on Saturday, as part of ongoing Lokayan 26, the defence ministry said here on Sunday.

During its stay, the ship proudly represented India at the prestigious SAIL 250 celebrations and the International Naval Review 250, showcasing India's rich maritime heritage while strengthening maritime partnerships through professional and cultural engagements.

The ship participated in SAIL 250 events at Norfolk, Baltimore, New York, and Boston, and hosted dignitaries, members of the Indian diaspora, and international naval delegations, reaffirming India's commitment to maritime cooperation and friendship.

(PTI)

Shah hails Pradhan's resignation

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

In a strong affirmation of the Bharatiya Janata Party's stated priorities, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that for BJP workers, the country, its youth, and students matter more than any political post. He made this statement just hours after Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned amid strong public pressure over the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) paper leak controversy.

Shah posted on X, saying, "For the BJP, the nation, our youth and students hold far greater importance than any position." He connected Pradhan's resignation to this idea, showing the party's focus on credibility and the hopes of young Indians over individual careers.

The resignation came after days of student protests and Opposition criticism over alleged problems with the NEET exam, which determines who gets into medical colleges. Paper leaks have been a recurring issue in India's exam system, making many students lose trust after years of hard work.

Shah made clear that the Modi Government is listening. "Shah emphasised that



Former Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, BJP National General Secretary Vinod Tawde, and others, listen to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' radio programme in New Delhi

PTI

the Modi Government is paying attention.

He wrote, "The Modi Government respects the sentiments of the country's youth and is committed to implementing the necessary reforms against paper leaks." He also praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strong actions to punish those responsible for leaking exam papers or tampering with results. "Punishment for those guilty of paper leaks is commendable," Shah said, expressing full confidence that these measures would "ensure complete justice for the students who succeeded in the NEET examination." The emphasis

on protecting the legitimate successes of honest candidates was deliberate, an attempt to reassure the majority who cleared the exam through hard work while signalling zero tolerance for malpractice.

Even as he addressed the controversy, Shah took care to situate Pradhan's tenure within the broader context of educational reform.

As Education Minister, Pradhan led the rollout of the National Education Policy, promoted the use of mother tongues in exams, helped set up PM SHRI Schools, and pushed for digital education and skill development. He also worked to build

stronger links between industry and academia. Shah said these efforts show a steady push to modernise India's education system and make it more inclusive and ready for the future.

The Home Minister's intervention serves multiple purposes. It seeks to calm student anxiety, reaffirm the government's reformist credentials, and frame the resignation not as a setback but as a demonstration of accountability. The Home Minister's comments aim to calm worried students, show the government's commitment to reform, and present the resignation as a sign of accountability rather than a failure.

In Indian politics, resignations amid public controversy are rarely straightforward and often test a party's ability to handle criticism while staying in control of the narrative.

Shah's message offers political reassurance, yet the real test will lie in the months ahead as the Government translates rhetoric into measurable change. The bigger issue of protecting the fairness of exams that affect millions of young Indians is still ongoing. By presenting the resignation as proof of the BJP's values, Amit Shah has set high expectations.

Kargil Vijay Diwas: President Murmu remembers warriors



PIB

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

On Kargil Vijay Diwas, President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday paid tribute to the valiant warriors who laid down their lives for the protection of the motherland, and said the nation shall forever remain indebted to them.

On July 26, 1999, the Indian Army announced the successful culmination of 'Operation Vijay', declaring victory after a nearly three-month-long battle with Pakistani troops on the icy heights of Kargil in Ladakh.

The day is observed as Kargil Vijay Diwas to commemorate India's victory in

the war. "On the occasion of Kargil Vijay Diwas, I pay humble tribute to those valiant warriors who laid down their lives for the protection of our motherland," Murmu said in a post on X in Hindi.

Their unparalleled valour, unwavering resolve, and unparalleled patriotism stand as exemplary models of our army's glorious traditions, she said.

"The nation shall forever remain indebted to them. The saga of valour of those heroic warriors will continue to inspire future generations to tread the path of national service and steadfast duty," the president said.

Assam flood situation improves as water levels recede, 6.5 lakh still affected

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

The flood situation in Assam improved on Sunday as water levels were receding in most of the affected areas with those places not receiving overnight rainfall, even as over 6.5 lakh people remained hit in six districts and 66 people lost their lives in this year's deluge, officials said.

An official of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said that water levels were receding in most of the flood-hit areas of

Upper Assam, especially Charaideo, Sivasagar and Jorhat districts.

"We hope the situation would improve further during the day. This would help us provide relief in a better way," he added.

According to the authority's daily flood report issued at midnight, more than 6,54,800 people have been affected in Charaideo, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat, Nagaon and Sivasagar districts.

Sivasagar was the worst-hit



Archer Jayanta Talukdar with his family members and one month old twins being moved to a safer place on a rescue boat by SDRF personnel from a flood-affected area at Rukminigaon in Guwahati, Assam on Friday

PTI

district with nearly 2.9 lakh people affected, followed by Charaideo (1.9 lakh) and Jorhat (1.3 lakh). The flood situation has improved marginally since Friday, when more than 7.05 lakh people were affected across nine districts.

The ASDMA's midnight bulletin said that four more people lost their lives in the deluge in the last 24 hours, taking the toll in this year's floods to 66. Three deaths were reported in Sivasagar and one in Charaideo.

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi on Saturday offered full support to the Assam Government in dealing with the deluge, which has shown signs of improvement as rain has stopped in most parts of the State.

Union Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal reviewed the relief measures at camps in flood-affected areas and directed officials concerned to ensure uninterrupted access to healthcare, food, drinking water and other essential services.

3 more held for Kolkata NEET protest violence, arrest count rises to 14

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari alleged the involvement of foreign Islamic fundamentalist forces behind the violence during a "Cockroach" protest in Kolkata on Friday when students' wings of various Left parties organised a rally and a night-long sit-in protest against question paper leaks in the NEET exams.

This, after the Kolkata Police arrested 14 people, including Md Afroz, a Trinamool Congress worker, in connection with Friday's violence. Saying that the police had identified about 70 people connected to Friday's mischief, the Chief Minister said, "very tough action will be taken against the trouble-mongers who are members of fundamentalist Jamat organisations."

Saying that none of those



Doctors, students and health workers participate in a rally to celebrate the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the NEET paper leak row and demanding immediate cancellation of National Testing Agency (NTA) among other demands at Calcutta Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, West Bengal

PTI

identified were students the Chief Minister said that the reason why the accused people resorted to violence was their frustration that stemmed not only out of the TMC's defeat but also "because my Government is investigating into the affairs of the unregistered Khariji Madarsas as well as the

Government's decision to cancel the spurious OBC list --- following a High Court order --- filled by the previous Government with underserving people."

The impugned OBC list that largely contained members of the minority community was questioned and nullified by the Calcutta High Court. The

police had earlier said that among the accused persons Md Azad and Md Afroz were arrested from the Durgapur Expressway while they were trying to sneak out of Bengal. Afroz allegedly had close links with TMC MLA Abdul Khaleque Molla from Kolkata's Metiaburuz constituency. The MLA however denied the claim.

The other arrested accused are Irfan Khurshed, Arshad Ali alias Sajid, Md Moynuddin, Md Alamgir alias Raju, Imran Ahmed alias Gopi, Khalid Reja alias Rinku, Zamir Ahmed alias Minku, Mohsin Khan, Dipak Bhownick alias Vicky, Shabab Khan, Sk Md Salman Hussain, and Johiruddin Mal. All the 14 people were on Sunday remanded to two-day police custody.

Out of those arrested at least 5 persons were charge-sheeted by the police on earlier occasions also,

police said.

The police claimed that the Friday's protests were organised by the various political parties and student-youth organisations, such as the SFI, AISF, AIDSO, AIDYO, CPIM(L), DYFI, AISA, PDFS, AFSA, DSF, ISU, APDR. Meanwhile, in a fresh round of controversy a number of FIRs were lodged at various police stations of Kolkata against prominent Bengali actress Srilekha Mitra for posing before the camera holding an "uncouth" cartoon of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi.

"The picture is not worthy to be shown in public... We want this lady to be arrested because she has insulted the Prime Minister not considering that it is a constitutional post and that he commands respect all over the world," BJP leader Keya Ghosh said.

Special session to discuss CAG reports, says Swapan Dasgupta



SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Kolkata

The West Bengal Government will hold a special session of the State Assembly to discuss the contents of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports that had been left undebated for the past four years, State Finance Minister Swapan Dasgupta has said.

"For now we are only tabling the reports... We want to hold a special session on the CAG reports in the coming days. It is the government's duty to present its shortcomings," Dasgupta said about the 28

long-pending CAG reports in the Assembly. The reports were placed on Saturday.

The Finance Minister said that the CAG reports between financial year 2020-21 and 2024-25 would provide a true picture of the State's finances and may also explain the reason behind the State's debt burden of ₹8 lakh crore. Incidentally, the Mamata Banerjee Government had carried a debt burden of ₹1.92 lakh crore from the previous Left and the Congress Governments. Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari too had earlier warned of strict action if the report underscored lapses.

National security a collective responsibility: Manipur Guv

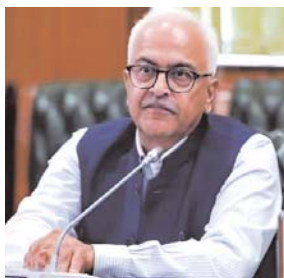
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Imphal

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Sunday said national security is a collective responsibility and called upon citizens to strengthen peace and harmony as India advances to achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Bhalla made the remarks during the observance of Kargil Vijay Diwas in Imphal, where he, along with Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh, paid heart-felt tributes to slain soldiers. Kargil Vijay Diwas commemorates India's historic victory in the Kargil War and celebrates the spirit that safeguarded the nation's sovereignty.

In his address, the governor paid tributes to the brave soldiers of the Indian Armed Forces, who have, across generations, defended the nation against external aggression with unwavering courage and selfless devotion.

Highlighting Manipur's



rich legacy of service in the Indian Armed Forces, Bhalla encouraged the youth to draw inspiration from the nation's brave soldiers and dedicate themselves to serving the country with discipline, commitment and patriotism.

"National security is a collective responsibility," the governor said, urging citizens to "strengthen peace, harmony and national integration as India advances towards the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047."

Bhalla recalled the valour of the Kargil heroes and acknowledged the sacrifices made by

the country's armed forces in safeguarding India's sovereignty, including their recent role in Operation Sindoor.

He said that their service continues to inspire the nation and paid "homage to the 'Veer Naris' (war widows) and 'Veer Matas' (women who lost their sons in conflict), whose strength, resilience and sacrifices remain an enduring source of inspiration for the country."

Bhalla said Kargil Vijay Diwas stands as an enduring symbol of patriotism, sacrifice and national pride, and urged everyone to honour the martyrs and their families.

Delivering his speech, the chief minister stated that Kargil Vijay Diwas is observed across the nation, including Manipur, to commemorate India's victory in the 1999 war and maintained that the victory was made possible through the courage, valour and unwavering determination of the Indian Armed Forces.

Students have shown PM that votes can be stolen, not people: Uddhav Thackeray

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday hailed students for their nationwide protests over the NEET paper leak, saying the agitation marked the beginning of a larger fight against the BJP and proved that "votes can be stolen, but not people".

"Deshbhakt have defeated andhbhakt", he said addressing a "Tiranga" rally at Shivaji Park in Mumbai where a massive crowd of youth, mostly college students, waving the national flag and holding posters of the Constitution, gathered to "celebrate" the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Despite light rains since morning, the youth in raincoats and under umbrellas carried posters of BR Ambedkar, the chief architect of India's Constitution,



Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray addresses the gathering in the presence of MNS chief Raj Thackeray, Maharashtra Legislative Assembly member Aaditya Thackeray and others during a rally to celebrate the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in Mumbai on Sunday

PTI

along with creative social media memes that had gone viral during the nationwide protests by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP).

Since the police action on students in Delhi on July 22, protests were seen in different parts of Maharashtra, with Shivaji Park being the centre point of gatherings in Mumbai.

During the rally on Sunday, Uddhav's cousin

and MNS chief Raj Thackeray led a one-minute silence at the venue in memory of 21 students who allegedly died by suicide following the NEET paper leak controversy in May.

Uddhav Thackeray said the youth had written "a golden chapter" in India's democratic history through their unity and their agitation evolved into a nation-

wide movement.

"People ask us why we are talking about elections when they are still three years away. The answer is simple. PM Modi has now realised that votes can be stolen, but not people," he said.

No election has been won today. "Patriots" (deshbhakt) have defeated "blind followers" (andhbhakt). This is the beginning of a bigger struggle. This is a fight between the BJP and India, the former Maharashtra chief minister asserted.

"I want to tell PM Modi that it is time to focus on the country. Your ministers are busy breaking political parties. Tell them to start working for the nation," he said.

Pradhan resigned on Saturday, following which the CJP called off its 36-day agitation that galvanised lakhs of people over irregularities in exams and the NEET paper leak.

Tej Pratap detained for supporting Bihar bandh over NEET paper leak



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

Former Bihar minister Tej Pratap Yadav was on Sunday sent to jail for trying to enforce the State-wide bandh called a day ago by students' unions over the NEET paper leak, his lawyer claimed.

The alleged "wrongful arrest" led his estranged younger brother Tejashwi, the RJD working president who is said to have played a role in his expulsion from the party headed by their father Lalu Prasad a year ago, to come out in his support.

According to Jagannath Singh, the lawyer of Tej Pratap Yadav, who now heads Janshakti Janata Dal, the ex-minister has been sent to the Beur Central Jail on the outskirts of the city, after being remanded to judicial custody by a magistrate.

"But the fact remains that he was arrested from a Patna mall at 7.30 pm yesterday and the FIR got lodged at the police station concerned only around 12.15 am on Sunday. Tomorrow, I shall be moving before a competent court for bail, where I will also highlight the anomaly," the lawyer said.

The police did not comment on Tej Pratap Yadav's "wrongful" arrest. Notably, Yadav has been booked for supporting the Bihar bandh called by Left-wing students' unions over the NEET paper leak issue.

He had been detained by the police Saturday morning and let off shortly afterwards, only to be arrested later, the lawyer said.

Pioneer Hulchul...

Whose Turn Is Next

The bureaucracy is often described as the backbone of governance, yet its authority frequently appears overshadowed by political power. A recent incident, in which a state minister allegedly abused, assaulted and secured the removal of a district collector, has raised uncomfortable questions about the balance between political leadership and the civil services. Since July 10, the officer has reportedly remained without an assignment in the ministry, while the IAS fraternity has maintained silence. The episode has sparked concerns over whether bureaucrats can effectively discharge their duties if they fear political retribution and who might be next.

Ministers' PAs Back in the Spotlight

Personal Assistants (PAs) to several state ministers are once again under scrutiny over allegations of influencing transfers and postings. Similar allegations had surfaced during the Raman Singh government, with critics blaming ministerial aides for damaging the government's image ahead of the 2018 Assembly elections. Although the Vishnu Deo Sai government had initially tightened norms for appointing PAs, political circles now claim that ministerial aides have regained significant influence, particularly during the ongoing transfer season.

BJP Mulls Organisational Changes

The BJP appears to be moving towards a long-awaited organisational reshuffle in Chhattisgarh. Recent meetings involving Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, Assembly Speaker Raman Singh, BJP National Joint General Secretary (Organisation) Shiv Prakash, Ajay Jamwal, Pawan Sai and state president Kiran Deo have fuelled speculation of changes in both the party organisation and the government. Shiv Prakash's separate meetings with senior leaders have further intensified talk of an imminent restructuring.

July 30 Crucial for Chhattisgarh Congress

July 30 is expected to be a significant day for the Chhattisgarh Congress, with PCC chief Deepak Baij summoned to Delhi for discussions with state in-charge Sachin Pilot. Pilot is also scheduled to visit Chhattisgarh on July 28 to consult party leaders and chalk out the opposition's strategy against the state government. The meeting is expected to address whether Baij will continue as PCC chief after completing his three-year tenure or whether the party will appoint a new state president.

Bhupesh-Devendra Rift Resurfaces

Differences have reportedly resurfaced between former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and Bhilai MLA Devendra Yadav over the leadership of the Chhattisgarh Youth Congress. While Devendra Yadav is backing Shailendra Banjare for the state youth chief's post, Bhupesh Baghel is supporting Satyendra Chelak. The contest has revived speculation about factionalism within the state Congress, with political observers closely watching the outcome.

'Excess' Comes at a Political Cost

The political fallout from the nationwide agitation over the alleged NEET paper leak continues to dominate discussions. Following sustained protests and mounting pressure, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned from his post. The handling of the protests—particularly allegations of excessive police action against demonstrators—has drawn widespread criticism and intensified public anger. Political observers believe the episode has inflicted avoidable political damage on the ruling BJP, reinforcing the adage that administrative excess often carries electoral consequences.

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Innovation, entrepreneurship to drive future growth: OP Choudhary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Durg

Chhattisgarh Finance Minister O P Choudhary on Sunday said innovation, technology and entrepreneurship will drive the future economy and urged young people to develop solutions to real-life challenges through creative thinking. Addressing the 'Manthan X' event at the Bhilai Institute of Technology (BIT), Durg, through virtual mode, Choudhary said the youth could play a pivotal role in the development of the state and the country by harnessing innovation and entrepreneurship. He said platforms such as Manthan X provide young innovators an opportunity to present their ideas before investors, industry experts and experienced mentors. "Such events are not



merely competitions but also serve as platforms for nurturing startups, generating employment and promoting innovation," the minister said. Choudhary stressed that self-confidence, a willingness to learn continuously and a solution-oriented mindset were the key ingredients of successful entrepreneurship. He urged students to align their innovations with the needs of society and develop solutions to local problems. Expressing confidence in the state's youth, the minister said they had the potential to establish themselves at the national and global levels through talent, hard work and innovation. He also lauded the organisers for promoting the startup ecosystem in Chhattisgarh and creating new opportunities for young entrepreneurs.

Doorstep schooling for PVTG children in remote C'garh hamlet



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

The Chhattisgarh government has arranged doorstep schooling and mid-day meals for children of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) Pando community in the remote forest hamlet of Sancharkhutra in Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi district to ensure their education is not disrupted during the monsoon.

