

15001/75/2627



Vikash ki Lahar,
Gaon se Sahar



Inauguration and Laying of Foundation Stone for
various developmental projects worth

₹47,600 Crore

Chief Guest

Smt. Droupadi Murmu

Hon'ble President of India

in august presence of

Shri Narendra Modi

Prime Minister

Dr. Hari Babu Kambhampati

Governor, Odisha

Shri Mohan Charan Majhi

Chief Minister, Odisha

Shri Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo

Deputy Chief Minister, Odisha

Smt. Pravati Parida

Deputy Chief Minister, Odisha

Ministers of State Government

Members of Parliament

Members of Odisha Legislative Assembly

Inauguration

₹811 Crore

Road & Bridge Projects

₹530 Crore

Strengthening of Transport
Infrastructure

A step towards safer roads, smarter transport,
and better public services.

Other Projects worth ₹3,218 Crore

Laying of Foundation Stone

₹25,000 Crore

BCGCL Coal Gasification Project

₹17,117 Crore

Advanced Power Infrastructure
Projects

Increase in Direct and Indirect Employment.
Strengthening of State's Electricity Infrastructure.

Other Projects worth ₹927 Crore

Dedication of Railway Projects

• Hindol - Meramandali multi-tracking project • Jakhapura - Jajpur Keonjhar Road - Baitarani Road multi-tracking project

Strengthening of regional connectivity and boosting of economic development

20 June 2026 | 12:15 PM | Rairangpur, Mayurbhanj

Seeking transfers on illness grounds

Govt orders med verification of 680 teachers

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Government has ordered medical verification of 680 teachers who sought transfers under the special category citing terminal illness of themselves, their spouses or children.

Acting on directions of the Directorate of Elementary Education, the Odisha State Standing Medical Board will examine the applicants at the Clinical Lecture Theatre near the Vaccine Store of SLN Medical College and Hospital in

Koraput.

According to the schedule issued by the Chief District Medical and Public Health Officer, Koraput, 126 teachers from Rayagada district will appear before the Board on July 2, followed by 179 teachers from Nabarangapur on July 3 and 125 from Malkangiri on July 4.

Teachers from Koraput district will undergo verification on July 6 and 7. While 219 teachers have been scheduled for examination on July 6, another 32 applicants under in-

tra-district, primary, secondary and mop-up categories will appear on July 7.

The verification process mandates the physical presence of the patient concerned whether the teacher, spouse or child before the Medical Board. Applicants have been instructed to carry original medical documents, treatment records, a copy of their online transfer application, identity proof and passport-size photographs.

Officials said the Medical Board would thoroughly as-

sess the genuineness of the terminal illness claims. All applicants have been directed to report at the venue by 10 am on their scheduled dates.

The move comes after doubts emerged regarding the authenticity of a large number of applications submitted under the terminal illness category. The Directorate of Elementary Education subsequently directed a detailed medical examination to ensure that the special transfer provision is availed only by genuinely eligible teachers.

Left parties issue open letter to Prez, PM

Flag law and order, education crisis, unemployment in Odisha

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation and All India Forward Bloc on Friday issued an open letter to President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Modi expressing "anger, grief and frustration" over the situation in Odisha.

The letter alleged that the

"double-engine government" has failed on promises of governance, women's safety, employment and development, and claimed law and order has deteriorated sharply in the State.

Citing National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, the parties said Odisha recorded a violent crime rate of 161.6 per lakh population in 2024, described as the highest in the country, and claimed crimes against women stood at 118.3 per lakh women, placing the State second nationally. They also stated that 2,29,881 criminal cases were registered in 2025 compared to 2,14,113 in 2024, marking a

7.3% rise. The letter alleged that schemes such as "Subhadra Shakti," "Shaktishree" and "Pink Zone" have not improved women's safety on the ground as increasing incidents of violence, murder, rape, robbery and kidnapping are reported.

Referring to the Chameli Ojha incident in Kendrapada, the parties demanded an independent probe, calling it an attack on democratic representation and Dalit rights.

They also raised concerns over delayed social security pensions for lakhs of elderly and widowed beneficiaries, citing hardship and a reported suicide in Ganjam linked to

pension deprivation.

The Left parties further flagged the errors in school textbooks, unemployment, water and electricity crises, rising prices, mineral exploitation and environmental degradation.

They demanded immediate restoration of pensions, inquiry into textbook errors, action on law and order, measures on unemployment and inflation and withdrawal of Labour Codes.

Concluding, they said the people of Odisha would closely watch the outcome of the high-profile visit and whether it addresses ground realities.

In State

49 road projects of Rs 1,721 cr to be commissioned soon

Another 47 road, bridge projects of Rs 12,102 cr planned

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha is set to witness a significant boost in its transport infrastructure as the State government prepares to inaugurate 49 completed road projects valued at Rs 1,721 crore in the coming weeks. The developments are part of a broader effort to strengthen connectivity, improve road networks and support economic growth across the State.

The progress was reviewed during a high-level meeting chaired by Works Minister Harichandan, who assessed the status of ongoing and proposed infrastructure projects. During the review, the Minister highlighted the importance of effective planning, close monitoring and timely execution to ensure that development targets are achieved without delays.

In addition to the com-

pleted projects, the State government is planning to launch 47 new road and bridge projects with a total estimated investment of Rs 12,102 crore. These upcoming projects are expected to further enhance transportation facilities, improve regional connectivity and support the State's long-term infrastructure ambitions.

The officials informed the Minister that 30 projects are currently under construction, while 14 projects are awaiting the issuance of work orders. Another four projects are presently in the tendering phase and are expected to move forward once the bidding process is completed.

Harichandan noted that Odisha continues to receive substantial support from the Central Government for infrastructure development. He urged officials to maintain momentum, set clear project-wise milestones and ensure that all works are completed within the stipulated timelines.

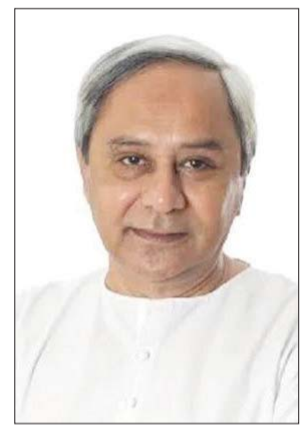
'Pension delay may have claimed Ganjam woman's life'

Naveen alleges governance failure as 18 lakh beneficiaries await dues

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Alleging that the prolonged delay in disbursement of social security pensions may have already claimed a life, Leader of the Opposition Naveen Patnaik on Friday urged Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi to immediately release pending pension dues to nearly 18 lakh beneficiaries across the State.

In a strongly worded letter to the CM, Patnaik cited reports that Sabitri Dora of Beguniapada in Ganjam dis-



trict died after being deprived of pension benefits.

"The denial of this vital support for three consecutive months has exposed our most vulnerable citizens to severe distress, deprivation and even the risk of starvation. There

are reports that Sabitri Dora of Beguniapada, Ganjam lost her life after being deprived of her pension benefits. Such a situation is unacceptable in a state committed to protecting its weakest citizens," Patnaik wrote.

Patnaik termed the situation a grave failure of governance and attributed the crisis to software-related problems in the pension disbursement system. He said technical glitches cannot become an excuse for withholding benefits meant for the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society.

Patnaik also drew a comparison with the pension distribution system during his 24-year tenure when pensions

were distributed regularly on the 15th of every month under "Jan Seva Diwas". He said beneficiaries received pensions at the gram panchayat level and officials ensured doorstep delivery for those unable to attend distribution camps. The model has earned appreciation from the Supreme Court.

Criticising the present bank-based disbursement system, Patnaik said the ongoing crisis highlights the importance of the earlier citizen-centric approach. He demanded immediate manual disbursement of all pending pensions, fixing of accountability for the lapse and assurances that such delays would not recur.

In Puri

11 fake guides held for duping devotees

PNS ■ Puri

In a crackdown on fraudulent activities around the Jagannath Temple in Puri, police have arrested 11 fake temple guides over the last five days for allegedly cheating devotees by promising quick darshan of Lord Jagannath in exchange for money.

According to police, the accused were posing as authorised facilitators and luring devotees with assurances of expedited darshan. They collected money from pilgrims under the false pretext of arranging special access inside the temple.

Acting on complaints from devotees, police launched a special drive and apprehended the accused while they were allegedly attempting to deceive visitors near the temple premises.

Puri SP Prateek Singh said

darshan at the Shree Jagannath Temple is completely free and devotees are not required to pay any individual for access to the deity.

"Some persons are extorting money from devotees by promising expedited darshan of Lord Jagannath. Eleven such impersonators have been arrested in the last five days for collecting money on this pretext," Singh said.

He warned that stringent action would be taken against anyone involved in such illegal activities, irrespective of whether they are government employees or private individuals. Police have urged pilgrims to remain vigilant and avoid dealing with unauthorised persons claiming to offer special darshan arrangements. Devotees have also been advised to immediately report any such suspicious activities to police.