The initiative was taken after the district administration found that children from Sancharkhutra, under Puta

gram panchayat in Gaurela development block, were unable to attend school because of difficult terrain and heavy rains. Collector Vijay Dayaram K. directed the School Education Department to make immediate arrangements for classes and nutritional support within the village. Under the arrangement, assistant teachers Chandrabhan Singh Uike and Ranveer Singh Baiga of Government Primary School, Puta, have been assigned rotational duty to conduct classes at the village commu-

nity hall and anganwadi centre. The teachers will mark their attendance at their parent school before travelling to Sancharkhutra according to a roster to ensure regular classes for the children. Officials said the arrangement would spare children from undertaking difficult and risky journeys to school during the rainy season and ensure uninterrupted education. The district administration has also made arrangements to provide hot cooked mid-day meals through the village

anganwadi centre. Food supplies will be transported regularly from Government Primary School, Puta, to the village for meal preparation. Collector Vijay Dayaram K. said ensuring access to quality education for children living in remote forest and particularly vulnerable tribal areas remained the district administration's top priority. He said efforts were being made to ensure that no child's education suffered because of geographical isolation, adverse weather or lack of basic facilities.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Korba

Water conservation initiatives of Korba district in Chhattisgarh received national recognition on Sunday after Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the district's work under the Catch the Rain campaign during the 136th episode of his monthly radio programme Mann Ki Baat.

The Prime Minister praised the rainwater conservation measures undertaken by the Korba Municipal Corporation, describing them as an effective model for augmenting water resources.

Officials said the initiatives have been implemented under the guidance of Korba Collector Kunal Dudawat and Municipal Corporation Commissioner Ashutosh Pandey with an emphasis on innovation and public participation.

As part of the campaign, the civic body has constructed recharge wells at 10 locations under the SAM-2.0



scheme using the "inject well" method in consultation with experts from the National Remote Sensing Centre (ISRO).

The recharge wells channel rainwater into the ground, helping improve groundwater levels by preventing runoff during heavy rainfall, officials said.

To promote rainwater

harvesting, the Municipal Corporation has facilitated the installation of 1,728 rainwater harvesting pits, including 757 in government buildings and 971 in private establishments. Rainwater harvesting has also been made mandatory for new building permissions as well as for community halls, schools, anganwadi centres and

other public utility buildings, they said. Officials said work orders for 109 public infrastructure projects include mandatory rainwater harvesting systems, while plans have been prepared to convert 95 abandoned or damaged borewells into recharge structures. Alongside water conservation, the district administra-

tion and Forest Department are carrying out large-scale plantation drives under initiatives such as Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam.

The Korba forest division has set a target of planting 2.5 lakh saplings this year.

The district administration also organised the "Run for Green Korba" campaign on July 18 to encourage public participation in tree plantation and environmental conservation.

Officials said the Prime Minister's mention of Korba's initiatives reflected the growing national recognition of the district's community-driven water conservation model and could serve as an example for urban local bodies across the country. Collector Kunal Dudawat and Municipal Commissioner Ashutosh Pandey appealed to citizens to install rainwater harvesting systems at homes, institutions and commercial establishments and participate actively in water conservation and tree plantation drives.

C'garh's Rakhi campaign aims to honour Armed Forces



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

Chhattisgarh Women and Child Development Minister Lakshmi Rajwade on Sunday appealed to people across the state to participate in 'Operation Sipahi Raksha-Sutra Abhiyan-2026', a Raksha Bandhan initiative aimed at expressing gratitude and solidarity with soldiers guarding the country's borders. The campaign has been launched ahead of Raksha Bandhan to encourage mothers, sisters and children to send handmade rakhis, greeting messages and a pinch of sacred soil from their homes to armed forces personnel. Rajwade said honouring the courage, dedication and sacrifice of soldiers was the moral responsibility of every citizen. "Raksha Bandhan is not merely a festival but

a symbol of protection, trust and emotional bonding. Through this campaign, the love and affection of Chhattisgarh's mothers, sisters and children will reach the nation's brave soldiers," she said.

The minister urged people to prepare handmade rakhis, write messages conveying their best wishes and enclose a pinch of soil from their courtyards in the envelope

for the soldiers' Vijay Tilak, describing it as a symbol of the blessings of the motherland.

She said the rakhis, greeting messages and envelopes containing the soil should be submitted at the nearest anganwadi centre or the Women and Child Development Department's project office by July 30. According to the minister, all Raksha Sutras collected under the campaign will be sent to the Army Headquarters in New Delhi through the Ex-Servicemen Mahasabha, from where they will be distributed among soldiers posted at various locations across the country.

Rajwade appealed to citizens to make the campaign a mass movement and send a message to soldiers that the people of Chhattisgarh stand firmly with them in honouring their service and sacrifice.

State level school hockey championship kicks off



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jashpur

The 26th Chhattisgarh State-Level School Hockey Championship began on Sunday at the international-standard astroturf hockey stadium in Jashpur, with 240 players from across the state taking part in the four-day tournament. Organised by the state School Education Department, the championship will be held from July 26 to 29 and features boys' and girls' teams representing all five divisions of Chhattisgarh.

Jashpur MLA Raimuni Bhagat inaugurated the tournament by hoisting the flag and taking the salute from the participating teams.

A total of 240 players, including 160 boys and 80 girls, along with more than 35 coaches and managers, are

participating in the championship. Addressing the gathering, Bhagat encouraged the players to uphold the spirit of sportsmanship and discipline and strive to bring laurels to their districts and the state at the national level. Jashpur Municipal Council President Arvind Bhagat said it was a matter of pride that the district was hosting the state-level school hockey championship for the second consecutive year. He said the international-standard astroturf stadium had strengthened hockey infrastructure in the district by providing quality facilities for training and competitions. Municipal Council Vice-President Yashpratap Singh Judeo, public representatives, officials, schoolchildren and local residents were present at the inaugural ceremony.

Conserve water, shun plastic, plant trees: Guv

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

Chhattisgarh Governor Ramen Deka on Sunday called for urgent measures to conserve water and protect the environment, warning that the state could face a water crisis in the future if timely action is not taken.

Speaking at the inauguration of a national campaign on 'Environmental Conservation and Disaster Management' organised by the Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwavidyalaya here, Deka said maintaining a balance between humans, flora and fauna was essential for environmental conservation.

"Climate change, rising temperatures, water scarcity and pollution are emerging as serious challenges. Chhattisgarh, too, may face a water crisis in the future, and therefore effective steps towards water conservation must be taken now," he said. The governor flagged off Brahma Kumari volunteers participating in the campaign, which will travel from Raipur to Jabalpur between July 26 and August 9 to spread awareness on environmental conservation and disaster management across parts of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Describing the initia-



tive as a public awareness campaign rather than merely a journey, Deka said it would inspire people to adopt practices such as tree plantation, water conservation, reducing plastic use and environmentally responsible behaviour. He said Chhattisgarh was endowed with rich natural resources, including dense forests, rivers and biodiversity, while its tribal traditions had long promoted harmony with nature. However, he cautioned that the state was not immune to the adverse effects of climate change and stressed the need to preserve its greenery and

traditional water sources. Highlighting water conservation as a priority, Deka said judicious use of water, rainwater harvesting and protection of traditional water bodies were essential to address future challenges. He also advocated greater use of renewable energy and eco-friendly technologies to reduce pollution. Expressing concern over the growing presence of microplastics, the governor said they posed a serious threat to human health and noted that reports of microplastics being detected in breast milk were particu-

larly alarming. He urged people to minimise the use of single-use plastic and ensure community participation in environmental conservation efforts.

Referring to natural disasters, Deka said while such calamities could not be completely prevented, their impact could be significantly reduced through preparedness, awareness and effective disaster management. He said rising global temperatures, erratic weather patterns and the increasing frequency of natural disasters underscored the need to reconsider humanity's relationship with nature.

The governor also said the campaign promoted harmony between science and spirituality, adding that practices such as Rajyoga encouraged positive thinking and greater sensitivity towards nature.

Calling for a mass movement for environmental protection, Deka urged citizens to conserve every drop of water, avoid single-use plastic and plant at least one sapling each while ensuring its proper care. Office-bearers of the Brahma Kumaris, volunteers and members associated with the campaign were present on the occasion.

Punjab police foils high-impact ISI-BKI plot

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi/Chandigarh

On Sunday, Punjab Police carried out an intelligence-based operation in Jalandhar, breaking up an ISI-backed Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) terror group. They arrested a key local member and found a fully assembled Improvised Explosive Device with 1.3 kg of high explosive, iron shrapnel, and steel ball bearings. The joint effort by Counter Intelligence Jalandhar and Jalandhar Rural Police stopped the plot before the device could be used.

Punjab Police officials said the IED was ready to use and built to cause as many casualties as possible in a public area. They confirmed it was meant for a major attack to disrupt peace and spread panic.

Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav said, "In a breakthrough against cross-border terror networks, Counter Intelligence Jalandhar, in a joint operation with Jalandhar Rural Police, busts an ISI-sponsored BKI terror module operated by foreign-based handlers and arrests a key operative from Jalandhar. The operation resulted in the recovery of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) with 1.3 kg of high explosive, shrapnel, and ball bearings. This showed plans for a major attack to disturb public peace. The quick action prevented a serious terror threat and protected innocent lives."

Police have not yet shared the name of the arrested operative, but they say he was a key local link in the foreign-run network. He was



caught in Jalandhar district during the raid. An FIR has been filed at Patara police station in Jalandhar Rural under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Explosive Substances Act, and the Arms Act. Investigations are ongoing

to uncover the full scope of the terror network, including foreign handlers, local support, and all connections. This is the latest in a series of quick successes against cross-border groups. Just five days ago, on July

21, Moga Police arrested 17 people linked to a UK-based handler and found an IED meant for a Ferozepur-Jammu passenger train. Earlier in July, Counter Intelligence Amritsar seized six hand grenades and 12 pistols from another ISI-backed arms-smuggling group.

These actions show ongoing efforts by Pakistan's ISI and its BKI partners to radicalise local youth and send explosives into Punjab using overseas handlers. Security agencies say BKI groups usually work remotely, with foreign handlers giving instructions through encrypted apps, arranging explosives, and choosing targets. Local operatives manage logistics and placement. The way shrapnel and ball bearings were packed in Sunday's IED is similar to earlier BKI

devices found in the state, which are made to cause maximum harm in crowded places. Police are questioning the arrested man about where the explosives came from, the intended target, and which overseas handlers were involved. Officials expect more arrests and recoveries as they follow digital and financial leads.

DGP Yadav reiterated that the Punjab Police is fully committed to dismantling terror networks, combating organised crime, and keeping the state safe. By stopping a dangerous device and arresting a key suspect, the police have shown how effective proactive, intelligence-based policing can be in preventing violence in Punjab. More information about the wider network is expected as the investigation continues.

Assam Governor honours Kargil martyrs at State War Memorial



TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended the Kargil Vijay Diwas commemoration at the State War Memorial in Dighalipukhuri on Saturday. The programme, organised by the Directorate of Sainik Welfare, Assam, marked India's victory in the 1999 Kargil War and honoured the valour and sacrifices of the Indian Armed Forces.

Paying floral tributes to the fallen heroes, Governor Acharya stated that Kargil Vijay Diwas stands as a solemn reminder of the indomitable spirit, courage, and patriotism shown by the armed forces in protecting the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Addressing the gathering, the Governor urged the youth to draw inspiration from the lives of the soldiers and actively contribute towards nation-building with discipline and commitment.

During the event, Governor Acharya interacted with military veterans, serving

defence personnel, and families of martyrs, expressing the country's gratitude for their selfless service.

He felicitated family members of several bravehearts, including Honorary Flying Officer Thogiram Gogoi and Dulu Prabha Gogoi, parents of late Captain Jintu Gogoi, Vrc; Thageswari Das, mother of Gunner Udhav Das; Bharati Saikia, wife of late Naik Someswar Saikia, SC; Hiranya Gogoi, mother of late Sepoy Rupom Gogoi, SC; and Dhal Kumari Shrestha, wife of late Havildar Padam Bahadur Shrestha.

The solemn ceremony was attended by senior officers of the Armed Forces, defence veterans, civil officials, NCC cadets, students, and members of the public. The Governor also commended the Directorate of Sainik Welfare for its initiatives in supporting ex-servicemen. The programme concluded with patriotic performances and a collective pledge to safeguard national unity and integrity.

Ex-Uttarakhand minister Hira Singh Bisht passes away



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Dehradun

Senior Congress leader and former Uttarakhand minister Hira Singh Bisht passed away due to cardiac arrest, Congress sources said. He was 85.

Sources said that after his health deteriorated around 1.30 am on Saturday, Bisht was immediately taken to the hospital, where he was declared dead.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami and State Congress President Ganesh Godiyal, along with various political parties, social organisations, and labour unions, expressed condolences on Bisht's passing.

The chief minister met the bereaved family at Bisht's residence on DL Road here and expressed his condolences.

AICC chairman Mallikarjun Kharge also expressed grief. In a post on X, he said, "Bisht dedicated his entire life to struggling for the rights of the poor, labourers, employees, and the deprived sections of society. This is an irreparable loss for the Congress family."

State Congress President Godiyal, along with other Congress leaders, visited his residence and bid him farewell by offering a wreath and presenting the Congress flag. Godiyal said Bisht was a popular leader who raised the voice of the poor, labourers, employees, and the deprived. His death is an irreparable loss to Uttarakhand politics and the Congress.

Born on November 4, 1940, Bisht began his political career in undivided Uttar Pradesh. He was among the Congress leaders who played an active role both before and after the formation of Uttarakhand.

Fadnavis dismisses buzz about shift to national politics

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Nagpur

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday dismissed speculations about him shifting to national politics, implying that his work and presence are confined to Mumbai and the State.

Speaking to reporters in Nagpur, Fadnavis downplayed the Shiv Sena (UBT) and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena's "Tiranga" rally in Mumbai, stating that issues such as the NEET paper leak do not belong to a particular individual or party, but concern the country's youth.

According to sources,

Fadnavis made a quick trip to the national Capital on Saturday and later returned to Nagpur amid speculation about his possible shift to national politics in the backdrop of Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation as the Union education minister.

When asked about his Delhi visit, the chief minister said, "Today, I am in Nagpur and will be going to Mumbai in the evening. I am in Mumbai and Maharashtra only."

He further said that he had no objection to the Shiv Sena (UBT) and MNS's 'Tiranga' rally in Mumbai to "celebrate" Pradhan's resignation.

"I am happy that they got



a reason to celebrate. Even we are happy because such issues (NEET paper leak) do not belong to any individual or party, but concern the youth of the nation. Prime

Minister Narendra Modi showed utmost sensitivity and took a decision in the interest of the country," Fadnavis said.

He said that the Union

Government will table the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 in the Lok Sabha on Monday, which will be the first of its kind in our country and the world. He further slammed Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray for his remarks during the Tiranga rally.

"Uddhav Thackeray has made such dialogues several times in the last 10 years, but his statements do not have any impact, as the entire country is standing with PM Modi. A single video by Modi ji at 1 am on Instagram broke Instagram records worldwide, and this shows whom India stands with," he remarked.

India warns seafarers amid black sea attacks

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Amid escalating security threats in the Black Sea region, India on Sunday issued a strong advisory urging its citizens to carefully evaluate the risks before accepting jobs on commercial vessels operating in conflict-hit waters.

The warning comes after five Indian nationals lost their lives in separate attacks on merchant ships in the region over the past week, underlining the growing dangers posed by the Russia-Ukraine war.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the security environment in and around the Black Sea remains highly volatile, with commercial shipping increasingly vulnerable to missile and drone strikes. It noted that attacks on merchant vessels have risen sharply since April, making maritime operations in the area significantly more hazardous.

In its advisory, the MEA urged Indian seafarers to thoroughly assess prevailing security conditions before accepting assignments on ships sailing through or operating in conflict-affected waters.

"Commercial vessels operating in or transiting these waters are facing significant



security risks, including missile and drone attacks," the ministry said, adding that the recent spate of incidents has already claimed the lives of five Indian nationals.

The Government advised prospective seafarers to seek detailed information from employers, recruitment agencies and ship operators regarding the vessel's intended route, ports of call, onboard security arrangements, insurance coverage and emergency response mechanisms before signing employment contracts.

It also stressed that employment agreements should comply with international maritime standards and include adequate provisions for medical treatment, evacuation, repatriation and compensation in the event of emergencies. Indian nationals were further advised to keep family

members informed of their travel itinerary, maintain regular communication and contact Indian diplomatic missions in the region whenever consular assistance is required.

The advisory coincided with another maritime incident involving Indian crew members. A merchant vessel, MV AGN Ragnar, carrying four Indian nationals, was struck while docked at Ukraine's Port of Odesa on Saturday. The Indian Embassy in Kyiv confirmed on Sunday that two of the four Indians on board are safe, while information regarding the remaining two is still awaited.

The embassy said it is closely monitoring the situation and remains in constant contact with the relevant authorities. Search and rescue operations are underway to determine the status of the missing crew

members and provide all possible assistance.

The circumstances surrounding the strike, including its source and the total number of crew members on board, were not immediately known.

Odesa, Ukraine's largest Black Sea port, has been subjected to repeated missile and drone attacks since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022, making it one of the most vulnerable maritime locations in the region.

Reiterating its concern, the MEA said the conflict continues to pose serious risks to commercial shipping. The ministry emphasised that Indian nationals considering employment on vessels operating in the Black Sea should make informed decisions after carefully evaluating the security situation.

India has consistently advised its citizens to avoid non-essential travel to Ukraine since the war began and has continued to provide consular support to Indian nationals residing in or transiting the country. Sunday's advisory marks a renewed effort by the Government to prevent further casualties among Indian seafarers working in one of the world's most dangerous maritime zones.

Odisha BJP MP's daughter's post on Pradhan's resignation sparks ire

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhubaneswar

A social media post of Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi's daughter Archita Sachin Rahar allegedly celebrating the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as the Union education minister has sparked resentment in the party rank and file in Odisha.

Rahar, in an Instagram post, which had a photograph of Pradhan in the backdrop of the national flag, wrote, "Dharmendra Pradhan resigns amid massive student protests over NEET leak fiasco."

State BJP leaders, including her mother, on the other hand, expressed sympathy to Pradhan. "Everyone has the right to express their views. Her daughter, who is from Gen Z, said she stands by her statement. She has the right to speak her mind," the MP's office assistant Dhaneswar Barik said.

Asked whether Rahar's social media post has put the Bhubaneswar MP in trouble, Barik said, "Only time will tell."

The two-time MP from Bhubaneswar was, however, unavailable for comment.

Sources said the lawmaker had asked her daughter to



remove the post after getting a phone call from Pradhan's office. However, it failed to have an impact.

Rahar, in another social media post, wrote, "Also, to DP's PA who is sure to text my mother asking me to delete my previous story (it has happened before) — Don't bother. I won't delete. Jai Jagannath! Jai Hind."

After her daughter's tough stand on her post, Aparajita Sarangi, in an X post on Saturday night, wrote, "Sri @dpradhanbjp ji has tendered his resignation today. Resigning after owning moral responsibility calls for a lot of courage. I stand by him in this very difficult time. I wish for him the best for the days to come. May Lord Jagannath shower HIS Blessings upon him."

BJP leaders of Odisha criticised Rahar over her post. Jagannath Pradhan, a BJP

candidate who lost the polls in 2024 from Bhubaneswar Central assembly segment, said, "Pradhan is son of the soil. His resignation has hurt us. Odias have welcomed the daughter of Bihar (Aparajita) and made her MP twice."