Lesson from tragedy in life

Cuttack youth helps patients get blood in emergencies

PNS ■ Cuttack

A train accident took away both his legs, but it could not stop him from helping others. Rabinarayan Das of Chauliaganj in Cuttack, who once fought for his own life in a hospital bed, is today helping patients and their families find blood during emergencies. In the last five years, he has donated blood 33 times and helped arrange nearly 5,000 units of blood for people in need.

Years ago, Rabinarayan met with a serious train accident and required 34 units of blood during treatment. He spent nearly two years recovering. Though he survived, he lost both his legs. The support he received during those difficult days later became the reason behind his blood donation work.

"One day I thought about how many people were worried about arranging blood for me. People from different places came forward to help. I am alive today because of blood donation. What I went through, no one else should have to face because blood is unavailable. With the support of my friends, my brother and my mentor Lalit Kumar Ray, I donate blood every three months at SCB Medical College and Hospital. Apart from donating myself, I also try to help arrange 8 to 10 units of

blood every day through my friends and contacts," said Rabinarayan Das.

What started as a personal promise gradually turned into a mission. Today, whenever a patient needs blood, Rabinarayan and his network of friends try to arrange donors as quickly as possible. His work has earned him the respect of many families who have received help during medical emergencies.

His close friend Lalit Kumar Ray says Rabinarayan's efforts continue to inspire those around him.

"Yes, he donates blood every three months. As far as I know, he has already donated blood 32 or 33 times. I feel very proud of him. He is always with me in every kind of work. He values suggestions and listens to advice with respect. Whenever we go anywhere, he follows us on his scooter. Seeing him do all this motivates us as well," said Lalit.

His father, Dukhi Shyam Das, says the family went through a difficult period after the accident but never expected that their son would one day become a source of help for so many people. "We are very happy and proud of him. After going through so much suffering, he still chose to help other people. Maybe that is God's wish," said Dukhi.

In Odisha

PM to lay stone for India's 1st coal-to-ammonium nitrate plant

Rs 25,016-cr Lakhanpur project aims to reduce imports, create jobs

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

India's first commercial-scale coal-to-ammonium nitrate project will be launched in Odisha with Prime Minister Narendra Modi scheduled to lay the foundation stone for the Rs 25,016-crore facility at Lakhanpur in Jharsuguda district on Saturday.

The project, to be developed by Bharat Coal Gasification and Chemicals Limited (BCGCL), a joint venture of

Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited and Coal India Limited, is being projected as a major step towards strengthening India's energy security, promoting import substitution and accelerating industrial self-reliance.

The plant will produce 2,000 tonnes of ammonium nitrate per day using indigenously developed coal gasification technology by BHEL. Coal gasification converts coal into synthesis gas (syngas), which can be used to manufacture products such as methanol, urea, ammonium nitrate, synthetic natural gas and other chemical feedstocks.

India, the world's second-largest producer and con-

sumer of coal, possesses over 400 billion tonnes of coal reserves, the fifth-largest globally. Officials said coal gasification would help utilise these resources more efficiently while reducing dependence on imported natural gas, ammonia and other critical feed stocks.

The Centre has approved incentive schemes worth up to Rs 46,000 crore for surface coal and lignite gasification projects. The initiative is expected to attract investments of Rs 2.5 lakh crore to Rs 3 lakh crore and generate around 50,000 direct and indirect jobs through 25 projects in coal-bearing regions.

India currently imports end-use and intermediate chemical products worth about Rs 2.7 lakh crore annually. The government believes coal gasification can significantly reduce these imports and strengthen domestic manufacturing.

A land-leasing agreement for the Lakhanpur project was signed in April between BCGCL and Mahanadi Coalfields Limited. The facility will come up on around 350 acres under MCL possession and has received the required clearances. The Union Coal Ministry is providing Rs 1,350-crore support under its incentive scheme.

KISS, KIIT students stage Shakespeare plays

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

After creating history by performing Shakespearean plays in Romania, students of KISS and KIIT showcased their talent on Odisha soil at a special programme held here on Thursday. The programme was inaugurated by Odisha Legislative Assembly Speaker Surama Padhy.

The students had become the first group to perform Shakespearean plays in the Santali language on an international stage at the World Shakespeare Theatre Festival held in Romania. Thereafter, they had performed in New Delhi in the presence of ambassadors, high commissioners and other eminent personalities from different coun-

tries.

At the Bhubaneswar event, the students staged all three Shakespearean classics in Santali. Hamlet was directed by Debanuj Majumdar, who also played the title role. Macbeth was directed by Adrika Shinjini. Romeo and Juliet was directed by Kamalika Bag.

The productions were further enriched by live musical performances from Pintu Majhi, Bipin Majhi, Ananta Angra, Shaurya Amit, Adrika Shinjini, Debanuj Majumdar and Kamalika Bag. The Santali translation of the Shakespearean plays was undertaken by Urmila Murmu, whose efforts helped bring the Bard's timeless works to life in an indigenous language.

In Cuttack

Divyang auto driver ferries poor patients, pilgrims for free

Sets example in humanitarian service

PNS ■ Cuttack

Compassion does not require wealth, rather it requires a willingness to help. This belief finds a living example in 45-year-old divyang auto-rickshaw driver Bishnu Patra of Cuttack, who has dedicated himself to serving the poor and needy people despite his own physical challenges.

Bishnu became physically disabled after suffering a leg injury in a road accident. Though he struggles with mobility, he continues to drive an auto-rickshaw to support his family, earning around Rs 500 a day. Yet, a portion of his time

and effort is devoted to helping those less fortunate.

Every Thursday, Bishnu provides free transportation to poor patients, ferrying them from locations such as Badambadi, Link Road and OMP Square to SCB Medical College and Hospital and back to bus stands after treatment. His selfless initiative has earned him admiration from many.

Taking his service a step further, Bishnu has now launched a free pilgrimage programme for underprivileged devotees. Beginning on Raja Sankranti, he started offering complimentary trips from Cuttack to Puri, enabling poor people to visit and seek blessings at Lord Jagannath without bearing travel ex-

penses.

"He is taking us to Srimandir free of cost. Both of us will travel in his



autorickshaw," said Benuka Jena, one of the beneficiaries.

"When he decided to offer free autorickshaw services to

poor patients, we fully supported him. He picks up patients from places like Link Road and OMP Square and spends the entire day transporting them. He usually returns home only for lunch," said Bishnu's wife.

Bishnu was once employed in a private company, but a serious accident changed the course of his life. After purchasing an auto-rickshaw with his savings, he began earning a livelihood. Regular interactions with poor patients and witnessing their hardships inspired him to dedicate one day every week to free service.

"I have known him for a long time. He has faced many struggles in life, but he has never stopped helping the

needy. Whether it is providing free autorickshaw services or distributing drinking water, he is always willing to serve others. There are many people who do not donate even a single penny, but Bishnu continues to help despite his limited means," said Sila Singh, a resident of Cuttack.

"I help people in the hope of earning their blessings because we cannot take anything with us after death. Every Thursday, I provide free transportation to patients, taking them from OMP Square, Link Road and Badambadi to SCB Medical College and Hospital. I also drop patients free of cost from the hospital to the bus stand and railway station," said Bishnu.

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NATION**

Home ministry working with SC to cut case pendency: Amit Shah



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LAW & JUSTICE**

SC refuses urgent hearing on NEET-UG pleas

PAGE 11: BUSINESS



Gold slumps ₹3,392 to ₹1.45 lakh on weak global trends

**PAGE 13
GLOBAL**

Italy slams Trump over claims of Meloni begging for photo



**PAGE 16
SPORTS**

Vaibhav can revive Test cricket: Srikanth



Prez, PM to launch projects worth Rs 47,600 cr in State

To visit Mayurbhanj, attend BJP gov't's two-year celebration

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Development projects worth more than Rs 47,600 crore spanning energy, industrial infrastructure, roads, drinking water, healthcare, education, tourism and irrigation sectors will be launched or unveiled in Odisha on Saturday during a programme marking the completion of two years of the BJP-led State Government.

The visit marks the completion of two years of the Odisha Government. At around 11.15 am, President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Pahadpur village in Mayurbhanj district, where they will offer prayers at the sacred Santhali Jahera and Ho Jahera groves and

visit the Skill Centre and Pahadpur School. The visit is aimed at highlighting efforts to strengthen education, skill development and socio-economic empowerment in tribal and rural areas.

At around 1 pm, they will participate in a programme at Rairangpur under the theme "Vikasa Dharma, Odisha Sara". The PM will also address a public gathering.

Major projects for which foundation stones will be laid include a 600-MW Upper Indravati Pumped Storage Project, the Stage-II expansion of the IB Thermal Power Station with two 660 MW units and the Bharat Coal Gasification and Chemicals Limited (BCGCL) project at Lakhapur in Jharsuguda district.

Other projects include a 300-TPD municipal solid waste-based compressed biogas plant in

Bhubaneswar, a bridge over the Kathajodi river linking Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, widening of the Dhalpur-Harbhanga Road in Boudh, four-laning of NH-353 from Nuapada to Ghatipada, the Kusumdihhi Megalift Irrigation Project, an IGNOU Regional Centre and an Indoor Badminton Complex at Rairangpur.

Projects to be inaugurated include the 300-bed District Headquarters Hospital at Boudh, 24 Atal Bus Stands, nine Automated Testing Stations, the Nayagarh Town Bypass on NH-57, the underground pipeline component of the Kusumi Smart Irrigation Project, the Jakhapura-JK Road-Baitarani Road and Hindol Road-Meramandali multi-tracking railway projects, besides a Sports Complex and Tribal Research Centre at Rairangpur.

Prez Murmu reaches Rairangpur



After weather forces flight diversion

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Unfavourable weather disrupted President Droupadi Murmu's Odisha travel schedule on Friday, forcing her special Indian Air Force aircraft to divert

from the Dandbose Airstrip in Rairangpur to Kalaikunda in West Bengal, after which she travelled by road through Bangriposi and Bisoi before reaching Rairangpur.

The President was originally scheduled to land at the Dandbose Airstrip at around 3.45 pm. However, adverse weather conditions led to the diversion of her aircraft

to Kalaikunda. From Kalaikunda, she continued her journey by road, passing through Bangriposi and Bisoi before arriving in Rairangpur in Mayurbhanj district later in the evening.

Security arrangements along the route were tightened with local administration and security agencies

coordinating closely to ensure smooth passage of the President's convoy.

Officials confirmed that despite the delay, all scheduled programmes in Rairangpur would continue as planned.

Later in the evening, the President inaugurated an AIIMS Satellite Centre in Rairangpur.

Crorepati AEE in Vigilance net

49 plots, 2 farmhouses among assets

PNS ■ Cuttack

The Vigilance police on Friday conducted raids on the properties of Satyanarayan Sethy, Assistant Executive Engineer (AEE), Kotpada block in Koraput district, on the allegations of possession of assets disproportionate to his known sources of income.

During house searches, one 2-BHK flat of 1,000 sqft in Hitech Plaza under Madhipur Mauza in Jatni, one 2-BHK benami flat at Golden Height Residence apartment at PR Peta, Indira Chowk, Jeypore in Koraput district purchased in name of his close associate, one farmhouse spread over 10.03 acre (mango plantation farm and eucalyptus plantation) located at Boriguma Tehsil in Koraput, another farmhouse spread over 4.35 acre (Nilgiri plantation) located at Taragaon Mouza, Boriguma Tehsil in Koraput,

49 valuable plots at Jeypore, Boriguma, Kotpad, Patangi tehsils in Koraput district of



which 17 plots are benami plots purchased in name of his relative, now under verification, cash of Rs 5.48 lakh, gold jewellery 940.66 grams and silver ornaments 2.493 kg, bank deposits of Rs 61 lakh and one benami Tata Harrier were the assets detected in the names of Sethy and his family members.

Further searches are continuing. Unearthing of more assets is likely and overall valuation is likely to increase.

Sethy had joined government service on January 22, 1998 as Junior Engineer and was posted at the office of Chief Engineer, Upper Kolab Division in Koraput, with an initial salary of Rs 7,100.

Forester held taking Rs 25K bribe

PNS ■ Puri

The Vigilance police on Thursday caught Rakesh Kumar Panda, Forester of Ankul under the Delang Forest Range in Puri district while taking a bribe of Rs 25,000.

Panda had demanded the bribe from a tractor owner to use a forest road to transport excavated earth intended for agricultural field dumping.

The Forester issued threats to the tractor owner asserting that the commercial vehicle would be summarily seized if it continued to utilise the forest transit route without prior official permission.

After the complainant informed the Vigilance, a trap was laid and Panda was caught red-handed taking the bribe of Rs 25,000.

Following the trap, two lo-



cations linked to Panda were searched from the disproportionate assets angle and cash of Rs 1.41 lakh was recovered from his residence at Bhaliabadi in Khordha district.

SAMRUDHA SAHAR initiative BDA unveils 3 new Town Planning Schemes

863 acres in Malipada-Daspur earmarked for urban expansion

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) on Friday declared its intention to prepare three new Town Planning Schemes (TPS No 05/2026, TPS No 06/2026 and TPS No 07/2026) under the Odisha Government's flagship SAMRUDHA SAHAR initiative, marking a major push towards planned urban expansion in the capital region.

The schemes, notified under Section 23(1) of the Odisha Development Authorities Act 1982, will cover around 863.29

acres in parts of Malipada and Daspur mouzas. TPS No 05/2026 will span 247.57 acres in Malipada, TPS No 06/2026 will cover 234.34 acres in the same mouza while TPS No 07/2026 will encompass 381.38 acres across Malipada and Daspur.

The proposed schemes aim to facilitate systematic urban development through creation of essential infrastructure, public utilities and social amenities while ensuring sustainable and balanced growth. Following publication of the declaration in the Odisha Gazette, landowners and stakeholders will be invited to submit information regarding their rights and interests in the notified lands within two

months. Under the SAMRUDHA SAHAR programme, urban infrastructure such as roads, drainage systems, water supply networks, sewerage facilities, electricity systems, public utilities, open spaces and social amenities will be developed through a land pooling mechanism. Landowners contribute up to 40% of their land for public infrastructure while the remaining 60% is returned as developed and serviced plots, significantly enhancing land value.

BDA officials said the model enables coordinated infrastructure development without large-scale land acquisition and ensures equi-

table sharing of development benefits.

The BDA has already secured government approval for Town Planning Schemes 1 to 4 covering nearly 1,577 acres, where reconstituted plots are being handed over to landowners and infrastructure works are underway. The draft scheme for TPS No 8, spread over about 560 acres in Andharua and Daspur, has also received approval with development works expected to begin shortly.

Notably, the BDA had recently declared four additional schemes TPS Nos 42 to 45 in Zone IV while surveys for 10 more schemes in Zone IV and three schemes in Zone I are currently in progress.

Odisha digital sanitation model gets global boost

OWSSB to mentor Nigeria's Lagos State

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha's urban sanitation governance model has earned international recognition with the Odisha Water Supply and Sewerage Board (OWSSB) being selected to mentor the Lagos State Wastewater Management Office (LSWMO), Nigeria, under a UN-Habitat-supported global initiative.

The five-year partnership (2026-2030), facilitated through the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA), will focus on strengthening sanitation service delivery in Lagos State through Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and data-driven governance systems.

The selection reflects global recognition of Odisha's work in digital sanitation management and citywide fecal sludge and septage management (FSSM), supported by its DIGIT platform for service



delivery and citizen engagement.

A detailed presentation on the programme was made by Athena Infonomics, the technical lead for the initiative, outlining its scope and implementation framework.

A review meeting was chaired by Housing & Urban Development (H&UD) Department Additional Chief Secretary Usha Padhee to finalise the roadmap and next

steps.

Under the collaboration, the OWSSB will mentor LSWMO in developing governance structures, institutional arrangements, ownership models and long-term sustainability frameworks for Digital Public Infrastructure.

The programme will also include a Strategic Digital Roadmap and an Integrated Data Management System (IDMS) to monitor sanitation

services and support evidence-based decision-making.

Capacity building will include learning clinics, virtual mentoring, peer sessions and exposure visits to Odisha for officials from Lagos State to study FSSM reforms.

The partnership includes Athena Infonomics, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, eGov Foundation and African Water and Sanitation Association (AFWASA).

State issues new SOP for apartment registration

Guidelines to ensure uniformity, legal compliance in property transactions

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Apartment registration in Odisha will now follow a uniform and streamlined process with the State Government issuing a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to remove ambiguities, strengthen legal compliance and safeguard the interests of homebuyers.

The SOP has been jointly issued by the Revenue and Disaster Management Department and the Housing and Urban Development Department to address varying interpretations of the Odisha Apartment (Ownership and Management) Act 2023, the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act 2016 (RERA) and the Registration Act 1908.

Under the revised framework, apartment registration has been classified into three categories: resale of pre-RERA apartments, first sale of unsold flats in pre-RERA projects

and post-RERA apartments. The SOP lays down category-specific documentation requirements, verification procedures and registration conditions.

For post-RERA apartments, registration will be allowed only after compliance with Odisha RERA provisions wherever applicable. Developers must obtain an Occupancy Certificate, register the Association of Allottees, register the Declaration under Section 9 and complete the transfer process relating to common areas and amenities. Registration can proceed only after approval by the competent authority.

The SOP also clearly defines the jurisdiction and responsibilities of competent authorities in areas under the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation, Development Authorities and Revenue Sub-Divisions to ensure consistency in implementation.

The existing 1% concession in stamp duty for apartment transfers in favour of women will continue. The government has also prescribed nominal stamp duty and registration fees for deeds involving the transfer of common areas and amenities to Associations of Allottees.