"Sarangi should have control over her family members. She should tender an apology to Odisha for her daughter making adverse remarks against Pradhan. As an educated person, the MP's daughter should not make such statements against Pradhan, who had immense contributions to Odisha and India," he added.

"The BJP is a family and all the members should stand by the other when he or she is in trouble. Sarangi's daughter going against a party leader is not acceptable in a disciplined party like the BJP," another senior leader said.



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday felicitated Assam's first woman to scale Mount Everest, Rupamani Goh and ITBP Assistant Commandant Bhanita Timungpi, who led the successful all-women Mount Everest expedition, at Lok Sewa Bhawan, Dispur and also handed over ₹10 lakh and ₹2 lakh respectively in recognition of their outstanding achievements

PIONEER PHOTO

In a first, 3 chicks of Great Indian Bustard released into rewilding tunnel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jaipur

In a first, three chicks of the endangered Great Indian Bustard have been released into a specially designed rewilding tunnel at the Godawan Conservation Centre in Jaisalmer's Ramdevra, officials said.

The state-of-the-art facility, built at ₹9.25 crore, aims to prepare captive-bred chicks for survival in the wild by minimising human contact and simulating natural conditions.

Forest officials described the development as a "historic milestone" in the conservation programme, as it marks a shift from captive breeding to successful reintroduction into natural habitats.

"For the first time, three chicks have been placed in the rewilding tunnel where they will learn to adapt to natural surroundings



without direct human interaction," an official said.

According to the officials, the chicks will remain inside the tunnel for about four months under continuous

CCTV surveillance. While food will be provided externally, no direct human contact will take place, allowing the birds to gradually develop survival

instincts such as foraging, movement in open terrain and adapting to desert ecology.

Deputy Conservator of Forests Ashok Singh said,

"The focus is now on preparing these birds for life in the wild so that they can be safely rehabilitated in their natural habitat.

After the rewilding phase, the chicks are expected to be released into the Desert National Park, where efforts are underway to revive the natural population of the critically endangered bird.

Wildlife experts believe the initiative could prove to be a game-changer for the species, whose numbers have dwindled drastically over the years. The Great Indian Bustard is the State bird of Rajasthan.

They said the success of this experiment could pave the way for large-scale reintroduction of captive-bred birds into the wild, bringing the long-standing goal of restoring the Great Indian Bustard population in Rajasthan's deserts closer to reality.



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Maharashtra: Two convicted in separate POCSO cases



Two persons were convicted under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in separate cases by a Palghar court.

Additional Sessions Judge AR Rahane sentenced Devkant Paswan, a manager in a corporate firm, to three years in jail under section 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) of the Indian Penal Code and section 8 (sexual assault) of the POCSO Act. He was also fined ₹25,000.

As per the prosecution, on April 27, 2017, he molested a 13-year-old girl in a building lift, dragged her into his flat and asked her to strip.

In the second case, office help Hasmukh Rathod (45) was sentenced to three days of simple imprisonment, covering his pre-trial detention, for stalking and sexually harassing a 13-year-old schoolgirl.

Judge Rahane convicted him under section 354D (stalking) of the IPC and section 12 (sexual harassment) of the POCSO Act. Rathod was also fined ₹20,000. (PTI)

Kerala HC judges inspect Thrissur mental health centre



Kerala High Court judges on Sunday visited the Government Mental Health Centre at Aranattukara in Thrissur to review the facilities and overall conditions at the institution, officials said.

Justices Devan Ramachandran and Basant Balaji inspected various sections of the hospital and interacted with officials during the visit.

Officials said the judges were accompanied by the amicus curiae appointed by the High Court in connection with a case relating to the condition of the mental health centre.

Speaking to people, including reporters gathered at the institution, Justice Ramachandran said substantial improvements were required.

“We will see when the case is considered. Let the orders come. A lot of things have to be done. Let us see what happens,” he said.

Officials said the High Court judges have been visiting mental health institutions across the state as part of the cases concerning their functioning and infrastructure.

On July 18, the judges visited the Government Mental Health Centre at Peroorkada in Thiruvananthapuram.

Following that inspection, the High Court expressed concern over the condition of the institution and called for immediate steps to improve the facilities. (PTI)

Shifting shape like a river: Delhi court upholds woman’s conviction in cheque bounce case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A Delhi court has upheld the conviction of a woman in a cheque bounce case, observing that her defence “shifted like a river” through various stages of trial, from a complete denial to a claim of repayment.

Additional Sessions Judge Saurabh Partap Singh Laler was hearing the appeal filed by a woman against a November 2024 magisterial court order convicting her under the Negotiable Instruments (NI) Act in a cheque bounce case.

The order on sentence was pronounced the next month, directing her to pay a compensation of ₹5 lakh within 90 days, or face simple imprisonment for three months.

“A defence, unlike truth, need not remain constant. It can begin as a categorical denial, mature into a qualified admission, and end as an altogether different narrative – shifting shape with every fresh stage of a trial, much as a river changes its course around the obstacles placed in its path. The present appeal is a study in precisely such a phenomenon,” the judge said in the order dated July 8.

The appellant, Omwati Tokas, set up three “mutually destructive” versions of her defence, where she initially denied that the cheque belonged to her or had her signature, he said.

Four years later, during cross-examination, she

residence, and finally, in her statement to the court, she admitted that the signature was her but claimed the loan had already been repaid in instalments, the judge said.

“Complete denial, followed by a qualified admission coupled with a plea of security, followed in turn by a plea of discharge – three defences at three distinct stages, each mutually destructive of the one preceding it,” the judge said, adding that such a trajectory of “self-contradiction” determined the fate of the appeal.

The case dates back to 2011-2012, when the complainant, Narsi Lal, advanced loans of ₹3 lakh to Tokas to meet family necessities. Lal, a carpenter, said that he had arranged the funds by selling a plot of land meant for his children’s education.

When Tokas issued a cheque for ₹3 lakh in April 2016 to repay the amount, it was returned unpaid by the

Jantar Mantar: Protests withdrawn, legal questions remain



RANJIT KUMAR SINHA

The protest movement at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, was officially withdrawn after Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan tendered his resignation on Saturday, July 25, from the Union Council of Ministers.

This followed a 26-day hunger strike by activist Sonam Wangchuk, who had called off his fast a day earlier on Friday, July 24, 2026, at a private hospital in Gurugram following high-level Government negotiations. With these developments, the Government successfully stepped forward to defuse the intense standoff witnessed earlier in the week.

Hopefully, peace will prevail, and normalcy will return to the heart of the national Capital as Parliament commences its daily business from July 27 to deliberate on the pressing issues of the nation.

The events that unfolded on July 20 — when a call was given for a ‘*Sansad Chalo*’ march coinciding with the start of the Parliament session — truly speak for themselves. The clashes and tense incidents that took place at Jantar Mantar and surrounding areas drew conflicting narratives, ultimately prompting the top-level political interventions needed to calm the situation.

Efforts were also made to draw the attention of the judiciary to the matter. The judicial interventions surrounding Wangchuk’s protest and subsequent hospitalisation involved multiple petitions filed before the Delhi High Court.

A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed seeking urgent medical intervention and daily health supervision by



Government doctors given his prolonged indefinite hunger strike.

Following the Ladakh-based activist’s removal from the Jantar Mantar protest site and his admission to Safdarjung Hospital, his wife moved the court challenging the shifting, alleging it amounted to “illegal detention” and a violation of his bodily autonomy.

An appeal was subsequently filed to transfer Wangchuk from the Government-run Safdarjung Hospital to Medanta Hospital in Gurugram, which the High Court ultimately permitted to protect his fundamental rights and well-being.

Additional PILs were presented before the High Court addressing matters related to the ‘*Sansad Chalo*’ march mayhem, requests for First Information Reports (FIRs) or Special Investigation Teams (SITs) regarding the police action, and security or surveillance issues at the protest site.

The sequence of events shifted briefly to the Supreme Court when an urgent mention was made seeking immediate inter-

vention regarding the police crackdown on protesters.

Initially, the Supreme Court displayed reluctance to entertain the plea. During the hearing, the Chief Justice of India (CJI) declined an urgent listing, remarked that the court did not have time to watch video evidence of the incident, and firmly instructed counsel not to waste the court’s time, sparking widespread controversy and debate across media platforms.

However, the very next day, a formal clarification came directly from the CJI in open court. The CJI dismissed certain media reports as reckless, clarifying that the

court had not technically “refused” to hear a proper petition, as no writ petition had actually been filed at that stage — only an informal letter representation.

The bench emphasised that matters of such magnitude require strict adherence to proper procedural filings rather than oral mentions or informal requests. The CJI was also seen on electronic media making this clarification.

However, when the matter was first mentioned, the Chief Justice could have handled it with greater sensitivity. On the first day, standard judicial procedure simply required advising the lawyer to file a proper, formal writ petition rather than dismissing the urgency outright.

At a time when the national Capital was heavily volatile and facing severe unrest, remarks stating that the court had “no time to watch video evidence” appeared dismissive. Such casual brush-offs during a public crisis can deepen distress and alienation among citizens seeking timely justice.

A person sitting at such an

exalted constitutional position is naturally expected to stay informed about critical developments from mainstream media or administrative sources. Total detachment from ground realities during widespread civil tension risks projecting institutional indifference when public reassurance is needed the most.

Despite this friction, the Supreme Court’s decision to take up the matter has offered reassurance. It signals to the public that the broader questions surrounding the protest will finally receive thorough judicial scrutiny.

Though the protest movement has been withdrawn, the judiciary is expected to examine the delicate line between the fundamental right of citizens to peacefully assemble and the State’s duty to maintain public safety and order.

Deliberations will likely focus on whether law enforcement agencies used reasonable crowd-control measures or excessive force during the mobilisation.

The legal boundaries surrounding emergency hospi-

talisation, medical supervision, and the preservation of life during prolonged hunger strikes will be scrutinised.

The judiciary’s review will aim to address systemic grievances and executive transparency, reinforcing public confidence in constitutional remedies.

The Foreign Funding and Conspiracy Claims need to be scrutinised. Statements by ruling political figures and a section of the media alleged that the agitation was not merely a student protest but part of a larger conspiracy, backed by foreign organisations and external funds, to destabilise the Capital.

If these conspiracy and funding angles are pushed during formal hearings, the judiciary will have to separate speculative narratives from concrete, verifiable evidence to ensure that national security laws are not misused to suppress legitimate dissent.

At the same time, proponents of the Government’s stance maintain that the state has a binding sovereign duty to investigate external funding channels and safeguard internal security.

From this perspective, rigorous administrative scrutiny and adherence to financial transparency laws like the FCRA are vital defences against foreign interference, ensuring that domestic civil movements remain indigenous, lawful, and free from malicious external manipulation.

Ultimately, a balanced judicial approach will be key to addressing these complex layers. By upholding both national security imperatives and constitutional freedoms, the legal system can ensure that justice is served fairly, transparency is maintained, and public trust in democratic institutions is firmly preserved.

Writer is a senior journalist covering legal affairs

Delhi court upholds four year sentence to man in Arms Act case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

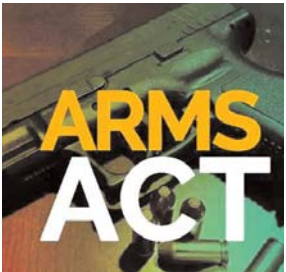
A Delhi court has upheld the four-year rigorous imprisonment awarded to a man found in possession of an illegal country-made pistol, saying the convict had demonstrated propensity towards repeated criminal conduct.

Additional Sessions Judge Saurabh Partap Singh, who was hearing the appeal filed by Virender alias Kala Badal, against an October 2025 order of a magisterial court sentencing him under the Arms Act, underlined that the credibility of police witnesses cannot be doubted merely because they belong to the State’s law enforcement agency.

According to the prosecution, Virender was apprehended by the Crime Branch on June 17, 2019 near Jhareda village here following a tip off.

A single-shot country-made pistol and two live cartridges were recovered from his possession.

In an order dated July 9, the court said, “It is well settled that no infirmity attaches to the testimony of police officials merely



because they belong to the police force, and there is no rule of law which lays down that a conviction cannot be recorded on the evidence of police officials, if found reliable, unless corroborated by independent evidence,” the court said.

It said the principle that a person acts honestly applies equally to a police officer, unless the contrary is shown, and it is not the correct judicial approach to view the testimony of a police witness with suspicion or distrust without a good ground.

In his appeal, Virender claimed he was falsely implicated due to personal enmity, alleging the police had previously killed his brother in custody. He also alleged the absence of independent

public witnesses and a discrepancy in the seal used on the seized weapon.

Trashing the claims, the court said the police did attempt to join passersby as independent witnesses, but they refused to join.

“Merely because there is no videography or photography of the alleged recovery, it cannot be said that the recovery had not been effected,” the court said, adding the discrepancy in the seal was an “inadvertent typographical error” that did not disturb the chain of custody.

Regarding the claim of false implication due to his brother’s custodial death, the court observed this claim was raised for the first time during the appeal.

“The plea now sought to be raised finds no support whatsoever in the trial court record, such a defence never having been set up at the trial stage,” the judge said.

While upholding the sentence, the court took note of the convict’s extensive criminal record, which included previous cases related to narcotics, theft, robbery, and attempt to murder.

Sleeping on pavement does not contribute to negligence: Delhi HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court has enhanced the compensation awarded to the victims and the kin of the deceased in a road accident, stating that sleeping on pavements cannot be held to be an act contributing to the negligence of the offending truck driver.

Justice Anish Dayal set aside the decision of the Motor Accidents Claims Tribunal (MACT), which reduced the compensation payable to the families of two deceased persons and two surviving victims by half, and said the finding attributing 50 per cent “contributory negligence” to the claimants was unsustainable.

The judge said a pedestrian using a pavement for walking, standing, or resting owing to compelling circumstances cannot be expected to anticipate that a motor vehicle would be driven onto the footpath and a driver ought to be more cautious while driving in an area meant for pedestrians.

“It is a reality in this country that many persons are homeless, work through the night, or are part of labour deployed at various construction sites and do not have a place to sleep. For such persons, these pavements also become a relatively safer place to rest, considering that they do not expect vehicles to be driven onto the pavements and mow them down. Even if they had taken a calculated risk sleeping on the pavement, it certainly cannot be translated into contributory negligence,” said the court in the judgement passed on July 8.



“Even if it is not being used for the purpose it is intended for, still it certainly cannot be used for driving, which is completely prohibited under the law,” it held.

The accident, in the instant case, took place on the pavement under the Madipur metro station in October 2015 at around 4.30 am when the truck, which was being driven at a high speed, hit four victims sleeping on the pavement there.

The court restored the 50 per cent amount deduced by the tribunal on account of contributory negligence and asked the insurance company to pay the amount to the respective beneficiaries within six weeks.

The court approved a compensation amount of around Rs 10 lakh each for the kin of the two deceased; the compensation for the two injured was set at ₹1,20,005 and ₹18,10,569 each.

The court passed the verdict on appeals by the surviving victims and the families of the deceased challenging the tribunal’s decision.

interest on the principal amount of ₹3 lakh over this period, the compensation of ₹5 lakh awarded by the trial (magistrate’s) court cannot, by any measure, be said to be excessive or disproportionate.

“The submission that the appellant had already undergone 48 days’ incarceration, even if correct, would, at best, be a matter to be reckoned against the default sentence at the stage of its execution, and furnishes no ground to hold the quantum of compensation or the default sentence, as such, to be unreasonable or excessive,” the judge said.

“There was no infirmity, illegality or perversity in the order on sentence,” he added.

Editor's

TAKE

A turning point for education reform

Even after the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan, the larger issue still remains unchanged: Reforming India's examination and education system

The resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, triggered by widespread student protests over alleged examination paper leaks and irregularities, represents a defining moment in India's democratic and educational system. The resignation came after the unabated student protests which became intense with each passing day. The student concerns over the paper leaks and general frustration with the education system is understandable. There have been numerous paper leaks of the competitive exams which take a heavy toll of students' mental state. The NEET paper leak became a trigger to vent those frustrations accumulated over year.

For the government, the resignation is both a setback and an opportunity. It is a setback because it acknowledges that public confidence in the administration of competitive examinations had eroded significantly. When allegations of paper leaks and procedural failures emerge repeatedly, the damage extends beyond individual examinations. It erodes the public confidence in the State itself. It is not just the students who bear the burden. Their parents and well-wishers often invest substantial sums to give them a year or more to prepare, pay for expensive coaching, and place their hopes in the belief that success in these examinations will help their children build a secure future. The government's response can also be viewed as an attempt to contain political fallout and signal that accountability applies even at the highest levels. However, replacing a minister is only the beginning. Unless institutional weaknesses are addressed, public scepticism will persist regardless of who occupies the office. For the Opposition, the protests have demonstrated that issues affecting young people can become powerful political mobilisers. By aligning itself with student demands, it has succeeded in amplifying concerns that might otherwise have remained confined to campuses.

The greatest responsibility now rests with policymakers. Students did not take to the streets merely to seek the resignation of a minister alone. They demanded assurance that merit, not manipulation, will determine their future. Restoring that confidence requires reforms that go far beyond administrative reshuffles. India's examination system needs a comprehensive overhaul. Security protocols for question papers must be strengthened through advanced digital safeguards and independent audits. Recruitment agencies and testing bodies require greater autonomy, professional management and continuous technological upgrades. Swift investigations into irregularities should become the norm, accompanied by transparent public disclosures. Equally important is the creation of legally enforceable timelines for re-examinations, and mechanisms to protect students from prolonged uncertainty. The creation of fast-track courts is a step in the right direction but certainly not enough. It must be accompanied by a foolproof preventive measure that ensure a fair and free examinaion system. India's demographic dividend rests on the aspirations of its youth. Protecting those aspirations requires a system that is transparent, secure and unquestionably fair.

UP redraws India's innovation map

Driven by bold policy interventions, world-class digital infrastructure and a long-term vision for technology-led growth, Uttar Pradesh is positioning itself at the forefront of India's next startup revolution.



SHEHZAD POONAWALLA VIJETA RATTANI

India's innovation geography is undergoing a profound cartographic shift and it is being redrawn from the heartland. For decades, the country's startup map was a narrow coastal corridor, with the Hindi belt treated as little more than a reservoir of engineers who built wealth for different states. A state once defined by demographic scale rather than economic ambition is no longer exporting talent alone. Under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, it intends to retain, nurture and scale its human talent pool into billion dollar enterprises.

With over 21,000 recognised startups, eight unicorns, UP has now India's fourth-largest startup ecosystem. This rise is not an accidental byproduct of a global liquidity boom but a mature and futuristic understanding of Yogi Adityanath's leadership. To build on this, the Uttar Pradesh Startup Policy 2026 represents a structured attempt to transform the state into one of India's leading innovation hubs in emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Computing, Blockchain and other deep-tech domains, as well as in priority sectors including Agri-Tech, Rural-Tech, Space-Tech, Defence-Tech, Edu-Tech, Health-Tech, thereby positioning Uttar Pradesh among the top start-up ecosystems in India. At the centre, the policy provides a wide range of incentives which includes sustenance allowances at the rate of ₹20,000 per month, prototype grants of up to ₹10 Lakhs, seed capital of maximum ₹15 Lakhs per startup, and matching grants. These ensure that startups can survive the volatile early stages of their development.