10,372 more UG seats created in State

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

In a major relief for higher education aspirants, the Odisha Higher Education Department has increased the number of undergraduate (UG) seats across the State for the current academic year.

The decision comes in response to the large number of applications received for Plus III (Degree) admissions.

A total of 10,372 additional UG seats have been created in various higher education institutions. Of these, 4,684 seats have been increased in government colleges while 3,416 seats have been added in 488 aided colleges.

Similarly, 1,056 additional seats have been sanctioned in

662 grant-in-aid colleges and 1,216 seats have been increased in State Public Universities.

The department said the expansion of seats was necessary to accommodate the growing demand for undergraduate admissions and ensure that more students get an opportunity to pursue higher education.

"Upon reviewing the admission data of the previous academic sessions, it has been observed that in several Higher Education Institutions, the demand for admission in certain UG subjects is considerably high whereas the sanctioned strength in such subjects is comparatively low," read a departmental notification.

In Baleswar

Girl escapes rape bid; married man held

UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ Baleswar

A second-year college student narrowly escaped a rape attempt on Thursday after locals intervened and apprehended the accused near Phuladhi Chowk, under Baleswar Sadar police limits. The incident has sparked fresh concerns over women's safety in the city.

According to reports, the incident occurred when the victim was waiting for a bus near Anand Bazaar to return home. The accused approached her on a bike and offered her a lift, claiming he

knew her father. Trusting him, the woman agreed to go with him. Instead of taking her home, he allegedly diverted to a secluded spot near a bridge at Phuladhi Chowk. When the woman questioned him, he reportedly tried to gag her and dragged her aside. She raised an alarm, drawing the attention of passers-by on the main road.

Locals rushed to the spot and found the accused allegedly attempting to assault the woman. He also tried to attack her with stones when confronted. The villagers overpowered him, beat him up, and

set his motorcycle on fire. Police from Sadar station arrived soon after, rescued the accused, and admitted him to a hospital for treatment. The survivor was taken to the District Headquarters Hospital for a medical examination.

Following a complaint by her father, the police registered a case and have begun a detailed investigation. The accused, who is married and has two children, was apprehended by police. The incident has triggered widespread outrage in the area and renewed questions about the law-and-order situation of the district.

Over five years

State to invest Rs 274 cr in sericulture growth

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Sericulture development in Odisha is set for a major boost with the State Government planning an investment of Rs 274 crore over the next five years to strengthen production, infrastructure and farmer support across all four varieties of silk cultivated in the State.

The announcement was made by Textiles and Handlooms Director Somesh Kumar Upadhyay on Friday during the inauguration of a five-day farmers' training

programme on "Tasar Host Plant Nursery and Its Management" organised by the Odisha State Sericulture Research and Training Institute (OSSR&TI) at its newly established training facility in Resha Bhawan. Inaugurating the programme, Handlooms, Textiles and Handicrafts Department Commissioner-cum-Secretary Guha Poonam Tapas Kumar said sericulture provides sustainable year-round livelihoods to thousands of rural families. Nearly 15,000 traditional families, comprising around one lakh

people, are engaged in sericulture in Odisha, she said.

She highlighted that more than 46,828 Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste families are engaged in Tasar cultivation across 14 districts, generating nearly Rs 6 crore annually through cocoon production. Eri culture is practiced by around 2,000 farmers on nearly 1,000 acres in several districts, producing about seven metric tonnes of cocoons worth around Rs 14 lakh annually.

Mulberry sericulture, practiced in 12 districts, supports

nearly 1,000 Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste farmers and generates around Rs 50 lakh annually through the production of about 40,000 kg of cocoons. Outlining government initiatives, Kumar said steps are being taken to establish sericulture for cocoon rearing, introduce insurance coverage for sericulture farmers, provide hostel facilities and training opportunities for women sericulturists, and revive the spinning unit at Bhagamunda in Keonjhar district.

Upadhyay said 11 training programmes would be

organised during the year in local languages for 165 beneficiaries. He also highlighted Odisha's achievement of securing the top rank in the Central Silk Board's Sericulture Review, attributing the success to the contribution of the State's sericulture farmers.

The event featured an exhibition, demonstrations of technologies such as the Buniyad Reeling Machine and Motorised Spinning Machine, an audio-visual presentation on silk initiatives, and a plantation drive under the "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" campaign.

Leopard skin seizures trigger probe into wildlife crime network



Repeated recoveries in Mahendragiri raise concerns

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Brahmapur

The seizure of two leopard skins, live bombs and a sword from alleged wildlife traffickers in Ganjam district has prompted police to seek a specialised investigation amid concerns over a possible organised wildlife crime network operating across southern Odisha.

Brahmapur SP Saravana Vivek M has requested the CID-Crime Branch Director General of Police, to transfer the case to the Wildlife Crime Cell, citing the seriousness of the offence involving a Schedule-I protected species and the recovery of explosives and weapons.

The case stems from a June 6 raid by Jarada police near Ankuli hilltop in Patrapur block. Police said two suspects attempted to flee towards a nearby forest after spotting the raiding team. During the chase, one of the accused allegedly threatened police personnel with a sword before both were apprehended. Two full-sized leopard skins, two live country-made bombs and a sword were seized from their

possession.

The latest recovery came barely a month after another leopard skin was seized from three persons at the same Ankuli hilltop area, raising suspicions about a larger trafficking network.

Investigators are focusing on the Mahendragiri-Lakhari Valley Wildlife Sanctuary landscape, as the hilltop falls within the ecologically sensitive Mahendragiri Hills region spanning parts of Ganjam and Gajapati districts. Sources in enforcement agencies suspect the network may extend across forest divisions under the Paralakhemundi and Brahmapur circles, though officials say the extent of any inter-district links is yet to be established.

Recent wildlife crime incidents in Ganjam and Gajapati have heightened concerns. Forest and police authorities have reported multiple cases involving illegal hunting, seizure of wildlife derivatives, snares and arrests linked to poaching activities in forest-fringe areas. The recurring recoveries from the Mahendragiri landscape have led investigators to examine whether organised groups are targeting protected wildlife and using the rugged Eastern Ghats terrain as a transit corridor.

Vedanta holds summer camps for 12 schools

600 students benefit

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Vedanta Aluminium organised summer camps across 12 government schools in the Jamkhani and Ghogharpalli areas of Sundargarh district benefiting over 600 students through a blend of educational and recreational activities during the summer vacation.

Promoting holistic development among children, the camps included sessions on art and craft, storytelling, quizzes and brain games alongside interactive modulation earth sciences, career counseling and sports.

Participating in the tree plantation drive, students



planted over 500 saplings, integrating environmental and experimental learning beyond the classroom.

Karuna Sagar Patel, Block Education Officer (BEO), Hemgir, along with the school

management committee members and teachers from participating schools attended the programme.

The camps also celebrated the spirit of employee volunteering, with 26 employee vol-

unteers contributing 145 man-hours, equivalent to 157 mandays, towards organising and conducting activities for students. Their active participation helped create meaningful learning experiences while strengthening community engagement.

BDO Patel said, "I am delighted to see a range of engaging and joyful learning activities being organised for students. Such initiatives contribute to the overall development of the children. More such programmes should continue in future."

Sharing their experience, employee volunteers highlighted joyful engagement with children and contributing to the community, describing the initiative as both meaningful and fulfilling.

'Brahmapur to witness comprehensive development'

BeMC Commissioner assures ODF

SUBHADRA SHUKLA ■ Brahmapur

A delegation of the Odisha Development Forum (ODF) met A Sasya Reddy, Commissioner of the Berhampur Municipal Corporation (BeMC), on Thursday and submitted a memorandum highlighting critical infrastructure bottlenecks in Brahmapur and pressing developmental demands aimed at reshaping the city's urban landscape.

The forum strongly advocated for immediate expansion of Brahmapur's municipal boundaries by merging 18 surrounding panchayats into the BeMC. Members pointed out that Brahmapur acts as a vital urban anchor for nearly 8 to 10 lakh people from adjacent regions, but its officially recorded municipal population stands at just around 4



lakh. This demographic gap frequently deprives the city of crucial Central assistance packages and major urban development grants.

To address the city's crippling traffic congestion, the ODF urged the commissioner to initiate construction of strategic four-lane flyovers at major chokepoints, including the Khallikote College-Bijipur stretch and Kamapalli. The memorandum further requested the BeMC to recommend a four-lane flyover at First Gate.

For smoother transit mobility, the forum pressed for an expedited completion of the long-pending Ring Road and

Bypass Road projects alongside creation of dedicated vending zones to relocate roadside vendors systematically. Pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, including uniform footpaths and foot overbridges, was also highlighted as an immediate necessity.

Considering Brahmapur's reputation as the "Food Capital of Odisha", the delegation urged establishment of specialised food parks at key locations, modernisation of the historic Giri Market and construction of new market complexes. They also called for early operationalisation of nearing completion infra-

structure projects, notably Ganjam Haat, Subhadra Shakti Haat and the Multi-Storey Parking Complex. The forum also demanded a dedicated exhibition ground for socio-cultural events.

BeMC Commissioner Reddy assured the delegation that sincere, coordinated efforts would be mobilised to address these issues. She affirmed that the corporation would actively pursue inclusion of the 18 panchayats and fast-tracking of the operationalisation of the commercial haats, parking complexes and foot overbridges.

The delegation included V Somsawara Rao, secretary of ODF; Laxmi Padhi; Pritish Panigrahi; advocate Saroj Pattnaik, convener of the South Odisha Joint Action Committee; social activist Madhusudan Sahu; Aditya Rath; Manas Ranjan Patro; and Saroj Das.

BWI World Board meeting Health, safety measures for workers sought

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) World Board Meeting, held on June 10-11, adopted a resolution under the theme "Heat the Trade Union Rights, Not the Earth", calling for stronger action to protect workers from heat stress and climate change.

The BWI urged governments and employers to implement comprehensive occupational health and safety measures, including safe work-rest schedules, medical support, and protection for workers exposed to extreme temperatures. The organisation also called for the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 13, 14, and 15 and compliance with ILO Conventions 155, 167, and 187.

Following the meeting, BWI delegates organised a demonstration at the Broken Chair Monument in front of the United Nations Office in Geneva, demanding stronger measures to address heat-related workplace hazards. Representatives of Greenpeace joined the protest in solidarity.

Among those participating were BWI general secretary AmbetYuson, BWI leaders Dr RC Khuntia, BWI Migrant Workers Committee chairman Paolo Cammelli, and Birendra Kumar from India.

Addressing the meeting, former MP and national vice president of INTUC Dr Khuntia urged all countries, including India, to implement the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) through concrete action plans prepared in consultation with all stakeholders.

In Paradip Yoga session held aboard ship Varad

PNS ■ Paradip

In the run-up to the International Day of Yoga 2026, the Paradip Port Authority (PPA), in collaboration with the Indian Coast Guard and Art of Living, organised a special yoga session aboard Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) Varad at Paradip.

The session was conducted by Yoga Guru Tapas Ranjan Pati of Art of Living, Paradip Unit, and witnessed enthusiastic participation from officers and personnel from both organisations. Paradip Port Authority Chairman PL Haranadh graced the occasion along with DIG Sanjay Negi, Commander of the Coast Guard District in

Paradip.

Heads of Departments and senior officers of Paradip Port Authority, Coast Guard officials and Yoga enthusiasts also participated in the programme, underscoring the shared commitment towards promoting holistic health, well-being and a culture of fitness.

Addressing the gathering, PPA Chairman Haranadh highlighted the importance of Yoga in enhancing physical and mental well-being and emphasized that such initiatives strengthen inter-agency cooperation while fostering a healthy and productive workforce. DIG Negi appreciated the collaborative initiative.

Care, cater, conserve Nature to offset climate change crisis

Climate change evolves as the most sought-after subject in recent days since it harms lives, environment and ecosystem on the planet. Does the climate really change? Yes, it has changed a number of times in the geological history of the Earth with loud and rude consequences like mass extinction; not once or twice, as many as five times. Now man is shouting at the issue apprehending what will happen in future.

Of course, man is tampering with the nature that exaggerates climate change imparting time to time ultimatum to survival and sustenance of the system. When the world is undergoing drastic phase of climate change, we the human beings are there to feel, fear and focus on the matter, as we have invited this crisis by our exploiting act on nature.



DEVANANDA BEURA

go on creating continuously and consistently. We should not be in impression that the problem is far ahead of us, while we still are passing through the same phase at present. Had we not alarmed at 0.5 degree Celsius increase in atmospheric temperature some decades back? Moving forward now, we have crossed the 1.5 degree Celsius limit and every fraction of degree does not add a small problem, it catalyzes and catastrophes the same.

Nature was developed along with the origin of the Earth during the Precambrian events around 4.5 billion years ago. It is neither a story nor an imagination, an implausible fact. Nature has been continuing as the strongest survival system on the planet since then. In a period when human didn't appear on the Earth, nature operated independently all along without human interferences. It has connected living organisms with this physical environment to survive, grow and mutate, and maintained a balance ecosystem harmonizing constant biotic, abiotic interactions.

As integral part of biosphere, we are intensely intertwined with liv-

ing as well as nonliving world. Here comes the thought over about ecosystem, environment, biodiversity, ocean, forest and many more. Sun does not just rise; it dispenses energy to the planet. Trees do not just grow; they provide food, oxygen and store carbon. Oceans do not just exist; they determine weather and climate conditions by regulating planetary temperature.

Similarly, ecosystem and biodiversity are not just the adornments; they support the foundational processes like energy transfer, nutrient cycling and climate regulations. Such are the prominent provisions that the nature deals with and it is rightly said the world seeks nature based solutions.

Climate change is the most defining global crisis emerging from human interference with nature. This progressive crisis leads to the situation of species termination symptomized by excessive emissions of greenhouse gases, global warming, sea level rise, ocean acidification, deadly disasters, extensive deforestation and land degradation. Impacts like extreme heat waves, prolonged summers, dis-

turbed monsoon patterns, severe droughts, intense coastal and urban flooding, water scarcity and biodiversity collapse may not be singled out rather they fall and threaten in the same domain of climate change.

Nature acknowledges the act of caring, catering and conserving to serve a sustainable planet. These three actions are the simple behavioral practices which remain powerful for change of system. When behavior changes, millions of individuals become exponentially powerful to add to the drive and reverse the degraded nature. Care for nature is to actively nurturing the ecosystem and biodiversity by supporting in-situ restoration of localized habitat and planting native species.

Looking for a sustainable living means catering to nature, which suggests the way of reviving the nature through policy adoptive measures. You may cater to the nature by exercising conscious and responsible consumerism for organic, local grown food to annul the environmental footprint. Shifting to renewable energy source is

another big move to respond to the powerful signal of fast diminishing fossil fuel resources. The other promising form of catering to nature is to embrace the circular economy through reduce, renew and recycle policies. The concept of conserving nature has become the ethical philosophy and global movement to balance our needs with environmental sustainability by optimizing resource use, adopting energy substitute, mitigating climate change and resilient ecosystem for future generations. It focuses on the practice of protecting, managing and restoring earth's natural resources and ecosystem.

Now it is the time to reality check for climate action and nature nourishment. We shouldn't silently observe and absorb the crisis by simple opening a discussion box of 'what should be and what should not be' on the issues. Public awareness is still considered as powerful tool, but it is no longer enough where information must not become action and warning must not become decisions. Not that we are sitting idle looking at 1.5 d C warming threshold, which

has been plateauing at record high over the past five year period.

The Climate Change Performance Index 2026 (CCPI) shows that the top three ranks have remained vacant as no country performs well to align with the Paris agreement's 1.5d C temperature. Denmark, the UK and the Philippines remain in the leading positions, while major States go on restricting the progressive climate policy. The world is still moving with a silent and steady revolution. Global per capita emissions are falling and renewable energy deployment is growing massively. We undergo a rising trend of solar energy and wind power that reshape our power grids ever fast. Electric mobility is substituting combustion vehicles. Now the world does not believe in the symbolic change, rather it opts for a huge structural transformation. We understand that we should not delay; else we will fail to see that the consequences are reversible.

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PM Modi to visit West Bengal, Odisha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit West Bengal and Odisha on June 20-21 and participate in the 12th International Yoga Day celebrations in Kolkata before joining President Droupadi Murmu for offering prayers at the sacred groves Santhali Jahera and Ho Jahera in Mayurbhanj. Modi will also commission three indigenously designed and built naval ships in Kolkata, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in a statement.

He will inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of multiple development projects in West Bengal and attend with President Murmu a programme in Mayurbhanj marking the completion of two years of the BJP government in Odisha, it said.

On Saturday, Modi will participate in 'Paschimanga Divas' (West Bengal Day) celebrations at Tarakeswar in Hooghly district.

On Sunday morning, he will participate in the 12th International Yoga Day celebrations in Kolkata and address the gathering.

The theme of International Day of Yoga (IDY) 2026, 'Yoga for Healthy Ageing', highlights the role of yoga in promoting physical health, mental well-being, emotional resilience and active ageing, thereby contributing to an improved quality of life.

Since its inception in 2015, when the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted India's proposal to observe June 21 as IDY, PM Modi has led the celebrations from various locations, including New Delhi, Chandigarh, Lucknow, Mysuru, New York (UN Headquarters), Srinagar and Visakhapatnam. Later on Sunday,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, centre, being greeted during an event under the Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana (PM-VBRY), in New Delhi. Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya and MoS Shobha Karandlaje are also seen.

Modi will commission three indigenously designed and built naval ships — INS Dunagiri, INS Sanshodhak and INS Agray — at the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata, the statement said.