Further, these measures are complemented by reimbursements for quality certifications, patent filings, bank loans, network support, interest subvention to boost ecosystem growth, handle operational costs and encourage formal employment. Importantly, the policy distinguishes between service-based ventures and those with genuine technological innovation, ensuring resources are more directed toward deep-tech startups capable of creating scalable impact. In this regard, the policy enables enhanced incentives including "Patience Capital" of up to ₹40 crore per startup, royalty-based R&D matching grants and compute power reflect the state's ambition to lead in frontier technologies like AI, quantum computing and blockchain.



TO COMPLEMENT THE LARGER GOAL OF CATALYSING THE GROWTH OF AN INNOVATION-DRIVEN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM, UTTAR PRADESH GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO ROLLED OUT ITS DATA CENTER POLICY 2026 WHICH REINFORCES THE STATE'S VISION OF BECOMING A GREEN, AI-READY AND GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE DATA CENTRE HUB

Shehzad Poonawalla is National Spokesperson, Bharatiya Janata Party & Dr Vijeta Rattani is Development and Sustainability Professional

To complement the larger goal of catalysing the growth of an innovation-driven entrepreneurial ecosystem, Uttar Pradesh government has also rolled out its Data Center Policy 2026 which reinforces the state's vision of becoming a green, AI-ready and globally competitive data centre hub. The policy targets over ₹2 lakh crore in investments and the development of an additional 2 GW of data centre capacity while creating around 50,000 indirect job opportunities. With a strong focus on Graphic Processing Units (GPU)-based infrastructure, energy efficiency, AI compute and sustainable operations, the policy offers dedicated incentives for Tier/Ratings 3 and 4 data centres, positioning UP alongside Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh and challenging their dominance in India's rapidly expanding data center market.

Together, both the policies aim to catalyse the growth of an innovation-driven entrepreneurial ecosystem, leveraging its demographic dividend, expanding industrial base and knowledge ecosystem. In essence, the Startup Policy 2026 and Data Centre Policy 2026 are not just a set of incentives but a systemic blueprint which is designed to nurture startups from idea to scale, embed them within the state's economy and position Uttar Pradesh as a frontrunner in India's innovation-driven future.

A notable aspect of the Uttar Pradesh's government's vision is its focus on inclusivity, sustainability and ensuring regional balance. For this, additional incentives are extended to women-led startups such as additional grants and 25 percent of incubator seats in incubators for women to promote women entrepreneurship. Similarly, additional incentives for start-ups registered in Purvanchal/Bundelkhand region include provisions for capital grants ensuring that innovation is not concentrated in urban centres but decentralized. The establishment of district-level innovation clusters, linked to ODOP industries, further embeds entrepreneurship into local economies. In the same vein, 50 per cent additional grant and subsidies for start-ups in agri-tech, renewable energy, clean technologies, health and waste management reflects forward looking vision of the state. These measures collectively build a pipeline of ventures that can scale while remaining anchored in Uttar Pradesh. As the Chief Minister aptly noted, when technology is infused with 'samvedna' (empathy) and policies with navachar (innovation), development becomes truly inclusive. This is tech-led social justice at its best. Dedicated towards the goal of 1 trillion USD economy and project UP as a premiere investment destination, Chief Minister Adityanath's visited tech giants like Google Cloud, NVIDIA, and marquee venture capital firms in Bengaluru visit, signalling maturation in its economic thinking and base readiness of the state in welcoming capital and expertise. Rather than losing talent to Bengaluru, Mumbai or Gurugram, UP is making serious efforts to draw them back. The government has smartly transitioned its role from being the primary investor to a highly effective derisking agent that crowds in private venture capital. In doing this, Uttar Pradesh has successfully shattered the glass ceiling that once confined its economic ambitions.

More than just a cup of tea

home. It is a much-needed pause in a busy day, a life-saver during a hectic work schedule, and a comforting drink on a cold winter morning. For me, it is the perfect way to begin my day.

Research suggests that tea contains many naturally occurring compounds with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties that are beneficial to our health. These findings give us another reason to appreciate tea. Today there are countless varieties of tea to suit every taste and occasion. There is the fragrant Kahwa from Kashmir, the rich tea of Assam, traditional Chinese tea, English Breakfast tea, fruity blends, and many more.

Every kind of tea has its own appeal. Green tea with honey and lemon is appreciated for its health benefits, while tea with milk, ginger, and a dash of black pepper soothes the throat. Chamomile is a favorite at bedtime, and fruity teas suit different moods. Upscale restaurants may serve steeped tea with milk and sweetener on the side, while roadside dhabas offer our beloved "masala chai," brewed with milk and fragrant spices.

This made me wonder about the origins of tea and how it became such an important part of societies around the world. Each cup of tea has a story to tell. It is believed that tea was discovered in China thousands of years ago and was used for its medicinal properties. Over time, it became an integral part of Chinese culture. Thereafter, it was introduced to Japan

by the Buddhist monks. They used it as part of their spiritual practice. It came to symbolize harmony, respect, purity and tranquility.

Soon the British started importing tea from China. Initially it was only for the upper class before becoming a drink for the masses. As demand for tea grew, the British established tea plantations in India and started exporting Indian tea around the world, transforming the country into one of the world's leading tea producers.

In this way, a simple cup of tea travelled across continents, shaping cultures and traditions along the way. Originally, most of the tea grown in India was intended for export. However, in the early twentieth century the Indian Tea Association began promoting tea, and it soon became a popular drink all over the country. Today, about 70 per cent of the tea produced in India is consumed domestically, reflecting just how deeply tea has become woven into everyday life.

In today's fast paced world, a simple cup of tea reminds us to slow down, reconnect, and appreciate the people around us. It is not just a drink. It is a gesture of hospitality and a cherished tradition. Long after the last sip is gone, it is these moments we share together that remain with us. It is a reminder that life's greatest pleasures are often the simplest ones.

Sharmila Vaidya is an author and an educator based in the US



Boys fly kites under a cloudy sky while standing on the deck of an anchored boat on the Hooghly River, in Nadia district, West Bengal PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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CJP PROTESTS: STUDENTS' VOICE STRENGTHENS DEMOCRACY

Apropos the news report, "Gen Z exits Jantar Mantar on a high" (July 26).The resignation of the Union Education Minister following sustained student protests over the alleged NEET paper leak marks an important democratic moment. Irrespective of political interpretations, it demonstrates that peaceful public engagement can compel institutions to respond to legitimate concerns. The episode also underlines the importance of accountability in matters affecting the future of millions of young people.Competitive examinations determine careers and aspirations. Any breach in their integrity erodes confidence in the system and inflicts deep emotional distress on students who invest years of hard work. Reports of repeated paper leaks and examination irregularities

across the country point to systemic weaknesses that require comprehensive reforms rather than temporary fixes.The government's assurance of wider reforms and its engagement with student representatives are encouraging first steps. However, lasting solutions demand stronger digital security, independent oversight of examination agencies, swift prosecution of those responsible for leaks, and strict adherence to examination schedules.Education remains the foundation of national progress.

Restoring trust in the examination system should be treated as a national priority so that every student believes success depends solely on merit, honesty and hard work rather than manipulation or malpractice.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Safety must not be compromised underground

The tragic tunnel collapse during the NHPC Teesta Stage-VI hydropower project in Sikkim, reportedly triggered after workers encountered a pocket of methane gas, is a grim reminder of the dangers associated with underground construction. The loss of 25 lives highlights the urgent need to strengthen safety standards at infrastructure projects across the country.Methane and other hazardous gases are well-known risks in tunnelling operations. Their presence demands continuous monitoring through advanced gas detection systems, proper ventilation, emergency evacuation plans and regular safety audits.

If reports are accurate, the incident raises serious questions about whether adequate precautions were taken before excavation continued.Most of the victims were migrant labourers who often undertake hazardous work to support their families. Their lives deserve the same level of protection as those of any other workers.

Economic necessity should never compel people to work in unsafe conditions.India has witnessed several tunnel-related accidents in recent years. The lessons from every tragedy must be implemented through strict enforcement rather than confined to inquiry reports. Development can be meaningful only when it safeguards human life and dignity.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

Student concerns deserve lasting solutions

The celebrations at Jantar Mantar following the resignation of the Union Education Minister reflected the sense of achievement felt by many students who had been protesting over the alleged NEET paper leak. For the protesters, the development represented recognition of their demand for accountability in the examination system.

Even as they welcomed the resignation, the demonstrators reiterated that several issues remain unresolved, including compensation for families who allegedly lost children to the emotional consequences of the controversy and action against those responsible for the alleged paper leak.

The protests also highlighted the importance of keeping students' concerns at the centre of the national conversation. Young people expect transparent examinations, timely investigations and a recruitment system that rewards merit alone.

Their faith in public institutions depends on the credibility of these processes. Political differences may shape public opinion, but the larger objective should be to restore confidence in the education system through institutional reforms, transparency and fair accountability.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Climate action must move beyond plans

The Supreme Court's observations on regulating the clipping and dissemination of courtroom proceedings address an important challenge in the digital era. While live streaming has improved public access to judicial proceedings, selectively edited video clips circulated on social media can present an incomplete or misleading picture of what transpired in court.

Advances in artificial intelligence have further complicated the issue. As highlighted during the hearing, sophisticated tools can manipulate voices and spoken words while retaining authentic facial movements, making fabricated courtroom exchanges appear genuine. Such misuse has the potential to damage public confidence in the judiciary and unfairly affect judges, lawyers and litigants.The rights of vulnerable individuals appearing before courts also deserve careful protection. At the same time, judicial transparency remains a cornerstone of democracy. Any safeguards should therefore be narrowly tailored to prevent distortion without restricting legitimate public access to court proceedings. The objective must be calibrated openness that preserves context, protects privacy where necessary and strengthens public confidence in the administration of justice.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

Frustration breeds agitation

Frustration, when left unaddressed, inevitably breeds agitation. In a democracy, the right to protest is not merely a constitutional guarantee but an essential safety valve through which citizens communicate their grievances



PRASHANT TEWARI

When governance appears arrogant, insensitive, or opaque, the appropriate response is not to restrict fundamental freedoms but to engage with public sentiment through transparency, empathy, and accountability.

Dismissing public movements as "anti-national" without addressing their underlying concerns may yield short-term political dividends, but it ultimately erodes public trust and weakens democratic

institutions. Across the world, conventional political systems are increasingly being challenged by a digitally connected and politically aware Generation Z that demands greater participation, transparency, and responsiveness. India, the world's largest democracy, cannot afford complacency. A confident government listens before it labels, engages before it suppresses, and reforms before public frustration turns into widespread alienation. The recent farmers' protests and student agitations over competitive examination irregularities illustrate an important democratic reality. Though driven by different issues, both movements reflected a growing perception among sections of society that governance has become less responsive to legitimate concerns. Electoral victories provide governments with the constitutional authority to govern, but they do not diminish the obligation to remain accountable between elections. Democracy is a continuous process of consultation, correction, and course adjustment rather than a five-year endorsement of unquestioned authority. Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains one of India's most influential and electorally successful leaders. Under his leadership, the government has delivered transformative initiatives in infrastructure development, digital governance, financial inclusion, welfare delivery, border infrastructure, defence modernization, and India's international standing. Landmark political decisions such as the abrogation of Article 370, a more assertive national security doctrine, significant progress in curbing Left Wing Extremism, stronger border management, and the expansion of India's digital public infrastructure have fundamentally altered the country's strategic and administrative landscape. These achievements deserve recognition and have contributed significantly to the government's repeated electoral success.

However, democratic maturity requires that achievements and shortcomings be evaluated with equal honesty. Strong electoral mandates should never become substitutes for institutional accountability. NDA government led by Narendra Modi, regardless of its popularity, must remain open to criticism and self-correction. Transformative reforms in healthcare, education, and the judicial system have remained missing from the government agenda. Persistent judicial backlogs, uneven public healthcare, declining learning outcomes in government schools, and delays in institutional reforms continue to affect millions. The directionless economic policy has drawn scrutiny over centralisation of wealth, job creation, and private investment, and while prolonged strained ties with some neighbouring countries have raised questions about the effectiveness of certain aspects of the government's foreign policy.

Governments often argue that major protests are influenced by political opponents or external forces seeking to destabilize the country. India certainly faces hostile neighbours, cyber warfare, misinformation campaigns, and geopolitical rivals eager to exploit domestic fault lines. Such threats are real and demand constant vigilance. Yet attributing every significant protest primarily to conspiracy or foreign interference risks overlooking the legitimate frustrations experienced by ordinary citizens. External actors may exploit unrest, but they seldom create genuine public grievances from nothing. Ignoring those grievances allows dissatisfaction to deepen and provides greater opportunities for manipulation.

The true strength of a democracy lies not in silencing criticism but in responding to it with confidence and institutional maturity. Governments must distinguish between those attempting to incite disorder and citizens demanding better governance. Respectful dialogue often succeeds where coercive measures fail. India's greatest challenge today is not the absence of ambition but the uneven quality of governance. While highways, airports, digital platforms, and economic reforms have transformed the nation's image, institutional reforms have not advanced with equal urgency. Administrative inefficiency continues across several departments. Judicial delays deny timely justice to millions. Urban local bodies struggle with sanitation, planning, and civic infrastructure. Public healthcare remains inadequate in many regions, while educational quality varies dramatically across states. Recruitment irregularities and bureaucratic delays continue to frustrate young Indians aspiring to stable employment. Perhaps the most persistent obstacle



PERHAPS THE GREATEST CONCERN VOICED BY CRITICS IS THE GROWING PERCEPTION OF CENTRALISATION AND POLITICAL ARROGANCE. DEMOCRACIES FLOURISH WHEN GOVERNMENTS ENCOURAGE INSTITUTIONAL DEBATE, TOLERATE DISSENT, STRENGTHEN FEDERALISM, AND PROTECT THE INDEPENDENCE OF CONSTITUTIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

The writer is a public policy expert and columnist

remains the nexus between corruption, political patronage, and organized vested interests that continue to influence public administration. These entrenched networks undermine transparency, distort policy implementation, and reduce public confidence in institutions. Technology has undoubtedly reduced opportunities for corruption in several sectors, but systemic reforms remain incomplete. Without greater accountability, police reforms, judicial modernization, civil service restructuring, and stronger local governance, India's developmental aspirations may remain constrained by institutional inertia. Economic management has also produced mixed outcomes. The Goods and Services Tax has strengthened fiscal integration, and India's macroeconomic resilience has attracted global investors. Yet policy decisions such as demonetisation continue to generate debate over whether the economic disruption justified the intended objectives. Small businesses, informal workers, and rural enterprises bore substantial costs during the transition. Similarly, unemployment, particularly among educated youth, remains a pressing concern despite impressive economic growth figures. Economic success must ultimately be measured not only by GDP but by employment generation, productivity, and improvements in living standards.

Perhaps the greatest concern voiced by critics is the growing perception of centralisation and political arrogance. Democracies flourish when governments encourage institutional debate, tolerate dissent, strengthen federalism, and protect the independence of constitutional institutions. Excessive concentration of decision-making, reduced consultation, and dismissive responses to criticism can gradually weaken democratic culture even when electoral legitimacy remains strong. Governments that become insulated from constructive criticism risk losing touch with public sentiment. The opposition, too, carries an equally important responsibility. Democratic competition should strengthen governance, not weaken national unity. Opportunistic politics that exploits social divisions or fuels misinformation is as damaging as governmental arrogance. Both the ruling establishment and the opposition must recognise that national interest should remain above partisan calculations.

A growing concern is the perceived lack of rigorous regulatory oversight and accountability across several privately run institutions that receive recognition, accreditation, or indirect public support. Critics allege that some private universities, professional and medical colleges, skill development centres, media organisations, and even sections of the legal profession operate with inadequate compliance and governance, allowing vested interests to exploit regulatory loopholes at the expense of ordinary citizens. Weak enforcement, prolonged legal proceedings, and limited institutional accountability have further eroded public confidence. If governments fail to strengthen oversight, ensure transparent audits, and enforce the rule of law impartially, public frustration with corruption and institutional failure could deepen, increasing the risk of a wider confrontation between citizens and the establishment.

India possesses extraordinary opportunities. It has the world's largest youth population, expanding technological capabilities, growing manufacturing ambitions, and increasing global influence. But demographic advantage alone cannot guarantee long-term prosperity. Institutions must evolve alongside economic growth. Citizens increasingly demand efficient public services, transparent recruitment, swift justice, accountable administration, quality education, affordable healthcare, and corruption-free governance. These are not unreasonable expectations but essential requirements for a modern democracy. Ultimately, the durability of any government depends not merely on electoral victories but on the trust it earns through responsive governance. Political success is temporary; institutional credibility endures. A government that combines decisive leadership with humility, transparency, administrative reform, and compassion for public concerns will strengthen both democracy and national unity. Frustration ignored eventually becomes agitation. Frustration understood and addressed becomes an opportunity for reform.

Chasing the Vision of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam



ASHISH TRIPATHI

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam is that one eminent public figure of post-colonial India who inspired and catalysed the lives of millions of the youth across the nation. His entire life journey is a set of motivations from his modest childhood to the highest office in the Rashtrapati Bhawan. Dr Kalam's endeavours in every walk of life, across science, education or public life, are great acts as powerful incentives for national progress. In one of his catalytic speeches in 2011 at IIT Hyderabad, he articulated the three visions: freedom, India's development and its global stature.

Regarding freedom, he noted that India got its first vision of independence in 1857 and later got freedom. He believed that we must protect it at all costs and reminded us, 'If we are not free, no one will respect us'.

He was very cautious about freedom, which is far beyond the conventional political spectrum. He championed the cognitive freedom that is truly more important for intellectual autonomy and that draws the nation's attention to reclaim its own heritage, honouring national heroes and preserving and cherishing its vast cultural treasures. India, after a long walk, led a great move for cognitive liberty, which evokes us to look back to our great civilisational history that constitutes great schools of philosophy, magnificent architectural milestones and many more ancestral achievements to cherish.

It's truly correct that over the last several years, we have tangibly gone through these cultural shifts. For instance, the nation has replaced the colonial-era legal framework with the revised Bhartiya Nyay Samhita; we are scaling our traditional medical practices, revitalising the indigenous languages and making a structural change in the field of education for Bhartiyyakaran of India's education system and systematically moving away from the Macaulay model of education.

To memorialise the 75 years of India's Independence the Union Government of India took a great initiative by introducing a nationwide campaign Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav to commemorate our national heroes, their life journeys, and their contributions to India's freedom movement. They are the real source of inspiration for our generation. Their history is very motivating and can inspire the idea of selfless service for the nation. The sacrifices they made for the country are unforgettable.

India's freedom struggle was a pan-India movement. People across the country fought for their motherland with great spirit. The number of participants is truly innumerable. There were many freedom fighters who did not get much recognition, but their sacrifices are highly notable. Whatever they did, they did for the sake of the nation. Dr. Abdul Kalam always highlighted this kind of selfless service; he firmly believed in the philosophy that prompts everyone to ask, 'What can I give?'

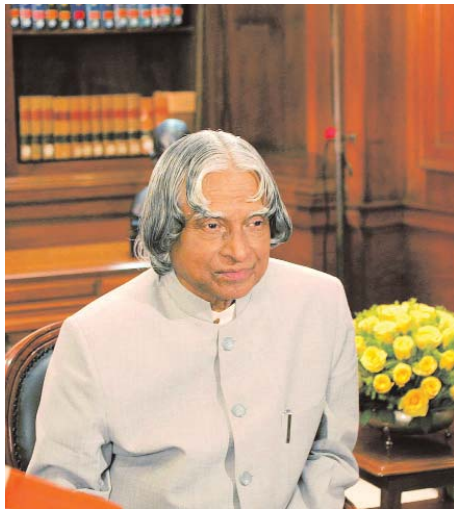
The remaining two visions of Kalam Sahab are intrinsically linked, as he saw the vision for India's development and its stature in the world. In point of fact, India has accomplished considerable achievements in diverse disciplines, and specifically the past decade and a half has marked a remarkable chapter for India's growth and advancement. This growth has touched everything from science to finance. Some noteworthy achievements are the Mars orbiter mission (Mangalyaan), Chandrayan success, the swadeshi defence network, and the unified payment interface (UPI). In the year 2023, the prime minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, launched the Viksit Bharat@2027 initiative.

On this very occasion, he said that 'in the life of any nation, history provides a time period when the nation can make exponential strides in its development journey; for India, this 'Amritka' is going on'. For India, this is the time, the right time (*yahi samay hai sahi samay hai*) and each and every moment should be utilised so every institution and every individual should move with a resolution that every effort and act will be for Viksit Bharat. Under his transformational leadership, India became the fastest-growing economy and was placed as the 4th largest global economy in 2025 by consistent structural reforms and other essential endeavours under the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat. True national development, however, demands active civic participation. Once Kalam Sahab said that why is media here so negative?

Why are we in India, so embarrassed to recognise our own strengths, our achievements? We have so many amazing success stories, but we refuse to acknowledge it, why? We always say the government is inefficient. You say the laws are too old, you say and say, but what do you do about it?

While addressing the youth on national youth Day in Pune, he urged the young minds to take some pledge for the betterment of themselves and their nation that 'I realise righteousness in the heart leads to the beauty in the character, beauty in the character brings harmony in the home, harmony in the home leads to order in the nation and order in the nation leads to peace in the world. So I like the lamp of knowledge in the nation and ensure that it remains lit forever. I realise, whatever works I do if I do the best, I am contributing to realising the vision of developed India.' In his autobiography, Wings of Fire, he shares the obstacles he faced and courageously overcame. While problems are a part of life, our courage, consistency, and passionate devotion to our vision will keep us fueled forever.

Really, we have a number of blame and excuses; moreover, we should ask ourselves what we can do for the betterment of our society and the development of our nation. Today, to honour his death anniversary, the nation must embrace his message and his inspirational directives. We must pivot from excuses to execution to lead an accountable, mission-driven life, as Kalam Sir himself defined his whole life and legacy in a singular defining declaration, 'My mission is my nation.'



The writer is Assistant Professor Zakir Husain College, University of Delhi

Mental health must be part of mainstream healthcare



YUVVEER BAGAI

Mental health remains one of the most neglected areas of Indian healthcare. Psychiatry and psychology are still too often treated as peripheral departments in hospitals and clinics. The neglect is not

because the need is small; it is because stigma continues to shape how society, institutions and even insurance systems view mental illness.

Just as the heart, liver, kidneys or lungs can malfunction, the brain and mind too can suffer from illness, imbalance, trauma, stress and dysfunction. Depression is not weakness. Anxiety is not drama. Mental illness is a medical and human reality, and it deserves the same dignity, urgency and financial protection as physical illness.

India's mental health burden is substantial. The India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative estimated that around 197.3 million Indians were living with mental disorders, including approximately 45.7 million with depressive disorders and 44.9 million with anxiety disorders. The National Mental Health Survey 2015-16 found that the current prevalence of mental morbidity among adults was 10.6%, and that nearly 15% of adults required active mental health interven-

tion. The same survey reported a treatment gap ranging from 70 per cent to 92 per cent across different mental disorders.

The urgency is even greater when viewed against India's demographic scale. A large part of India's population is young, exposed to academic stress, workplace pressure, digital overload, financial uncertainty, relationship challenges and lifestyle disruption. Mental health is therefore not only a healthcare issue. It is also a question of family wellbeing, workplace productivity, educational performance and national resilience.

The legal position is clear. Section 21(4) of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 requires every insurer to make provision for medical insurance for the treatment of mental illness on the same basis as treatment for physical illness. In 2026, the Government of India also clarified in Parliament that policies covering OPD treatment for physical illness must cover mental illness on the same basis.

This principle of parity is important. Mental health coverage should not be a cosmetic clause in a policy document. It should not be a rider, top-up, add-on or symbolic inclusion. It should form part of the base structure of every health insurance policy. If a policy offers Rs 10 lakh of health cover, mental illness should be meaningfully covered within that framework, not pushed into restrictive sub-limits, unclear exclusions or delayed approvals.

India also has a larger insurance protection gap. In FY 2024-25, India's overall insurance pen-



etration stood at 3.7 per cent of GDP, with life insurance at 2.7 per cent and non-life insurance at only 1 per cent.

Health insurance has grown, but coverage is still uneven. IRDAI's Annual Report 2024-25 records that general and health insurers covered 58 crore lives under 2.65 crore health insurance policies. In a country of nearly 146 crore people, this shows both progress and a large gap in meaningful individual protection.

The gap is especially relevant for mental healthcare because most treatment is outpatient-based. Mental healthcare is not primarily an admission-based specialty; it is a continuity-based specialty. A person with depression may need repeated psychiatric consultations, therapy

sessions and medication review. A child with developmental concerns may need psychological assessment and early intervention.

A person with anxiety may need counselling and follow-up. Very little of this care is inpatient. Most of it takes place in OPD settings, clinics, counselling rooms, digital consultations and structured follow-up programmes.

Therefore, a policy that claims to cover mental illness but largely restricts coverage to hospitalisation is structurally inadequate. Mental health insurance must include psychiatric consultations, psychology sessions, counselling, psychotherapy, psychometric assessments, neuropsychological testing, digital follow-ups, rehabilitation support and clinically required diagnostics.

Daycare mental health services should also be included where relevant. Many interventions do not require overnight admission but may involve structured therapy programmes, supervised assessments, neuromodulation support or short-duration clinical procedures. Insurance frameworks must evolve beyond the old binary of OPD versus hospitalisation.

The private sector is central to this reform. If insurance networks are limited mainly to large hospitals, access will remain narrow. Private mental health clinics and centres must be able to empanel with TPAs, insurers and government schemes through a seamless, transparent and digital process. Empanelment should be based on clear eligibility standards, qualified professionals, ethical documentation, privacy safeguards and defined timelines.

Government schemes such as Ayushman Bharat, CGHS, DGHS and similar programmes should also recognise the role of private mental health providers. Mental healthcare must be integrated more meaningfully into such frameworks, including OPD-linked models where appropriate. Fair pricing and timely payments are equally important. Mental healthcare is manpower-intensive and cost-intensive.

A quality centre requires trained psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, counsellors, therapists, assessment tools, digital systems, privacy infrastructure, crisis protocols, continuous training and, in some cases, expensive technology such as neuromodulation or brain-mapping systems. Margins are often limited because the service depends heavily on professional time and clinical quality.

If reimbursement rates are unviable or payments are delayed for months, good providers will avoid empanelment. The private sector can complement the government sector only if it is treated as a genuine partner. Claims and bills should be processed through time-bound and transparent systems, with minimal administrative friction. Moreover, mental health insurance must also reach beyond metros. Tier-2, tier-3 and rural India need access through tele-psychiatry, online counselling, digital follow-ups, community screening and empanelment of smaller qualified centres.

The writer is a financial expert with experience across healthcare, investments and business strategy



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PNB profit to cross ₹20,000 cr mark in FY27: MD Chandra



Enthusied by the consistent financial performance of the last four quarters, Punjab National Bank MD and CEO Ashok Chandra exuded confidence that the bank's profit would surpass the ₹20,000 crore mark this financial year. The public sector lender had earned a net profit of ₹16,904 crore in the previous financial year.

From the second quarter of last financial year, the bank has been maintaining a net profit of over ₹5,000 crore every quarter, Chandra told PTI in an interview.

"We have maintained the same trend in the first quarter (ongoing financial year). And I am hopeful and confident that with the profitable growth, which is happening in the system....we will be surpassing the ₹5,000 crore number and every quarter will be reaching a new height," he said. Asked if the bank can cross the ₹20,000 crore mark during FY27 at this run rate, he said, "If I am telling that every quarter ₹5,000 crore of net profit will happen, I think that goes to that figure which you are talking about". To achieve the target, he said, the bank is focusing heavily on conducting mega outreach activities every quarter on a very large scale.

Besides, he said, retail, agri, MSME, and self-help groups are going to be the focus areas for asset creation.

Overall, loan growth will be 12-13 per cent while deposits would be growing at 9-10 per cent during the ongoing financial year, he added. Chandra also said the bank would enter into acquisition finance in the third quarter of the current financial year as the RBI recently opened the window for lenders. (PTI)

Maruti Suzuki targets 9 lakh CNG vehicle sales this fiscal



Car maker leader Maruti Suzuki India is aiming to sell around 9 lakh CNG vehicles, a nearly 30 per cent increase in the ongoing fiscal, with demand for such automobiles rising in the wake of the West Asia war, according to a senior company official.

The demand for CNG vehicles is no longer restricted to small cars and vans, but it has also seen a rise even in the company's SUVs, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd (MSIL) Senior Executive Officer, Marketing & Sales, Partho Banerjee told PTI. "In the first quarter of this fiscal, we have sold 2.2 lakh units of CNG vehicles across models, which is a growth of 58 per cent over the same quarter last year," he said when asked about the traction of CNG vehicles currently in the market. Banerjee said due to the fuel price hike after the West Asia war, demand for CNG vehicles has shot up. Asked what the target for CNG vehicle sales this fiscal is, he said, considering how CNG vehicle sales have grown in the first quarter, for the full year we are targeting around 9 lakh units.

Maruti Suzuki India currently sells 15 CNG models, including light commercial vehicles, in the domestic market. In fiscal 2025-26, it sold more than 7 lakh units of CNG vehicles. The demand for CNG vehicles is no longer restricted to small cars, vans, and the utility vehicle Ertiga. There is also a strong demand for CNG in SUVs as well, he noted. "In case of our SUV Victorisv more than 50 per cent of sales are coming from the variant with 'underbody CNG' (tank)," Banerjee said, adding that considering that trend, the company has also introduced the same 'underbody CNG' in the newly launched fresh version of compact SUV Brezza.

The company has equipped the new 'Brezza S-CNG' with the idle start-stop technology along with the new 6-speed manual transmission to deliver better fuel efficiency of 26.9 km/kg. (PTI)

Reforms, infra investment critical to unlocking India's next phase of gas demand growth: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India's long-term natural gas growth will depend not only on expanding LNG import capacity but also on accelerating investment in transmission and distribution infrastructure, gas-intensive industries, and reforms to market design, regulation and pricing, according to a new report of International Gas Union (IGU).

While India has significantly expanded regasification terminal capacity, the pace of investment in midstream infrastructure has lagged, limiting the country's ability to increase gas consumption. The report argues that reforms to pricing mecha-



nisms and market access will be essential to support sustained growth in gas demand.

"The Strait of Hormuz crisis has underlined several import dependencies for India, par-

Tax terrorism 2.0: The end of loopholes and rise of smart tax planning



The phrase "Tax Terrorism" has been part of India's financial vocabulary for over a decade. It typically referred to retrospective amendments, prolonged litigation, aggressive tax demands and uncertainty that often discouraged investors. But there is another side to this story that deserves equal attention.

For years, India's tax laws also contained several loopholes that enabled investors and institutions to significantly reduce-or in some cases eliminate-their tax liabilities. While many of these structures were perfectly legal under the prevailing law, others gradually evolved into aggressive tax avoidance or outright evasion. The government's response over the last decade has been to close these gaps while simultaneously making the tax administration more technology-driven and transparent.

The result is a fundamentally different tax landscape in 2026. Perhaps the most famous example was the Mauritius and Singapore treaty route. For nearly two decades, foreign investors routed investments into India through these jurisdictions because capital gains were either exempt or taxed at negligible rates under Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAAs). While the structure was legally permissible, it increasingly became a vehicle for treaty shopping rather than genuine cross-



border investment. The introduction of the Principal Purpose Test (PPT), Limitation of Benefits (LOB) clauses and subsequent treaty amendments effectively brought this chapter to a close. Another widely discussed instrument was Participatory Notes (P-Notes), which enabled overseas investors to gain exposure to Indian markets without directly registering with SEBI. Although they played a useful role in improving liquidity, concerns around opaque ownership and regulatory oversight prompted stricter KYC norms. Today, P-Notes account for only a fraction of their historical peak.

Domestic investors too witnessed significant changes. Until 2018, long-term capital gains (LTCG) on listed equities were completely tax-free. While this encouraged equity participation, it also gave rise to widespread abuse through manipulated penny stocks that converted unaccounted money into tax-free gains. The Government responded by

reintroducing LTCG taxation and, through the Finance Act, 2024, rationalised the regime further. Today, short-term capital gains on listed equities are taxed at 20%, while long-term gains exceeding ₹1.25 lakh annually attract a 12.5% tax without indexation.

Debt mutual funds experienced an equally significant shift. For years, indexation benefits made them one of the most tax-efficient fixed-income investments, particularly for investors in higher tax brackets. The removal of indexation from April 2023 substantially altered the post-tax return equation, forcing investors to re-evaluate debt allocations. Interestingly, debt-oriented Fund of Funds continue to enjoy favourable long-term capital gains treatment after the prescribed holding period, demonstrating that tax-efficient opportunities still exist for informed investors.

Not all reforms, however, were restrictive. The abolition of Angel Tax through the Finance Act, 2024 marked a welcome move for India's

startup ecosystem. For years, genuine entrepreneurs found themselves entangled in valuation disputes despite raising legitimate capital. Removing this provision has improved investor confidence while reducing unnecessary litigation.

The government's broader strategy has been clear: eliminate artificial tax structures while encouraging genuine investment. The introduction of the General Anti-Avoidance Rules (GAAR), faceless assessments, Annual Information Statement (AIS), Taxpayer Information Summary (TIS) and extensive PAN-linked reporting has transformed tax administration. Today, mutual fund transactions, equity trades, property purchases, overseas investments, bank accounts and high-value financial activities are digitally interconnected, leaving very little room for non-disclosure.

This does not imply that tax planning has become obsolete. On the contrary, prudent tax planning remains an integral part of sound financial management. Investors should continue to utilise deductions available under various provisions of the Income-tax Act, maximise the annual long-term capital gains exemption, adopt systematic tax-loss or gain harvesting where appropriate, evaluate tax-efficient investment vehicles and maintain comprehensive documentation for every financial transaction.

Equally important is understanding the distinction between tax avoidance and tax evasion. Tax planning within the framework of the law is both legitimate and desirable. Concealing income, creating artificial transactions or using

structures that lack commercial substance is not. The difference increasingly lies in intent, documentation and economic substance rather than merely legal form.

For investors, the biggest lesson from the past decade is that taxation should no longer drive investment decisions in isolation. Investments should first satisfy financial goals, risk appetite and asset allocation requirements, with tax efficiency serving as an important-but secondary-consideration. Chasing products solely because they promise lower taxes often leads to sub-optimal investment outcomes.

India's tax ecosystem has undoubtedly entered a new era-one defined by digital transparency, data analytics and stricter compliance. The age of exploiting loopholes is steadily giving way to an era of responsible tax optimisation.

The message for investors is simple. Build wealth through disciplined investing, maintain complete transparency, preserve documentation and make full use of every legitimate tax benefit that the law provides. Sustainable wealth creation is no longer about finding the next tax loophole-it is about combining financial discipline with regulatory compliance.

In 2026, the smartest tax strategy is not tax avoidance. It is informed, compliant and efficient financial planning.

The author is the founder and CEO of SabhyaFN. This article is for information purposes only and does not constitute investment or tax advice. Tax laws are subject to change. Readers should consult a qualified professional before making decisions. Views are personal.

Oil prices, US Fed rate decision, West Asia crisis to drive market: Analysts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Developments around the West Asia conflict, crude oil prices and the US Fed interest rate decision would be the key drivers for market movement this week, analysts said. Besides, quarterly earnings would drive sentiments in the market, they added.

"Developments surrounding the US-Iran conflict, shipping activity through the Strait of Hormuz, and movements in crude oil prices will remain key drivers of global risk sentiment.

In addition, investors will closely monitor the US Federal Reserve's policy meeting, where interest rate guidance and commentary on inflation will be critical for global markets," Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare



Broking Ltd, said. On the domestic front, market participants will track June Industrial Production (IIP) data, he added.

Major companies reporting earnings this week include Coal India, BEL, Larsen & Toubro, Hindustan Unilever, Adani Enterprises, Asian Paints, Adani Ports, Bajaj Finance, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Steel, Maruti Suzuki, ITC, and Sun Pharma, Praveesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst at Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

"Investor attention in the week ahead is expected to remain firmly anchored on developments in the Middle East, with the escalating conflict between the US and Iran continuing to dominate global market sentiment. The sharp rise in crude oil prices has revived concerns over inflation, economic growth and the outlook for monetary policy," Ponmudi R, CEO — Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

India among top five growth markets for Red Hat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India has emerged as one of the top five growth markets globally for open-source solutions provider Red Hat and its parent company IBM, driven by the country's deep-rooted embrace of open-source architecture and a burgeoning talent pool, a top company executive said.

India is currently at the centre of the company's global strategy, both as a critical market and a hub for engineering excellence, Navtej Singh Bal, Vice President and General Manager, India and South



Asia, Red Hat, noted.

"India, what started as a business from scratch, has actually scaled up nicely to be one of our fastest-growing businesses globally, and this is primarily because India has actually embraced open-source software at its core.

"I would say India would be, both for Red Hat and IBM, one of the top five growth markets globally," Bal said.