During the 'Paschimanga Divas' celebration on Saturday, the PM will inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of multiple development projects. Spanning sectors of railways, agriculture, rural development, fisheries and animal husbandry, these initiatives will strengthen infrastructure, improve livelihoods, enhance farmer welfare and accelerate socio-economic development across the state, the statement said.

He will also release the 23rd instalment of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN).

Under this instalment, more than ₹18,880 crore will be transferred

directly into the bank accounts of over 9.44 crore farmers across the country, according to the statement.

In West Bengal alone, more than ₹900 crore will be credited to the accounts of more than 45 lakh beneficiaries, taking the cumulative disbursement under the scheme in the state to over ₹15,000 crore, the statement said.

This takes the total nationwide disbursement to over Rs 4.46 lakh crore since the launch of the scheme in 2019, it said.

Modi will also rollout several key central agricultural schemes in West Bengal. These schemes include Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), Agri Stack as part of the Digital Agriculture Mission, National Mission on Natural Farming, and Pradhan Mantri Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana.

During 2026-27, the PMFBY, the world's largest crop insurance scheme, aims to provide insurance coverage to nearly 50 lakh farmers across about 14 lakh hectares of agricultural land in West Bengal, protecting crops with an estimated insured value of around ₹28,140 crore while supporting farmers through substantial premium subsidy, according to the statement.

Modi will inaugurate the modernised and capacity expanded fishing harbour at Fraserganj in South 24 Parganas and the newly constructed Modern Fish Market at Sainthia, Birbhum.

These projects will strengthen fisheries infrastructure, improve post-harvest management and provide better marketing facilities for fish producers and traders.

The PM will also inaugurate the Regional Semen Production

Laboratory and Semen Bank for Goats at Haringhata in Nadia district.

He will inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of important railway projects worth around Rs 590 crore, the statement said.

These projects collectively represent a major step towards strengthening infrastructure, empowering farmers, enhancing livelihoods and creating new economic opportunities across West Bengal, it said.

During his visit to Odisha on Saturday, Modi will join the President in a few functions, making it a rare and significant moment for the state. Murmu and Modi will visit Pahadpur village in Mayurbhanj, where they will offer prayers at sacred groves Santhali Jahera and Ho Jahera and visit a skill centre and the Pahadpur school.

The visit will highlight the ongoing efforts to strengthen educational opportunities, skill development and socio-economic empowerment in tribal and rural regions. On Saturday afternoon, Murmu and Modi will participate in a programme at Rairangpur in Mayurbhanj, marking the completion of two years of the BJP government in Odisha.

Modi will inaugurate and lay foundation stones of various development projects worth over Rs 47,600 crore across key sectors, including energy, industrial infrastructure and road connectivity, at the programme and address the gathering.

The projects are expected to strengthen infrastructure, improve connectivity, enhance energy security and generate employment opportunities across Odisha, the statement said.

States Focus



PRESENTING THEKUA TO SLOVAK SPEAKER HONOUR FOR BIHAR: CM

Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary on Friday praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for gifting 'Thekua', a traditional Bihari dish, to the Speaker of Slovakia, Richard Rasi, and said that "it is a matter of pride and honour for the state". 'Thekua' is a traditional sweet snack from Bihar and Jharkhand, made using wheat flour, jaggery or sugar, fennel seeds, and ghee. It is a traditional prasad that is often made during Chhath puja. It is offered as a prasad during the Chhath puja. (PTI)



ANANT AMBANI VISITS RSS HEADQUARTERS IN NAGPUR

Industrialist Anant Ambani visited Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) headquarters here on Friday and met the organisation's chief Mohan Bhagwat. According to sources, Ambani paid a courtesy visit to the RSS headquarters located in Mahal area of the city. Ambani also visited Dr Hedgewar Smruti Mandir premises in Reshimbagh area. It is a memorial of Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, and also serves as the final resting place for his successor M S Golwalkar. (PTI)



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh along with CM Devendra Fadnavis perform a ritual during the Bhoomi Puja

Rajnath Singh lays foundation for Aluminium extrusion press in Nagpur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi/Nagpur

Underlining the importance of self-reliance, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said: "A nation capable of meeting its own requirements moves forward with the greatest confidence towards safeguarding its interests."

He made this assertion after performing the bhoomi puja for the state-of-the-art 10,000-Tons Aluminium Extrusion Press, along with Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, at Ordnance Factory Ambajhari, Nagpur, a unit of Yantra India Limited (YIL).

Rajnath said the Extrusion Press symbolises a shift in the country's approach from relying on imports to producing critical goods domestically. He described taking control of security-related necessities as imperative in the present geopolitical sce-

nario to remain future-ready.

The proposed press will be one of the most advanced facilities of its kind in the country. It will support the manufacture of large and complex aluminium alloy profiles required for defence systems and platforms, aerospace and aviation structures, missile programmes, railways and transportation sectors and other strategic industrial applications.

The project will help reduce dependence on imports of critical aluminium extrusions and strengthen the domestic supply chain, while supporting the future requirements in strategic sectors through indigenous production.

"This extrusion press addresses a crucial need. Modern fighter jets, missiles, and advanced space programmes require metals that are lightweight and strong, capable of withstanding even the most extreme

conditions. Such metals are produced through specialised processes. If the quality of the metal is superior, it will serve well in every situation," said the defence minister.

Highlighting the significant role of Made-in-India equipment in the success of Operation Sindoor, Rajnath stressed the need to increase the indigenous manufacturing of robust hardware to complement the bravery of defence forces personnel.

He underlined that thousands of crucial components constitute the true strength of big machines, and the extrusion press will go a long way in making the nation self-reliant in this critical domain.

The defence minister added that, today, while the nature of warfare is evolving and enemies are harder to detect, conventional warfare and its associated means remain just as relevant.

RS polls: CPI(ML) L seeks probe into cross-voting in Jharkhand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Ranchi

The Jharkhand unit of the CPI(ML) Liberation on Friday wrote to Chief Minister Hemant Soren, seeking a probe into "cross-voting" during the Rajya Sabha polls that led to the defeat of Congress nominee Pranav Jha, a party leader said.

The JMM said the Rajya Sabha poll results will be reviewed within the Mahagathbandhan, and the reasons for not achieving the desired outcome will be examined. The CPI(ML) Liberation alleged that certain Congress leaders and ministers maintain close ties with "forces that promote corporate interests regarding Jharkhand's 'Jal, Jungle aur Jamin' (water, forests, and land)".

"We have written to the chief minister seeking a fair probe into the entire episode of Rajya Sabha polls and urged him to find out the Congress legislators involved in the conspiracy (to defeat the INDIA bloc candidate), which turned out to be a setback for the ruling alliance.



We also sought action against them," CPI(ML) Liberation state secretary Manoj Bhakt said during a press conference. Amid cross-voting, NDA-supported independent candidate Parimal Nathwani on Thursday won one of the two Rajya Sabha seats in Jharkhand, defeating the Congress's Pranav Jha, an official said.

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha candidate Baidyanath Ram was elected to the other seat.

The BJP-led NDA has 24 MLAs, four short of the minimum of 28 first-preference votes required in the 81-member assembly to secure a berth in the Rajya Sabha.

The INDIA bloc, including the JMM and the Congress, has 56 members in the House.

"Instead of taking the responsibility for its failure, the Congress is trying to evade accountability by levelling false allegations against its allies RJD and CPI(ML) Liberation," he said.

AICC in-charge of Jharkhand, K Raju, on Thursday, accused the Rashtriya Janata Dal and CPI(ML) Liberation of "betrayal".

"In accordance with the alliance's decision, both party MLAs voted in favour of the Congress candidate. After the voting, party representatives

also verified the ballot papers and found them to be in order," Bhakt said.

He said the Congress should make public the reality of its MLAs' voting and explain "why this political game, which put Jharkhand's reputation at stake, was played?"

JMM general secretary Vinod Pandey, in a statement, said all 34 of the party's MLAs cast their votes -- achieving 100 per cent turnout -- and voted in favour of both alliance candidates.

"Despite all efforts, the defeat of one of the alliance's candidates was not in line with expectations. So, the results will be reviewed and analysed to determine why the expected result was not achieved," Pandey said, adding that the aim is to overcome such weaknesses in future and strengthen the INDIA bloc in its political battle against the BJP.

Earlier, the RJD alleged that Congress should introspect before pointing fingers at others.

"The RJD and CPI(ML) Liberation are being defamed, while the Congress

itself failed to secure votes of its own MLAs in the election," Jharkhand minister and RJD leader Sanjay Prasad Yadav told reporters here on Friday.

Reacting to the development, Congress media in-charge Rakesh Sinha said in a press statement, "The personal remarks made against K Raju are not only unfortunate but also contrary to the spirit of the Mahagathbandhan."

He said they believe that if a party does not trust its own MLAs and leaders, it is not appropriate to vent its frustration on the Congress. Nathwani polled 28 votes while Jha bagged 20 votes.

Ram received 30 votes in the election, while three votes — two from the BJP and one from the Congress — were found invalid.