Addressing concerns regarding AI-induced job losses in the IT sector, Bal stated that while the technology will unlock efficiency

Air India to modify dreamliners over door-assist handle issue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Air India is carrying out certain modifications in some of its Boeing 787 planes to address a possible issue with door assist handles, sources said against the backdrop of the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issuing an airworthiness directive regarding the issue.

FAA, earlier this month, adopted the directive for certain Boeing 787-8, 787-9 and 787-10 models after reports of door assist handles pulled loose from their lower attach point in the doorway support bracket during pre-flight checks. The watchdog has asked airlines to make modifications in certain models since detachment of door assist handles could cause



injuries to passengers, crew or maintenance personnel when opening the door. Currently, Air India has a fleet of 35 Dreamliners, comprising 26 legacy Boeing 787-8s and 9 Boeing 787-9s. Out of the 787-9s, 3 are new, and the remaining 6 are from erstwhile Vistara.

Air India has a total of 185 planes, including narrow-bodies and wide-bodies.

One of the sources said the airline is aware of the

FAA's airworthiness directive and there is no impact on the current flight operations or safety aspects.

In line with the directive, Air India is carrying out the necessary modifications in a phased manner, and modifications have been completed for some of the legacy aircraft, the source told PTI.

Details about the number of Air India Dreamliners that need modifications could not be ascertained.

Nippon India MF tops mutual fund industry with over 4 crore folios



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Nippon India Mutual Fund (MF) has become the first asset management company in the country to cross the 4-crore folio milestone, according to industry data.

As per the data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi), the mutual fund industry had 27.86 crore folios at the end of June, with Nippon India MF accounting for 14.4 per cent (4.02 crore folios) of the total. Also, the fund house said it had the industry's largest unique investor base at 2.41 crore, accounting for 39 per cent of the industry's 6.19 crore unique investors.

"We are humbled to have the trust of 4 crore investors and a 39 per cent share of India's unique investor base. This milestone reflects the wealth creation journey we have enabled for millions of retail investors," Sundeepp Sikka, MD and CEO of

Nippon Life India Asset Management, said.

He added that the company continues to channel household savings into India's capital markets while facilitating Japanese investors' participation in India's growth story.

Among other major fund houses, ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund had 3.18 crore folios, followed by HDFC Mutual Fund at 3.11 crore, SBI Mutual Fund at 2.24 crore and UTI Mutual Fund at 1.42 crore. The remaining fund houses in the top 10 by folio count were Axis Mutual Fund (1.35 crore), Tata Mutual Fund (1.28 crore), Kotak Mahindra Mutual Fund (1.19 crore), Aditya Birla Sun Life Mutual Fund (1.11 crore) and DSP Mutual Fund (1.03 crore).

Collectively, the top 10 AMCs accounted for 19.94 crore folios, or 71.6 per cent of the industry's total, while the remaining fund houses contributed 7.92 crore folios, representing 28.4 per cent.

PROSPECT

Indian single malts leap to half a million cases in 2025: CIABC

Indian single malt whisky, which has won several global awards and gained international fame in the last couple of years for its craftsmanship, are estimated to have grown to about 5 lakh cases in 2025, registering a growth of approximately 22 per cent, according to data released by the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC).

This growth has been primarily driven by homegrown desi labels such as Amrut, Rampur, Indri, and Paul John, along with newer entrants, including Solan Gold, GianChand, Doaab, Crazy Cock, Aaghaz, and Gamber Valley, as the category gains stronger traction within India's premium and luxury spirits space, CIABC said. Moreover, the desi companies continue to dominate the 'Made in India' Single Malt Whisky landscape, accounting for an estimated 92 per cent of category sales in 2025.

Indian single malt whisky brands such as Diageo's Godawan and Pernod Ricard's Longitude 77, which are owned and backed by foreign and multinational companies, are estimated to account for around 7 per cent of the category with 35,000 cases (of nine litres each). "Within the 'Made in India' Single Malt Whisky category, brands made by Indian companies account for the dominant share of sales. For 2025, Indian manufacturers are estimated to account for around 92 per cent of the category, translating to approximately 4.65 lakh cases," it said.



Goa Tourism launches Ekadasha Teertha Yatra



Goa is steadily reshaping its tourism narrative from being known primarily as a beach destination to becoming a year-round hub for culture, heritage, spirituality and immersive experiences. Spearheading this transformation, Tourism Minister Rohan A. Khaunte has been driving the 'Goa Beyond Beaches' vision to showcase the State's diverse tourism offerings. As a flagship initiative under this vision, the Department of Tourism, Government of Goa, has launched the Ekadasha Teertha Yatra-India's newest curated spiritual tourism circuit-connecting eleven revered temples across Goa and inviting visitors to experience the State through its centuries-old traditions, sacred landscapes and vibrant living heritage. The Ekadasha Teertha Yatra represents a significant milestone in Goa Tourism's strategy to diversify the State's tourism offerings while encouraging visitors to explore its hinterland.

The Department of Tourism, along with Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC), has deployed two dedicated pilgrimage buses that will operate along the circuit, making the journey more accessible and convenient for devotees and visitors alike.

EIL signs MoU with DGMA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

State-owned Engineers India Ltd (EIL) has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA) to provide engineering consultancy, technical advisory and project management services for the development and modernisation of India's maritime infrastructure.

The agreement, signed on July 24, provides a framework under which Engineers India Ltd (EIL) will support the maritime regulator in planning, developing and implementing projects across the sector, the company said in a statement.

Under the pact, EIL will leverage its expertise in hydrocarbon, marine and offshore engineering to assist the Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA) in executing projects aimed at enhancing India's maritime capabilities.

The scope of work includes feasibility studies, infrastruc-



ture planning, technology integration, capacity enhancement and other specialised technical services to be identified jointly.

The collaboration will also draw on EIL's capabilities in engineering, project management, digital solutions, sustainability and infrastructure development to support the implementation of maritime projects. The partnership is aligned with the government's objective of developing world-class maritime infrastructure and strengthening the sector as a driver of economic growth, the statement said.

It is also expected to help improve operational efficiency, promote sustainability and accelerate the adoption of modern technologies in maritime infrastructure development and administration.

The Directorate General of Maritime Administration, formerly known as the Directorate General of Shipping, functions under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, while EIL is a public sector engineering consultancy and EPC company under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

Assam Cricket Association inaugurates flood lighting system at ACA Cricket Stadium

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

The Assam Cricket Association (ACA) on Sunday marked another significant milestone in its commitment to strengthening cricket infrastructure across the state with the inauguration of the Flood Lighting System at the ACA Cricket Stadium, Umrangso, Dima Hasao.

The flood lighting system was formally inaugurated by Debolal Gorlosa, Chief Executive Member (CEM), Dima Hasao Autonomous Council, as the Chief Guest, in the august presence of Devajit Saikia, Honorary Secretary, Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), who attended the event as the Guest of Honour.

The state-of-the-art flood lighting facility is expected to significantly enhance the stadium's capabilities by enabling day-night cricket, improving training opportunities for players, and paving the way for hosting more domestic and competitive cricketing events in the region. The development reflects ACA's continued



vision of expanding quality cricket infrastructure and promoting the growth of the game across every corner of Assam.

The occasion was also graced by ACA Apex Council Member Mukutananda Bhattacharjya, ACA Former Secretary Shri Tridib Konwar, ACA former Vice President Porikshit Dutta, members of the local cricketing fraternity, and other distinguished dignitaries.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Guest Debolal Gorlosa, Chief Executive Member (CEM), Dima Hasao

UP Govt to launch aviation-focused girls' school near Noida airport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Noida

A 480-seat Sarvodaya residential school for girls being built near the Noida International Airport at Jewar is expected to begin functioning from the next academic session in April 2027, officials said on Sunday. The Uttar Pradesh Government has decided to develop the school as a centre of excellence (CoE) for aviation, considering its proximity to the airport to prepare students for careers in the aviation sector, they said.

Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Social Welfare, Asim Arun, said, "Our objective is not only to provide quality and modern education to the daughters of the state but also to equip them for careers in emerging fields such as aviation. The



Sarvodaya school will prove to be a milestone in giving wings to their aspirations." According to the officials, The Doon School will provide academic mentorship and institutional support to help develop the school into a world-class educational institution. Experienced teachers and experts from The Doon School will regularly visit the campus and provide guidance in teaching methods, school administration and co-curricular activities, they said.

The CEO of the Boarding Schools' Association of India (BSAI), Sapna Sukul, said the collaboration aims to ensure that quality education reaches every child, and hoped that more boarding schools associated with the organisation would join the initiative in future. Meanwhile, Jewar MLA Dharendra Singh has laid the foundation for a modern composite school to be built at an estimated cost of ₹25 crore.

The school, to be constructed by the Uttar Pradesh Projects Corporation Limited on around six acres of land provided by the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA), will offer education from pre-primary to Class 12 with smart classrooms, science and computer laboratories, a library and sports facilities.

PM museum hosts Kargil Vijay Diwas exhibition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

To commemorate the remarkable Kargil Vijay Diwas on Sunday, the Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya organised a special exhibition to pay tribute to the valour, courage, and supreme sacrifice of the Indian Armed Forces during the Kargil War in 1999.

It will also highlight the decisive leadership of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee during one of the most significant chapters in India's military history.

As part of the exhibition, visitors will have the opportunity to experience a curated display of micro-films, archival videos, photographs and personal letters of bravehearts related to the Kargil War in the Freedom and Unity Gallery, Block II, offering insights into the conflict and the extraordinary bravery displayed by Indian soldiers.

Complementing the exhibition, the Sangrahalaya inaugurated the AI Holobox of Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the Anubhuti Zone. This immersive, technology-driven



installation provides visitors with a nuanced, interactive encounter with Vajpayee's life, leadership and enduring contributions to the nation, said a PMML press release.

Guests of honour for the ceremony were Ranjan Bhattacharya and Namita Bhattacharya, members of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's family.

Through this commemorative initiative, Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya seeks to honour the unwavering courage and sacrifice of India's armed forces while inspiring visitors, especially young learners, to appreciate the values of patriotism, national service, leadership and India's journey as a strong and resilient nation.

DAILY SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

HOW TO SOLVE IT

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



SOLUTION (25.7.26)

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

DOUBLE CROSSWORD
MONDAY | JULY 27, 2026

1		2		3	4		5	6		7
8		9						10		
	11			12						
13				14			15	16		17
		18			19					
20		21								
22							23			
			24			25				
26	27	28			29			30		
31					32				33	
			34				35			
36							37			
			38							

ACROSS
3 & 8 Easy times in the far distance (5,5)
10 A piece of land, church property (5)
11 River no longer noted? (3)
12 Shoot that smug fellow to the back of the class! (5)
13 For certain lines, credit makes things simpler (7)
15 City alas in ruins around each end (5)
18 Part Eskimo character in Kipling (3)
19 Could it hamper making a better rhyme? (6)
21 Once more weary, went back to bed (7)
22 Being beggarly is bad (4)
23 Beach plant? (4)

DOWN
1 In a wild spree, do they get as drunk as a lord? (5)
2 A smashing wave? (7)
4 One politician's devils (4)
5 Greeted loudly (and icily?) (6)
6 Close game, nothing less than hot (5)
7 Nearby in a cul de sac (5)
9 Weapon wielded economically? (3)
12 Scattered remains assembled in a group (7)
14 Pettish command doggedly obeyed? (3)
16 Titanic book? (5)
17 Perfume showing warm-hearted love for mother (5)

24 Is surrounded by broken rakes and old rulers (7)
26 It's smart of Charlie to put the pressure on (6)
29 Also helps give you a smooth back (3)
31 Weird at all times, that is (5)
32 A climbing aid, naturally (7)
34 Chose a musical production by name (5)
35 Unattractive individual with no chance at all? (3)
36 Tangled laces can be a bit fishy! (5)
37 Manage to overtake? (3,2)
38 Happen, as a plural form, to include the singular (5)

19 Ate well, as in being festively honoured (7)
20 Room for a rocket? (5)
21 Romeo finished as a pirate! (5)
23 Given the push? (7)
24 He may hold a ball (6)
25 One changes in time (3)
27 In bleaching, a percolating liquid may do so (5)
28 A girl to make music with? (5)
30 Will he thrust past? (5)
32 Light meals said to tantalise? (4)
33 An infection of carrots? (3)

Northeast International Fashion Week 2026 concludes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

The Northeast's most anticipated fashion show and event for a cause, Northeast International Fashion Week (NEIFW), this prestigious event has consistently generated significant buzz throughout the Northeast, attracting both aspiring and renowned fashion designers and models from India and abroad to showcase their exclusive designs for a noble cause.

The theme for this year's NEIFW was "SAVE THE EARTH, STYLE THE FUTURE," with a focus on raising awareness about global warming and its preventions.

Apart from that, NEIFW, under fashion designer & choreographer PRASANTT GHOSH, awarded 10 personalities who are behind the upliftment of the fashion industry of Northeast India in



this event. The awardees were actor Diganto Hazarika, fashion promoter Medha Saikia, fashion designer & film director Dipankar Kashyap, fashion designer Meghna Rai Medhi, celebrity makeup artist Christina Joseph, fashion educators Sumita Dey Deka & Usmita, fashion choreographers Meenu Paul, and fashion photographers Kamal Barman & Anup Baruah.

As the 10th season of NEIFW, this event serves as an

exceptional platform for kids, teens, male models and ladies interested in pursuing a career in fashion and glamour. It provides a unique opportunity for young talents to showcase their skills and gain international recognition. Fashion enthusiasts from various parts of India are expected to attend, and NEIFW has established itself as more than just a fashion event but an event with a strong social cause. Previous social themes have included

supporting old-age homes, promoting eye and body organ donations, and protecting the environment, in collaboration with international organisations such as PETA.

Furthermore, NEIFW offers a unique platform for collaboration with neighbouring countries and people from diverse cultural backgrounds worldwide. The primary objective of the event is to create brand awareness among the public and media associated with the fashion industry in the North East.

The event will also feature fashion accessory stalls from budding and established entrepreneurs across India. The 10th season of NEIFW has attracted a host of aspiring fashion designers from the Northeast states, as well as neighbouring countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan, in addition to talented designers from across India.

Satellite operator Sateliot sets up India subsidiary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

European satellite operator Sateliot, specialising in Low Earth Orbit based narrowband IoT (NB-IoT) connectivity, is eyeing the India opportunity and has recently incorporated a local subsidiary here to tap what it describes as a "key market."

Ethan Mudavanhu, Regulatory Affairs Lead — Asia, Africa and Middle East at Sateliot, said India's IoT devices and connections are projected to grow sharply over the coming years.

He noted that this creates a significant opportunity for satellite IoT to deliver low-

cost connectivity to sectors such as agriculture, transport, mining and utilities, provided the regulatory framework fosters this distinct category of services.

It is pertinent to mention here that unlike Starlink and Eutelsat, that primarily target broadband internet access, Sateliot's business model centres on narrowband satellite IoT connectivity for machine-to-machine applications in areas like agriculture, logistics and utilities.

Internet of Things or IoT connects devices and machines to the internet so they can exchange data—think soil sensors on farms, or smart electricity meters.



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e- tenders are hereby Invited for the supply of following items :-

Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative - Qty
1.	For Verka Chandigarh Dairy a) Pouches & Rolls i. Kaju Pinni Rolls ii. Besan Burfi Rolls iii. Panjiri Pouches iv. Punjabi Kufli Pouches (40ml) v. Ice Candles Rolls (40ml) (all variants) vi. Ice Cream Bar Rolls (40ml) (all variants) b) Plastic Crates	Annual
		Annual

NOTE:

1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in.

2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.

RO : 1018/12/2026-27/13646

General Manager
(Purchase)

GRAPEVINE

Kare koyi, bhare koyi

The repeated reshuffles of officers has come as setback of Education Ministry, as the buzz is that they were made scapegoats for none of their fault rather 'forced' to dance to the guided tunes. Career bureaucrat Vineet Joshi was replaced by Naresh Pal Gangwar as the education secretary amid mounting multiple criticism of the education ministry including exam irregularities. First under scrutiny was problems in CBSE's introduction of on-screen marking (OSM) and then NEET-UG paper leak. While Joshi is credited to have rolled out several reforms in CBSE like Teachers' Eligibility Test (CTET), rolling out CUET through NTA which he headed for two years, Sanjay Kumar faced backlash at the fag-end of his career and was tipped to be the next NITI Ayoag CEO post retirement on June 30. Another career bureaucrat Rahul Singh from Bihar cadre was removed as CBSE Chairman who is understood to be against the digital evaluation system initially until forced to roll out.



Troubles galore for some now!

Now that the protest by cockroaches are over, the BJP IT cell has been tasked to identify from the social media platforms about the wards of people in bureaucracy who participated in the Gen Z protest at Jantar Mantar. Few on the target include entire family members of two AGMUT cadre IPS officers who took part in the CJP protest. Simultaneously, grapevine has it that, PMO has got annoyed about the 'leak' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's instructions to his Cabinet colleagues to go aggressively on Instagram. It is being worked out who from the cabinet meeting last week shared to a TV media about PM's advice for a better modern youth political outreach.



Pellet guns used?

After the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) strike is over, the security agencies are keeping silence over the demand on probe whether Pellet Gus were used during Jantar Mantar strike. Opposition leaders, media organisations have brought out the videos of injured people. Government hospitals which treated the injured people are keeping stony silence. Grapevine has it that the Pellet Guns and shock providing batons are not used by Delhi Police, which first jump to say that they never used such weapons. CRPF is keeping silence as it is a well known secret that its Rapid Action Force (RAF) faced similar allegations in usage of such weapons in Kashmir. Will Home Ministry order a probe is the question, which creates trouble for security agencies?



In between the resignation!

While the Government remained adamant that Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation as Education Minister was "not possible", grapevine has it that in the second meeting between Centre and CJP it was conveyed that if resignation demand is not accepted then the protestors would officially announce Gherao and march to Parliament. According to sources, the matter first gained momentum when representatives of CJP met BJP senior leader and Union Minister JP Nadda at his residence where they were conveyed except the resignation issue talk on other points were acceptable. The threatening of march towards Parliament is believed to be turning point in consideration of Pradhan's resignation as the city had already witnessed repercussions when the CJP protestors had rushed to Parliament followed by sit in protest by opposition leaders in front of PM's residence.



2 Delhi men held in Kerala over fake ministerial berth offer scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kozhikode (Kerala)

Cyber police have arrested two Delhi natives in connection with an alleged attempt to dupe some Kerala MPs and an MLA by promising them ministerial berths in the state cabinet in return for ₹3 crore.

The two accused-Nitin and Gaurav-were brought to Kozhikode from New Delhi on a transit remand on Sunday morning, an officer of the Kozhikode Cyber Police Station said.

They were arrested following a complaint by Elathur MLA K Vidya Balakrishnan, who alleged that a person posing as the private secretary to Wayanad Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had called her and offered her a ministerial berth in exchange for ₹3 crore, police said.

Similar calls were allegedly made to Kerala MPs Shafi Parambil and Dean Kuriakose. A complaint in this regard was lodged by DS Rajkumar, private secretary to Vadra, with the state police chief and the Wayanad Superintendent of Police, following which an

FIR was registered. Rajkumar alleged that the accused had misused his identity and the name of the MP's office in an attempt to cheat the public representatives by demanding money from them.

According to police, Balakrishnan received a WhatsApp call at around 2 pm on July 6 from a person who introduced himself as Rajkumar from Vadra's office in New Delhi.

The caller allegedly claimed that a cabinet reshuffle was likely in Kerala and that she could be made a minister if she paid ₹3 crore. Police said the conversation, which was in English, lasted about 10 minutes. Balakrishnan grew suspicious of the caller's claims during the conversation.

The caller allegedly told her that she had been recommended by another MP from Kozhikode.

After the call, Balakrishnan contacted the MP, who told her that a person claiming to be from the AICC office had sought the contact details of her and another MLA, police said.

Exam panel attempt to fix PM's image: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Congress on Sunday derided the Modi Government's committee on exam reforms as a "high-powered attempt to fix the Pradhan Mantri's irretrievably compromised image."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday announced the constitution of a high-powered task force, headed by Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani, on forging reforms for the examinations conducted by the National Testing Agency.

The task force will give suggestions on maximum use of technology for setting up a robust and transparent examination system, Modi said in a video message posted on Instagram.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "Friends, in June 2024, after it bungled multiple examinations including NEET-UG, the Modi Government constituted a High-Level Committee of Experts headed by K Radhakrishnan to 'ensure transparent, smooth and fair conduct of examinations.'"

In July 2026, the Modi Government bungled the NEET-UG and other exams and has now constituted another "High Powered Task Force", he said on X.

Ramesh said the new committee comes even as the Modi Government has still not finished implementing the K Radhakrishnan Committee's 101 recommendations.

For most of the two years between the 2024 and 2026



Opposition Leader in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Congress MP KC Venugopal, Samajwadi Party (SP) MPs Akhilesh Yadav, Dharmendra Yadav and Awadhesh Prasad, TMC MP Saugata Roy and Mahua Mitra, JMM MP Mahua Maji and other opposition leaders stage a protest wearing black clothes to express solidarity with students protesting against the NEET paper leak issue during the Monsoon session of Parliament in New Delhi on Wednesday

PTI

paper leaks, it didn't even appoint a full-time director general for the National Testing Agency, he said. "This is ultimately only a

High-Powered attempt to fix the Pradhan Mantri's irretrievably compromised image," the Congress leader said.

According to the government, a multidisciplinary group of domain experts will be a part of the task force. Besides Nilekani, its other

Youths should visit border villages to understand India, instead of depending on virtual means: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the objective of the Viksit Vibrant Village (VVV) programme, under which youths visit border villages and live with local communities, is to give opportunities to youngsters to step onto the ground to understand and connect with India instead of relying on virtual means.

Interacting with the participants, many of whom belong to Gen Z, of the VVV programme 2026 that covered 74 'vibrant villages' across Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, Modi said in the country's border villages, the aspiration for development and the spirit of patriotism are equally cherished. At times, it feels that for these people the country matters more than themselves.

The prime minister said that during the Developed India Young Leaders



Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually interacts with participants of the Viksit Vibrant Village Programme 2026

PTI

Dialogue, he had presented an idea before the youth. "The idea was that why not have the youth, instead of using virtual medium, step onto the ground to know India, connect with India, try to live India, and understand India," he said.

Modi said there are so many aspirations for development in India's villages and these can be understood by visiting these villages.

In his virtual interaction

even more expensive.

The prime minister, however, did not refer to the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP)-led protests over the NEET paper leak issue which concluded on Saturday after the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as Education Minister and the acceptance of the protesters' other demands by the government.

The participants were largely mobilised through various virtual mediums, including Instagram, and protesters mostly belonged to Gen Z. Modi said the aim of the VVV programme was that youth from different districts of the country should travel to the villages of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Ladakh.

"When the youth of the country connects with the land, it makes the vision of a developed India even more expansive. This youth, in their heart, strengthens the resolve to live for the country, to do something for the country," he said.

Pralhad Joshi assumes charge as Union Education Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi on Sunday assumed charge as the Union Education Minister, a day after President Droupadi Murmu accepted the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan and assigned him the additional responsibility of the ministry.

Joshi said he was reviewing the ministry's functioning and familiarising himself with the department, describing education as "a new subject" for him. Speaking to media after assuming office, Joshi said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had entrusted him with the responsibility and that he would take time to under-

stand the ministry before making detailed comments.

"The Prime Minister has entrusted me with this responsibility with full confidence. I was in Karnataka and I reached Delhi immediately and came this morning to take charge. I have assumed charge. I am reviewing all the details here and the decisions that need to be taken. I have been gathering information and trying to understand the functioning of the entire ministry. We had continuous meetings today. This is a new subject for me. I have taken charge today and held detailed discussions with the senior officers. It is a very big department, so I will speak to you in detail after I have understood it completely,"



Union Minister Pralhad Joshi during a meeting as he takes charge as education minister in New Delhi. Joshi has been given additional charge of the education ministry besides his role as the consumer affairs minister

PTI

Joshi said.

Joshi has been given additional charge of the education ministry besides his role as the consumer affairs minister. Pradhan resigned

from his post on Saturday following the Cockroach Janata Party-led student protests across the country, demanding his ouster over the NEET paper leak controversy.

Transgender leader Sanjana Singh broadens Datia bypoll debate with focus on inclusion

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

Amid a high-profile electoral contest between the BJP and the Congress in Madhya Pradesh's Datia Assembly by-election, one candidate has succeeded in shifting part of the campaign narrative beyond traditional political equations.

Sanjana Singh, a transgender leader, former Government employee and Mahamandaleswar of the Kinnar Akhara, is contesting the election with a message centred on inclusion, dignity and political representation for the transgender community. While the bypoll remains largely a bipolar contest, Sanjana's candidature has attracted considerable public attention and sparked conversations on the participation of transgender persons in mainstream politics.

Sanjana, who is widely recognised as Madhya Pradesh's first transgender Government employee, says her decision to enter electoral politics is aimed at ensuring that members of



the transgender community have a meaningful voice in policy-making rather than remaining confined to symbolic roles. She believes the democratic process should reflect the diversity of Indian society and offer equal opportunities to every citizen, irrespective of gender identity.

Unlike the resource-intensive campaigns mounted by major political parties,

Sanjana has adopted a grassroots approach, travelling across villages and urban localities, meeting residents door-to-door and interacting directly with voters. Her campaign focuses on issues such as education, employment, women's safety, healthcare, social justice and the welfare of economically weaker sections. She has repeatedly said her election campaign is not confined to the concerns of the transgender community but is aimed at addressing the aspirations of all sections of society.

Her campaign has also received support from members of the Kinnar Akhara and transgender community from different parts of the country, adding a unique social dimension to the Datia bypoll. Political observers say that although Sanjana may not alter the arithmetic of the contest, her presence has broadened the debate on political inclusion and equal representation.

Madhya Pradesh has played a pioneering role in transgender political repre-

sentation. In 1998, Shabnam Mausi scripted history by becoming India's first openly transgender MLA after winning the Sohagpur Assembly seat in Shahdol district as an Independent candidate. During her tenure, she became a prominent advocate for the rights of marginalised communities and remains one of the country's most recognised transgender political figures.

Since then, several transgender candidates have entered the electoral arena in the state. Candidates have contested Assembly, municipal and local body elections from cities including Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Gwalior, though electoral success has largely remained elusive. Even so, their participation has steadily expanded the visibility of the transgender community in democratic politics and challenged long-standing social barriers.

Against this backdrop, Sanjana's candidature represents another significant chapter in Madhya Pradesh's evolving political landscape.

Pradhan offered to resign on day one of NEET agitation: MP minister Vijayvargiya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Indore

Madhya Pradesh minister Kailash Vijayvargiya has claimed that Dharmendra Pradhan had expressed his willingness to resign as Union Education Minister on the very first day of the student agitation over alleged examination irregularities and the NEET paper leak.

Speaking to mediapersons here on Saturday, Vijayvargiya said Pradhan had informed the BJP president that he was prepared to step down if the party considered it necessary. However, according to the minister, the party leadership asked him not to resign or discuss the matter until a formal decision was taken.

"Pradhan had told the BJP president on the very first day of the agitation that if the party felt his resignation was necessary, he was ready to quit. The party president advised him to wait, saying no decision had been taken and asked



MP minister Kailash Vijayvargiya

him not to submit his resignation or speak about it publicly," Vijayvargiya said.

He added that once the party leadership decided Pradhan should step down, the former Education Minister resigned immediately. Vijayvargiya said Pradhan had carried out every responsibility entrusted to him with honesty and dedication. He also claimed that the resignation had "foiled the designs of foreign forces" that allegedly wanted to destabilise India through violence, drawing comparisons with developments in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Sooryavanshi, Mayank script India's 35-run win; sweep Zimbabwe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Harare

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's remarkably adaptive 81 and an equally solid effort from bowlers led by pacer Mayank Yadav ensured India's smooth 35-run win over Zimbabwe in the third and final T20I here on Sunday.

Along with the victory, India also completed a 3-0 sweep, a fine step-up after surrendering the previous two series to England (0-4) and Ireland (0-2).

Zimbabwe had to bat out of their skin to chase down 193 on a rather sluggish pitch. But they did not have enough patience or nous for it, ending up at 157 for seven

despite Ryan Burl making a fine unbeaten 54.

Just like in the previous matches, Zimbabwe lost one too many wickets early as they could not properly use the Power Play segment.

Pacer Yash Thakur (2/45) got rid of Dion Myers and skipper Sikandar Raza off successive balls in the fourth over as the hosts slipped to 34 for three. Earlier Mayank (3/29), who bowled with heaps of pace and accuracy, had ousted Brian Bennett in the first ball of the innings as Zimbabwe struggled for an early move-on.

It became a trend as the innings progressed despite Indians grassing as many as four catches and conceding



couple of boundaries in another sloppy fielding effort. Burl played a nice innings of assurance and formed a good 60-run alliance with Wesley Madhevere (28) for the fifth wicket. The Zimbabweans played some forceful shots around the park, but the early damage was too big to mitigate.

India too suffered an early jolt, losing a struggling Abhishek Sharma for 2 after opting to bat.

But Sooryavanshi showcased another side of his batting during the 49-ball innings on a slightly tacky pitch at the Harare Sports Club, and

The 15-year-old started in a relatively subdued fashion - first 10 balls produced a mere 11 runs, the next 10 saw the arrival of 15 runs, and eventually his second T20I fifty came in 31 balls.

There were a few stunning shots as one would expect in a Sooryavanshi innings.

A straight punch for a four off Brad Evans' yorker and

then a 102-metre six off off-spinner Sikandar Raza showed his age-defying power and skills.

There was a moment of innovation too when he reverse swept spinner Madhevere for a boundary. But overall, it was an innings of restraint on the day from the Bihar boy.

But on the other hand, his opening partner Abhishek got out for his sixth below par score in succession, edging pacer Blessing Muzarabani to stumper Tadi Marumani.

Now, Abhishek's last six innings read: 10, 16, 3, 1, 8, 2, dating back to the third T20I at Nottingham against England last month.

But Sooryavanshi showed enough maturity to stitch a 75-run partnership with Ishan Kishan (29) for the second wicket and followed it up with a 50-run stand with Shreyas Iyer (27) for the next wicket.

However, the left-hander fell close to a well-deserved hundred with Evans taking a stunning catch at long-off off Madhevere.

Once Sooryavanshi and Shreyas departed, the middle order batters struggled to impart the desired momentum to the innings.

It reflected in the 47 runs they scored off in the last five overs, and Rinku Singh's cameo (25, 14b) was needed for India to move closer to 200.

Fitness ahead of SL Tests: Washington remains doubtful, focus on Saransh Jain

KUSHAN SARKAR
■ New Delhi

Indian selectors face a selection headache ahead of the two-Test series against Sri Lanka, with Washington Sundar unlikely to recover in time for the opening match in Galle, leaving the reserve spinner's slot up for grabs.

The Indian squad for the Sri Lanka Tests will be announced on Tuesday and the Ajit Agarkar-led selection panel is dealing with a plethora of fitness issues plaguing the national team at the moment.

Senior speedster Jasprit Bumrah, who had missed the final ODI against England at Lord's due to an impact injury, is also expected to appear for a fitness Test.



It is understood that the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru has released the fitness updates as per which both Harshit Rana and Nitish Kumar Reddy are not in selection contention for the red ball series. They sustained hamstring injuries at

different times and are currently in the middle of intense rehabilitation programme.

"Washington will only be fit by the second Test and it is there to be seen if selectors pick him for one game subject to fitness. Else, they



will have to look for a fourth option beyond Ravindra Jadeja, Manav Suthar and Kuldeep Yadav. If they pick Harsh Dubey, it will be three bowlers with identical skill sets," a BCCI source privy to selection matters told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

The options available are off-spinner Saransh Jain, who is also a handy lower middle-order batter. Saransh did pretty well against Sri Lanka A where he took six wickets in two games and scored a 70 not out. Knowing Gambhir's propensity to have a handy

batter till No. 8, Saransh won't be a bad option.

The other options are wrist spinners Zeeshan Ansari and Vipraj Nigam but men who matter believe that Nigam's game is more suited to white ball format. He bowls fast leg breaks and can hit the ball a long way as one has seen in IPL where he plays for Delhi Capitals. In case of Bumrah, if he is not available then the pace attack will comprise Mohammed Siraj, Gurnoor Brar and Prasidh Krishna.

Akash Deep, who played a stellar role in 2025 England away series is still recuperating from stress fracture and has just about started his 'Return To Play' protocols.

"Akash is bowling around 12-15 balls a day as per instructions. He is still some

time away from attaining his full fitness," the source added.

The opening Test is scheduled to be held in in Galle from August 15 while the second Test will begin on August 23 in Colombo. Meanwhile, senior all-rounder Hardik Pandya is back to full fitness and will be available for India's white-ball assignment from the month of August after completing the mandatory 'Return to Play' protocols by the end of July, BCCI sources informed on Sunday.

India's No. 1 pace bowling all-rounder was supposed to play the three-match ODI series against Afghanistan in June after being cleared to play post his quadriceps strain.

"Hardik is ready to play both forms of white ball cricket. He is expected to get fitness certificate by the end of this month. If India's proposed white ball tour of Bangladesh happens, Hardik can be expected to be picked. He has been training two sessions at the COE.

"Hardik is ready to play both forms of white ball cricket. He is expected to get fitness certificate by the end of this month. If India's proposed white ball tour of Bangladesh happens, Hardik can be expected to be picked. He has been training two sessions at the COE. The morning is primarily for fitness work and evening is purely skill-based (batting and bowling)," the source added.

Hodge's 83 leads West Indies to 194-3 against Pakistan on day 1 of Test series

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Tarouba (Trinidad)

Kavem Hodge's unbeaten 83 carried West Indies to 194-3 against Pakistan at stumps on the rain-affected first day of the first test on Saturday.

Only 67 overs were bowled in the day before stumps was called early because of bad light. Hodge batted in all three sessions, including the truncated first session in which only 14.1 overs were bowled and 23 runs scored. He came to the crease in the ninth over when Mohammad Abbas bowled Brandon King (12) on his way to figures of 1-8 from seven overs in the morning session.

When the players returned from lunch, Hodge faced a pitch that had been

enlivened by the rain, and stood firm as West Indies added 104 runs for the loss of two wickets in 28.5 overs.

Hodge then added 67 runs in 24 overs in the shortened final session during which he survived a confident appeal for lbw. He was struck above the knee roll on the back pad by a ball from Abbas which jagged back from outside off stump. Pakistan's appeal was upheld by the on-field umpire but overturned by the television officials when replays showed the ball was bouncing over the stumps.

Hodge went on to share an unbroken 88-run partnership for the fourth wicket with Shai Hope who was 39 not out at close of play.

Abbas finished the day with 2-44 from 19 overs as the



best of the Pakistan bowlers. Left-arm spinner Usman Ali made his test debut at 33 and managed to find sharp turn at times. West Indies captain Roston Chase made the decision to bat after winning the toss. It seemed questionable as runs came at a

snail's pace in the first session for the loss of King's wicket in the ninth over when the total was 13.

Tagenarine Chanderpaul and Amir Jangoo both made 21 before falling in the second session. Chanderpaul fell to Aamer Jamal, who returned to the Pakistan test side after an 18-month absence and Jangoo was trapped lbw by Abbas. Hodge remained resolute, reaching his fourth half-century in tests from 86 balls with eight fours. Hope provided solid support and faced 91 balls by stumps.

Babar Azam has returned to lead Pakistan after the captaincy was stripped from Shan Masood, who lost 12 out of 16 tests. Pakistan hasn't won an away test since beating Sri Lanka in 2023 under Babar.

Opening batter Abdullah Fazal was ruled out of the series, and the upcoming three test series in England, after injuring his lower back on Thursday. Imam-ul-Haq, who missed the last series against Bangladesh, has

returned to open with Azan Awaiz. West Indies has gone in with three fast bowlers - Kemar Roach, Shamar Joseph and Jayden Seales - after Alzarri Joseph made himself unavailable for the series. Jomel Warrican is the specialist spinner.

The teams are at the bottom of the World Test Championship with one win apiece. West Indies players and match officials wore black armbands in memory of legendary allrounder Garfield Sobers, who died at the age of 89 this month.

Players of both teams and match officials observed a minute of silence before the start of play at the Brian Lara Cricket Academy, which became the 13th test venue in the Caribbean.

Norris snatches pole from penalised Hamilton at Hungarian Grand Prix



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Mogyorod (Hungary)

Defending Formula 1 champion Lando Norris took his first pole position of 2026 when he snatched it from Lewis Hamilton by just 0.012 of a second at the Hungarian Grand Prix on Saturday.

Hamilton was on course for a record-extending 105th pole position, and first in a full grand prix since Hungary in 2023, before Norris darted through to take it away. Then a penalty dropped Hamilton to fifth. "It's been a while," Norris said. "I felt confident all weekend." Norris felt he could easily have gone much faster if he'd had time for another run to iron out mistakes.

"I had the confidence to push more," he said. "I got it to unexplored territory from what happens to the balance when I push it that next level, and I lost a bit of time in a couple of places."

Norris added that upgrades to McLaren's car give him confidence for Sunday's race, but "it's a long race ahead tomorrow and it's going to be a difficult one." Charles Leclerc took third for Ferrari, .238 off the pace but will

start second alongside Norris. Mercedes had a tough day. Standings leader Kimi Antonelli was fourth after seemingly being held up by Red Bull's Max Verstappen spinning ahead of him, and teammate George Russell was seventh.

Mercedes could also be facing a repair job after Russell broke down on track on his way back to the pits.