The INDIA bloc's 56 members comprise 34 of the JMM, 16 of the Congress, four from the RJD and two from CPI(ML) Liberation.

The NDA's 24 MLAs comprise 21 from the BJP and one each from the LJP (Ram Vilas), AJSU Party and the JD(U).

Sukhu orders land diversion plan for 2,183 roads in Himachal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Shimla

Himachal Pradesh chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Friday directed that a comprehensive plan be prepared for land diversion across all 2,183 roads constructed without approval under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980. The action will be carried

out under the provisions of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, in accordance with the directions of the High Court of Himachal Pradesh.

Presiding over a meeting of the Forest department, he said many of these roads provide critical access to remote habitations and are important for emergency response, particularly in disaster-prone areas.

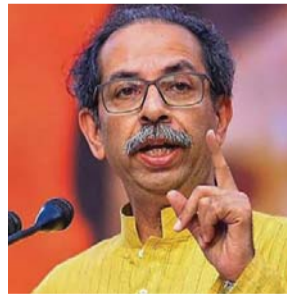
These roads were constructed before the FRA was implemented in 2006, and only 150 road cases were approved between 2016 and 2026.

Meanwhile, a public interest litigation was filed before the High Court regarding this matter, directing the department to process these cases under the FRA provisions.

Ready to quit as Shiv Sena (UBT) chief if workers don't trust me: Uddhav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Mumbai

Amid a rebellion by six Lok Sabha MPs of his party, an emotional Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Friday said he had not lost his resolve despite challenges and attacks, but was ready to quit his post if the party didn't have faith and trust in him.



In his first comments on the impending split in his party for the second time in four years, Thackeray said he has been leading the outfit for over a decade and given the persistent attacks on him, he was ready to quit the top Shiv Sena (UBT) post.

The former Maharashtra CM was addressing a gathering organised to mark the 60th foundation day of the Shiv Sena in Mumbai.

"I would be happy if someone from the party ranks becomes the next Shiv Sena president, but I will not let it pass on in the hands of thieves," an emotional Thackeray told his supporters. Thackeray said he hasn't wavered and remains steadfast to face all challenges. "But I don't want even a single Shiv Sainik pointing fingers at me, that's why I resigned as chief minister

(in 2022) and didn't continue as MLC (in 2026)," he said. The former CM said Shiv Sena (UBT) workers were not disheartened by the latest developments but were instead fired up, seeking to downplay the rebellion by six of the nine Lok Sabha MPs of his party.

He slammed the rebel MPs for claims that they feared the Shiv Sena (UBT) might merge with the Congress.

"If we didn't merge with the BJP despite being an ally for 30 years, how can we merge with the Congress. I fear the Maharashtra BJP might merge with the Shinde Sena," he remarked.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) leader hit out at his political opponents, who often criticise his style of functioning and alleged disconnect with workers and people.

Shivakumar pushes single-window system to boost coastal tourism investment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Bengaluru

Karnataka Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday said the state government would hold a Cabinet meeting in the coastal region, and directed officials to resolve technical issues affecting tourism and investment projects ahead of it.

Chairing a meeting on coastal tourism at Vidhana Soudha, he instructed officials to prepare a report within 15 to 20 days on technical obstacles arising from Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms and issues related to the Forest Department, identifying both problems and possible solutions.

Stressing the need to facilitate investments, the CM said, "We must create smooth and simple pathways for investors; depart-



Karnataka Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and others during a meeting over the ineligible beneficiaries and misuse of the five guarantees in Bengaluru

mental hurdles faced by entrepreneurs must be resolved."

He directed officials to promote the culture, traditions, customs and heritage of the coastal region

at the international level, while giving priority to employment generation and economic growth, the CM's office said in a statement.

According to officials, 45 projects

with an estimated investment of Rs 718.63 crore have been approved under the Karnataka Tourism Policy. These projects are expected to generate about 4,500 jobs.

The CM said employment generation should increase further.

Noting that Karnataka has one of the country's longest coastlines, Shivakumar asked officials to explore tourism development opportunities in coastal areas without causing environmental damage.

The CM expressed support for introducing a single-window system to secure the various approvals required for development projects, ensuring that technical hurdles do not impede progress.

Officials told the meeting that coastal tourism has been identified as a special sector under the state's

tourism plans. Tourism zones and large-scale tourism projects are being planned, while coastal fairs, festivals and marketing initiatives will be promoted.

Shivakumar emphasised the need to provide incentives such as subsidies, interest subsidies and concessions to help achieve the government's objectives and attract investments.

Actor and filmmaker Rishab Shetty, who was also part of the meeting, called for greater importance to be given to the arts and said coastal folk arts and music should be encouraged.

The actor said improved facilities for film shooting would benefit the film industries of Karnataka, Kerala and Goa. Industrialists who attended the meeting urged the CM to focus on the development of heli-tourism in the coastal region.

States Focus

PM-VBRY has created over 70 lakh jobs, says PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana (PM-VBRY) has created over 70 lakh jobs across the country so far, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday as he transferred incentives worth ₹2,400 crore for 15 lakh first-time employees and their employers. The amount will be transferred to the beneficiaries through the direct benefit transfer.

Addressing the event, Modi said that when the Government, the youth and the industry work together, job creation grows multi-fold.

He informed that Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana has created 70 lakh jobs and provided social security cover for the beneficiaries under the scheme. The Government encour-



ages those institutions or employers who generate new jobs, Modi said, adding that the Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana forms a bridge between the youth and the industry for first-time job seekers.

He said, "Through PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana, we are supporting employment generation, empowering youth and building a

stronger workforce for the future."

The scheme is about empowering first-time employees and building a bridge between the youth and the industry, he stated.

The aspirations, skills and potential of our youth shape the path to a Viksit Bharat, he said.

Modi further said that India's youth will be at the

forefront of driving global growth, innovation and entrepreneurship in the years to come.

In the 21st century, opportunities will belong to nations that nurture skilled talent, foster innovation and uphold the highest standards of quality, he said, adding that India has unprecedented capability in these three areas.

Under PM-VBRY, the Government has provided an outlay of ₹99,446 crore and targeted 3.5 crore job creation in two years.

Under the scheme, up to ₹15,000 is provided for first-time employees. Employers get up to ₹3,000 per month per new employee under the scheme.

To boost employment in the manufacturing sector, extended benefits are being provided for up to four years under the scheme.



PASSPORT DELIVERY NOW TRULY DEMOCRATISED: JAISHANKAR

The passport delivery process today has become "truly democratised", and this seamless service serves as an engine for a prosperous, globally connected and Viksit Bharat, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Friday. In his address at the Annual Regional Passport Officers' Conference, which also marked Passport Seva Divas, he said the annual passport issuance volume has surged to over 138 lakh in the financial year 2025-26, which reflects the "soaring aspiration" of India and its people. The external affairs minister said the passport service today has become "swift" and "accessible", while acquiring a passport was akin to a privilege earlier.

(PTI)



DEFENCE MINISTRY INKS ₹425 CR DEAL FOR NAVY GENERATORS

Ministry of Defence on Friday signed a contract with Bharat Forge Limited, Pune, for the acquisition of 12 sets of 1.25 MW Marine Gas Turbine Generators, with a minimum 60 per cent indigenous content, for the Indian Navy at a total cost of around Rs 425 crore.

Giving details, officials said the contract was inked under the Buy (Indian) category in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh.

The project reinforces the Government's commitment to Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make-in-India by creating a robust domestic manufacturing ecosystem. It would enhance maritime self-reliance in critical strategic technologies and bolster the Indian Navy's operational readiness through indigenous production and end-to-end life-cycle support.

(PTI)

NIA arrests 10 accused in Manipur ethnic violence cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday arrested 10 accused in six different cases of ethnic violence in Manipur.

In a coordinated operation with Manipur Police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), a joint multi-location search operation in the districts of Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Churachandpur, Ukhrul, Chandel, and Pherzawl in the strife-torn north-eastern state led to the arrest of the accused.

Investigations in multiple cases revealed that the accused had played active roles in various incidents of violence during the period of ethnic unrest in Manipur, including attacks on security



forces, looting of arms and ammunition, and bank robberies, a statement issued by the NIA said. The operations, conducted on the basis of extensive intelligence, technical and field investigations by the NIA along with the state police and the central security agency, were focused on identifying and prosecut-

ing individuals, across communities, involved in criminal and terrorist activities in the state, it said.

The NIA expects the arrests to reveal significant information about the planning, execution, and support networks involved in the cases of violence, the statement said. The agency is also exam-

ining possible linkages between the various incidents, as well as the individuals and groups involved in the insurgency, it said.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

No leave for medical students during NEET exam: NMC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The National Medical Commission has directed all medical colleges and institutions under its purview not to grant leave to students on June 20 and 21, except in exceptional circumstances, to support the fair conduct of the NEET-UG re-exam on Sunday.