Hamilton drops to fifth with his penalty. Hamilton dropped to fifth on the grid for the race with a three-place penalty for impeding McLaren's Oscar Piastri. The penalty means Antonelli now starts ahead of both his main title rivals, Hamilton and Russell. The Australian driver gestured angrily at Hamilton after taking evasive action when he spotted his rival's Ferrari going slowly on the inside of the first corner. Piastri ended up fifth. Asked what his main problem was in qualifying, Piastri said: "Lewis not looking in his mirrors." Hamilton said he hadn't had the usual radio update from his team warning of faster cars behind and he told the stewards he wasn't able to spot Piastri in his mirrors. (AP)

India reclaim top spot in ICC T20I rankings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

India on Sunday reclaimed the No.1 position in ICC men's T20I rankings after taking an unassailable 2-0 lead against Zimbabwe in the ongoing three-match series at Harare.

The reigning T20 world champions regained the top spot from England, who had dethroned Shreyas Iyer's side after their 4-0 series win recently. India had also lost to Ireland 0-2 prior to that.

But Men in Blue returned to winning ways, beating Zimbabwe by seven wickets in the first T20I at Harare before establishing a 2-0 lead



with a 90-run victory in the second match. India top-order batter Ishan Kishan, who made a fifty in the second T20I against the African side, remains on top of the batters' list with 892 points followed by Abhishek Sharma (858 points).

I don't give much focus on what's happening outside: Ishan Kishan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Harare

Indian wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan is unfazed by the noise surrounding Abhishek Sharma and Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's explosive batting and wants to stay focused on doing the job he is meant to do.

On Saturday, India lost Abhishek (8) and Sooryavanshi (20) inside three overs to be reduced to 29/2, but Kishan anchored the innings with a 44-ball 81 to power India to 219/5.

His effort helped India beat hosts Zimbabwe by 90



runs in the second T20I and seal the series 2-0 ahead of Sunday's final match. "I don't give so much focus to what's happening outside," said the 28-year-old after registering

his second fifty in three T20I innings. Abhishek has been known for some time for his fearless batting. But, since the much-anticipated debut of Sooryavanshi, the spotlight has largely been on the teenage prodigy. But Kishan, who is equally aggressive, is not bothered by the noise.

"I know the way I have to play and what's important is to just be in the moment," he said. "Don't think about who is getting more runs or who is hitting more." Kishan said a No. 3 batter's role becomes even more important when the team loses early wickets. "Everyone can have that image in the team. But as a number three batter, you need to understand what's important when two wickets are down early."

Abdullah, Saud Shakeel added to Pakistan squad against West Indies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Karachi

Pakistan selectors on Sunday added opening batter Abdullah Shafique and Saud Shakeel for the ongoing Test series against the West Indies and tour of England for three Tests.

Shafique has been named as a replacement of the injured Abdullah Fazal while Shakeel has been added boost Pakistan's batting resources on these away assignments, the Pakistan Cricket Board said on Sunday. Fazal developed a lower back problem during training ahead of the first



Test against the West Indies and was ruled out for the five Tests in the Caribbean and England. The Pakistan squad strength has swelled to 18 in

the Caribbean, with Abdullah, who was playing in the Global T20 League in Guayana, joining the national side in Port of Spain.

Indian sub-junior men's team defeat Pakistan 3-1 to win FIH Youth Hockey5s Asian Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Muscat

The Indian sub-junior men's team produced a clinical performance to defeat arch-rivals Pakistan 3-1 in the gold medal match of the FIH Youth Hockey5s Asian Championship.

Goals from Romit Pal (5'), captain Ketan Kushwaha (12') and Shahrukh Ali (13') crowned India as the Asian Champions. With this victory, the Indian men's team also finished at the top of the Elite Pool table.

The summit clash saw India take early control with sharp passing and disciplined structure. Romit Pal (5') broke the deadlock in the first half, striking past the Pakistani goalkeeper to give India a 1-0 lead at half-time. India extended their dominance early in the



second half as captain Ketan Kushwaha (12') found the back of the net, followed immediately by a strike from Shahrukh Ali (13') to make it 3-0. Pakistan pulled

one goal back through Muhammad Usman (16'), but the Indian defense stood firm in the closing minutes to secure a 3-1 win and lift the trophy.

By virtue of reaching the final, both India and Pakistan have qualified for the inaugural FIH Youth Hockey5s World Cup. In the women's competition, the Indian sub-junior women's team bagged the silver medal after a hard-fought contest in their final against China, ensuring both Indian contingents return home with medals.

Celebrating the stellar performances of both squads, Hockey India announced cash rewards for the teams.

Each player of the gold medal-winning Indian men's team will be rewarded with ₹2 lakh, while each member of the support staff will receive ₹1 lakh. Additionally, each player of the silver medal-winning Indian women's team will receive ₹1 lakh, with ₹50,000 awarded to each member of their support staff.

FROM THE WORLD

UKRAINE Two dead in Russian attack

Russian ballistic missiles struck Kyiv early on Sunday, setting off fires and wounding at least 3 civilians, while attacks on other parts of Ukraine later killed at least 2 people, local officials reported. The strikes come as Ukraine's successful drone attacks have stalled the Russian army's advances in an expanded campaign inside Russia that has been causing fuel shortages and piling pressure on Russian leader Vladimir Putin. In Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine, Kremlin-installed authorities said a Ukrainian drone strike had killed 4 civilians in the city of Horlivka. According to Ivan Prikhodko, city's Russian-appointed mayor, city had been under fire since early hours of Sunday. (AP)

GERMANY Manhunt after Berlin attack

German investigators on Sunday hunted a man who allegedly drove a van into a crowd near Berlin's Pride festival, killing one person and wounding many more, before apparently stabbing others with a machete in what authorities believe was an Islamic extremist terror attack. Authorities issued a wanted notice and warned people against approaching Abdul Ballout, a German citizen with Lebanese roots, saying that he may be armed and dangerous. "Everything we see here points to us dealing with an Islamic terror attack," Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt said. Dobrindt put the total number of injured at 29. Ashley Jump, a 26-year-old UK resident, had travelled to Berlin for Saturday's Pride parade but had left the celebrations before the attack. (AP)

Nepal eases curbs on Indian currency notes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kathmandu

Nepal has allowed Indian and Nepalese nationals to bring into or take out of the country Indian currency notes of ₹200 and ₹500 denominations, ending a nearly decade-long restriction under which only notes of up to ₹100 denomination were permitted following India's 2016 demonetisation.

The Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), in a notice reissued on Thursday, said Indian and Nepalese nationals may carry Indian currency notes of ₹200 and ₹500 denominations issued on or after November 9, 2016, up to a limit of ₹25,000 per person in accordance with the prevailing regulations.

Though the provisions had already been notified through a notice published in the Nepal Gazette on February 11 after the necessary regulations were framed, the NRB reissued the notice to reiterate the rules and clarify their implementation.

Clarifying the new rules, NRB spokesperson Guru Prasad Paudel said on Saturday that Nepalese



nationals cannot bring Indian currency into Nepal from any country other than India. Likewise, they cannot carry Indian currency from Nepal to a third country, except India.

He said the revised provision would facilitate Indian tourists visiting Nepal and Nepalese nationals engaged in trade and business with India.

The notice also said Nepalese nationals and foreign visitors can bring up to \$5,000 or its equivalent in other foreign currencies into Nepal without making a customs declaration.

Amounts exceeding \$5,000 must be declared to customs upon arrival.

In case of the Indian currency, travellers may bring in an amount equivalent to up

to \$5,000 (approx ₹4.83 lakh) without making a customs declaration only if the denominations do not exceed ₹100, Paudel said.

However, if the amount exceeds the \$5,000 limit, a customs declaration is mandatory, he added.

India demonetised ₹500 and ₹1,000 currency notes on November 8, 2016, replacing them with redesigned ₹500

notes and introducing new ₹2,000 notes, which have since been withdrawn from circulation.

Following the demonetisation, Nepal prohibited the entry and use of Indian currency notes of denominations above ₹100. While the ceiling of ₹25,000 on carrying Indian currency remained unchanged, travellers were effectively restricted to notes of ₹100 and below.

Under the revised regulations, Indian and Nepalese nationals are now permitted to carry redesigned ₹500 notes and ₹200 notes issued after November 9, 2016, subject to the existing ceiling of ₹25,000.

Indian currency notes of ₹500 and ₹1,000 denominations issued before that date will continue to remain prohibited in Nepal.

The move is expected to facilitate travel and cross-border transactions between India and Nepal, which share an open border and close people-to-people ties. India is Nepal's largest trading partner and a major source of tourists, while thousands of Nepalese citizens live, work, study and conduct business in India.



Nepal urges India to accept National ID for travel

SHIRISH B PRADHAN
■ Kathmandu

Nepal has requested India to recognise the National Identity Card as a valid travel document for Nepali citizens visiting the country, a move that will allow the NID to be used alongside the existing citizenship certificate and passport, a senior official said on Sunday.

The Department of Immigration has forwarded the proposal to the Indian Government through diplomatic channels, seeking recognition of the NID for travel to India, spokesperson Tika Ram Dhakal said.

"We have already sent the proposal to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs via the Home

Ministry, and the Foreign Ministry has forwarded it to the concerned authorities of India," he said.

"We are in touch with the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu regarding the matter and are awaiting a formal response from the Indian side," Dhakal added.

If the proposal is approved, the National Identity Card will become the third valid identification document for Nepali citizens travelling to India by both air and land routes, alongside the citizenship certificate and passport, he said.

Dhakal expressed hope that India would respond positively to Nepal's request at the earliest.

Canadian intern arrested for spying inside NATO

SAM MCNEIL ■ Brussels

A Canadian woman was arrested and accused of espionage while working as an intern in the operational headquarters of the NATO military alliance, Belgian authorities said Saturday.

Belgium's Federal Prosecutor's Office said it launched an espionage investigation after NATO's security services tipped off Belgium's military intelligence. Authorities then detained "a Canadian citizen of Chinese origin" on Friday, a day after raiding the suspect's home and workplace inside NATO's vast command centre.

"She is suspected of spying on behalf of a third country and of being a member of a criminal organisation," the prosecutors said in a statement.

The strategic headquarters of the Allied Powers, known as SHAPE, is located in the southern Belgian city of Mons near the French border. Military officials at SHAPE plan and command joint strategy, tactics and



operations. The alliance's political headquarters is in Brussels, where ambassadors from member nations meet to discuss defence spending, drone incursions and cyber threats. NATO's Cyber Security Centre is based at SHAPE.

"At this time, there is no indication that NATO or SHAPE operational readiness, command and control arrangements, or ongoing tasks have been adversely affected. SHAPE continues to fulfil its responsibilities

without interruption," said Col Martin L O'Donnell, a spokesperson for SHAPE.

Both Canada and Belgium are members of the 32-nation military alliance that in 2021 labelled China a "security challenge" alongside active threats in Russia and the Middle East.

NATO leaders have said China is working to undermine global order, develop its military opaquely, and run destabilising disinformation campaigns. They said that Beijing's goals and

"assertive behaviour present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to alliance security".

The Chinese Government denounced the statement and said its military buildup was defensive.

The arrest in Belgium comes at a crucial time for the alliance as it weathers deep criticism from President Donald Trump, who has drawn down the US security role in Europe.

Trump has been pressing allies to spend more on defence and join the conflict in Iran while at the same time threatening to seize by force Greenland from NATO-member Denmark, a move that rattled Europeans and the alliance.

Last year, following pressure from Trump, 32 NATO nations agreed to invest 5 per cent of their gross domestic product on defence — 3.5 per cent on defence items such as jets and missiles and 1.5 per cent on infrastructure, including roads, bridges and ports, as well as cybersecurity. (AP)

Ship struck at Ukraine's port: 2 Indians safe, 2 missing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ London

A merchant vessel carrying four Indian nationals was struck at Ukraine's Port of Odesa, with two crew members confirmed safe while information about the other two is still awaited, the Indian Embassy in Kyiv said on Sunday.

The incident occurred on Saturday when MV AGN Ragnar was hit at the Port of Odesa, one of Ukraine's key Black Sea ports that has frequently come under attack since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022.

The Indian mission, in a statement, said it is closely monitoring the situation.

"Embassy of India in Ukraine is closely monitoring the situation following the incident involving MV AGN Ragnar, which was struck at the Port of Odesa on July 25," it said.

Four Indian nationals were on board the vessel at the



time of the incident, the embassy said.

"As per the latest information, two have been confirmed safe, and information is awaited regarding the other two nationals," it said.

Search and rescue operations are currently underway, the embassy said, adding that it is in constant touch with the concerned authorities to ascertain the status of the missing crew members and extend all possible assistance.

There was no immediate information on the source of the strike, the circumstances

surrounding the incident or the total strength of the vessel's crew. The identities of the four Indian nationals and the nature of their duties on board were also not immediately known.

Odesa, Ukraine's principal Black Sea port, has remained a frequent target of missile and drone attacks since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Merchant shipping in the Black Sea has periodically been affected despite efforts to keep maritime trade routes operational.

10 killed after Typhoon Noul makes landfall in southern China

KJM VARMA ■ Beijing

Ten people were killed in rain-triggered floods in China as Typhoon Noul made landfall early Sunday in the southern province of Guangdong.

Noul, the 12th and the strongest typhoon to hit China so far this year, made landfall at Huizhou city in Guangdong around 3.50 am, bringing gale-force winds and heavy rain to large parts of the region.

Rain-triggered flash floods killed 10 in China's Gansu scenic area, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

China's National Commission for Disaster Prevention, Reduction and Relief activated a Level-IV

national disaster relief emergency response for Guangdong.

Level-IV is the least severe tier in the four-tier emergency response system. Level I is the most critical/severe.

High-speed rail services and flights across Guangdong province were cancelled on Sunday after Typhoon Noul made landfall in the province, bringing heavy rainfall to large parts of southern China.

The National Meteorological Centre issued its first red alert for a typhoon this year on Saturday evening. The alert was downgraded to orange and later to yellow on Sunday as Typhoon Noul weakened.



Red is the highest alert in China's four-tier, colour-coded warning system, in which blue is the lowest level.

The typhoon packed winds of up to 162 kilometres per

hour, slightly stronger than Typhoon Bavi, which struck eastern and northeastern China about two weeks ago, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. A working team has been

dispatched to the affected areas to assess the situation and assist local authorities in relocating and resettling residents, besides ensuring their basic living needs.

The National Development and Reform Commission also allocated 100 million yuan (about \$14.7 million) from the central budget to support post-disaster recovery efforts in Guangdong.

The funds will primarily be used to restore damaged infrastructure, including roads, water conservancy facilities, schools and hospitals, to help resume normal production and daily life at the earliest.

Ahead of the typhoon's landfall, China's national

observatory on Saturday issued a red alert, the highest level in country's four-tier colour-coded typhoon warning system. Red is followed by orange, yellow, blue.

Emergency measures were also activated in Fujian, Jiangxi, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, covering large parts of eastern, central and southern China.

In Hong Kong, authorities initiated emergency measures on Saturday as the typhoon approached. More than 410 flights and 150 high-speed train services were cancelled, while the Home Affairs Department opened 28 temporary shelters in anticipation of the storm. (PTI)



Pakistan sends 14,000 cops to PoK ahead of elections

M ZULOGERNAIN ■ Lahore

Pakistan's Punjab province has sent 14,000 police personnel, 30 per cent of them carrying weapons, to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) for security duty ahead of elections in the region, an official said Sunday.

Elections for 45 contesting seats of the so-called legislative assembly of PoK are to be held in three phases from Monday to August 10.

India maintains that the entire Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh are integral and inalienable parts of it. New Delhi also asserts that Pakistan has been in "illegal and forcible occupation" of parts of these Union Territories.

"The Punjab government has sent 14,000 personnel of Punjab policemen for Kashmir poll security duty on the request of the Kashmir Government," a Government official told PTI.

Of these, 30 per cent are carrying weapons, and 70 per cent are equipped with anti-riot equipment, he said.

On July 21, PoK's Election Commissioner Ghulam Mustafa Mughal said that polling in 13 constituencies of Mirpur division will be held

on July 27, nine constituencies of Muzaffarabad division and all 12 refugee constituencies on August 2, and 11 constituencies of Poonch division on August 10.

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

The additional force deployment was needed as the PoK region saw unprecedented violence following widespread protests by the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) that lasted for nearly two months. The JAAC's main demand was the abolition of the 12 refugee seats.

Dozens of people, including security men, were killed in the violence, following which the Government last month banned the JAAC.

India on July 14 had described the protests in PoK as a "direct consequence" of Islamabad's decades-long "systemic exploitation and administrative oppression" in areas under its "forcible" occupation and criticised reported police brutality on the protesters.

In the PoK polls, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is contesting against the

Maldives ready to help revive SAARC: President Muizzu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Male

Maldives is prepared to facilitate the resumption of the meetings of the SAARC stalled for the last nine years, President Mohamed Muizzu said on Sunday.

The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) comprises India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan.

Speaking at the Maldives' 61st Independence Day ceremony on Sunday, Muizzu described SAARC as an important regional organisation, according to the state-run Public Service Media (PSM News).

However, he noted that the Association has remained inactive for



Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu

the past nine years.

The last SAARC Summit (18th Summit) was held in Nepal's capital Kathmandu on November 26-27, 2014.

The 19th SAARC Summit, scheduled to be hosted by Pakistan in 2016, did not take place, and Summit-level engagement within SAARC has remained stalled due to the prevailing lack of

consensus among member states and concerns relating to cross-border terrorism, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

The Maldives has consistently advocated the peaceful resolution of disputes and is prepared to take a leading role in promoting dialogue, he said and stressed that reviving SAARC

and restarting meetings among its member states are essential for maintaining peace and stability in the region.

"The Maldives calls on all parties with differing views to come together around the table, prioritise regional development and peace, and work in a spirit of cooperation."

"If there are difficulties in doing so, the Maldives stands ready to take the initiative and serve as a mediator to help advance those discussions," PSM News said, quoting Muizzu as saying.

The SAARC was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on December 8, 1985. The Secretariat of the Association was set up in Kathmandu on January 17, 1987.

Appalled that Nirav Modi still in UK, says Priti Patel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ London

Priti Patel, the British Indian minister who signed off on Nirav Modi's extradition order to India as home secretary in April 2021 after a prima facie case was established in court, has said she is "appalled and horrified" that he is still in the UK.

Patel, shadow foreign secretary on the Conservative Opposition benches, told 'The Daily Telegraph' podcast in an episode to be released next week that the Indian authorities were "hugely angry" over Britain's failure to extradite the jeweller wanted for one of the country's biggest banking frauds.

'The Diamond King' four-



Nirav Modi

part podcast series traces the newspaper's discovery of the fugitive diamond merchant hiding out in a luxury London flat, leading to his eventual arrest by Scotland Yard in March 2019.

"If our system were judicious and doing the right thing, rather than tying itself up in process and excuses, he should not be in this country," Patel is quoted as saying.