The move comes in the backdrop of some instances when students of medical colleges were found to be involved in activities that could compromise the sanctity and integrity of the examination process, the Commission said in a notice issued on Thursday. The instruction has been issued in compliance with directions received from the Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education regarding the conduct of the medical entrance examination, it said.

The Commission also asked medical colleges to remain vigilant and sensitise students against involvement in any activities that could compromise the sanctity and integrity of the examination process.

"In the past, instances have come to notice where some students of medical colleges were found to be involved in activities that could compromise the sanctity and integrity of the examination process," the notice said.

"In view of this, and as a matter of general deterrence, all the medical colleges are hereby directed to remain vigilant and ensure that students are sensitised against any involvement in activities prejudicial to the conduct of the examination," it added.



TN Assembly unanimously resolves against Mekedatu Dam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

The Tamil Nadu Assembly on Friday adopted a unanimous resolution against Karnataka's move to construct a dam across river Cauvery at Mekedatu, expressing support for all measures undertaken by the State Government on the issue.

Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay piloted the government resolution over the nearly 13 years long dispute with the neighbouring State, with the members of the opposition, including Leader of the



Opposition Udhayanidhi Stalin and AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami, backing the Government.

The Congress too supported the ruling TVK in the Assembly, taking a contradictory stand opposing the Karnataka Congress Government, which is keen on pursuing the balancing reservoir project.

Experts flag concerns over SC-appointed Aravalli panel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Scientists, senior environmental and policy experts, and other stakeholders from across India have written to the Chief Justice of India (CJI), raising questions over the composition of the Supreme Court-appointed high-powered expert committee tasked with reviewing the Centre's report on the definition and delineation of the Aravalli hill range.

The letters, written on Thursday and Friday, seek changes to the committee's composition, citing concerns about its independence.



The committee, constituted under the Supreme Court's May 25 order, is headed by Kanchan Devi,

Director General of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, and has been directed to submit

its report by August 31.

The other members of the panel are Dr Subhash Ashutosh, former director general of the Forest Survey of India; Dr Rajendra Kumar Sharma, former director of the Geological Survey of India; Brij Mohan Singh Rathore, former joint secretary in the Environment Ministry; and Professor Ashok K Bhatnagar, former head of the Department of Botany at Delhi University.

The court also appointed Professor Jagdish Krishnaswamy of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru, and

Professor Laxmikant Sharma of the Central University of Haryana as special invitees whom the chairperson may associate with the committee's work, if required.

The Environment Ministry was directed to nominate an officer of the rank of director to serve as the panel's member secretary.

In one of the letters, environmentalist and social scientist, Dr Ravi Chopra, expressed doubts about the panel's ability to provide independent written opinions on the disputed issues, noting that almost all its members are serving or retired Government officials.

NTA to hold nationwide mock drill for NEET exam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Centre is not leaving anything to chance, and the National Testing Agency (NTA) will conduct a nationwide mock drill on Saturday as part of the preparations to ensure the NEET UG-2026 re-examination on Sunday, June 21, is conducted smoothly and securely.

The mock drill will begin at 9 AM and continue until late evening. More than 2.5 lakh security personnel are expected to participate in the

exercise across the country. All examination centres have already been handed over to the National Testing Agency (NTA). On the day of the examination, the centres will operate under a three-tier security system to prevent any irregularities.

According to officials, paramilitary forces will be responsible for the custody and security of question papers and answer booklets. More than 5,000 examination centres across the country will be monitored through CCTV surveillance



and security personnel deployed.

The nationwide mock drill is aimed at assessing preparedness, coordination among agencies, and the effectiveness of security measures ahead of the examination. Elaborate security arrangements are in place to ensure the examination is conducted smoothly for the 22.79 lakh candidates who would be appearing for the re-NEET. On Friday, the Government issued detailed advisories on where to track updates on the examination, and also listed the arrangements in place.

Himanta urges FM Sitharaman to raise northeast funding limits

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday urged Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to allow the northeastern states to have access to enhanced funds through externally aided projects, citing "exceptional track record and honest implementation of schemes and projects" in the region.

He said that such projects, worth Rs 53,000 crore, are underway in Assam alone.

"On behalf of Assam and our sister states in the northeast, I made a passionate appeal to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to allow



our Governments access to enhanced limits through Externally Aided Projects (EAP), keeping in view our exceptional track record and honest implementation of schemes and projects," Sarma said on X.

After attending a seminar on 'Leveraging EAPs in North-Eastern States' in Shillong, he said that over the past few years, these projects, backed by multilateral financial agencies, have empowered Assam to initi-

collaboration and planning in the implementation of such projects".

The Chief Minister's Office (CMO), in a post on social media, said Sarma highlighted the transformative growth of Assam.

Sarma cited the successful completion of the EAP-funded Lower Kopili Hydroelectric Project in just three-and-a-half years.

He also mentioned projects such as the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu in Guwahati and the ongoing Dhubri-Phulbari Bridge as examples of the state's strong development momentum and effective utilisation of Externally Aided Projects, the CMO said.

NSF slams Yoga Day order for hurting faith

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kohima

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has expressed grave resentment and unequivocal opposition to a recent circular issued by the Directorate of School Education, Government of Nagaland, which directs educational institutions across the State to observe the 12th International Day of Yoga on June 21, 2026.

The student body has strongly objected to the scheduling of the event, pointing out that June 21 falls on a Sunday. The Federation viewed the directive as a blatant disregard for the religious sentiments and spiritual convictions of the Naga people, emphasising that Sunday occupies a sacred place in the Christian faith and is strictly devoted to worship, prayer, and fellowship.

In a joint statement, NSF President Mteising and Education Committee Convenor Pithungo Shitio asserted that institutionalising such activities on a Sunday violates the religious freedom guaranteed under Article 25 of the Indian Constitution. They added that the directive is inconsistent with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights



(ICCPR) and Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

"The Federation condemns in the strongest terms the unwarranted directive and calls upon the Directorate of School Education and the Government of Nagaland to immediately withdraw the notification," the statement read. The NSF cautioned the state Government against any attempt to coerce compliance under the guise of official instructions, warning that authorities would be held solely responsible for any untoward consequences.

Home ministry working with SC to cut case pendency: Amit Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said his ministry is "actively engaged" with the Supreme Court to work out a new system for reducing the pendency of cases in the apex court and high courts, and ensure timely justice for people.

Speaking at the inauguration of the All India Fingerprint Conference-2026, organised by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Shah stressed that police and forensic experts should accurately collect evidence from the crime scene and ensure that these are "not contaminated" to secure a fast and correct conviction. He also spoke about the three new criminal laws introduced



by the Modi Government to ensure timely justice.

"We identified the loopholes (in the old criminal laws), and 90 per cent of the law-based ones have been addressed. The Union home ministry is actively engaged with the Supreme Court for creating a new system to address volume-based delays in the high courts and the

Supreme Court," Shah said. He said the Government is "determined" to prevent delays in the criminal justice system.

Addressing police and forensic experts from across the country, the minister told them to file timely charge sheets, follow up with the prosecution, and pursue cases before the courts to ensure timely decisions.

Shah said converting information or data into intelligence is important and cited the example of the Mahabharata, where Lord Krishna played this role and ensured victory for the Pandavas against the numerically superior Kauravas.

He said all the data gathered from crime scenes should be analysed with the help of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning tools to find crime patterns so that not only can crimes be pre-empted, but criminals are also caught quickly.

The minister said that a modus operandi bureau, which he suggested creating within the NCRB four years ago, should now start working to study crime patterns, repeat offenders, and interstate and international criminal networks.

Govt to deploy area officers for VB-GRAM G rollout

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Rural Development will deploy more than 100 area officers across the country to assist states and Union territories ahead of the implementation of the VB-GRAM G Act from July 1, a statement said on Friday.

The officers will act as facilitators and resource persons during the rollout phase, working with State Governments, district administrations and field-level functionaries to support implementation, strengthen capacities, share best practices and address operational challenges, the ministry said. The move comes as preparations for the new rural employment framework gather pace. The ministry said an interim allocation of ₹95,692 crore has been approved as the



Centre's share for 2026-27, while 27 states and Union territories have already made budgetary provisions for implementing the Act.

Six states/UTs have notified their state schemes under the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-GRAM G) framework, it added. The area officers were briefed through an orientation programme covering the Act's key features, implementation framework, institutional arrangements,

technology-enabled governance systems and support mechanisms available for states and districts. The programme was chaired by Rural Development Secretary Rohit Kansal, while Joint Secretary Rohini R Bhajbhakare conducted the orientation.

The ministry said the VB-GRAM G Act seeks to transform rural employment by linking guaranteed wage employment with livelihood promotion, climate resilience, rural infrastruc-

ture creation and technology-based governance.

It will also use tools such as Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans (VGPPs) and GIS-based planning to support the vision of Viksit Bharat in 2047. As part of preparations, all states and UTs have been onboarded onto the DBT-SPARSH platform, nearly 93 per cent of active workers have completed e-KYC, and a face authentication-based attendance system has been rolled out nationwide, according to the ministry.

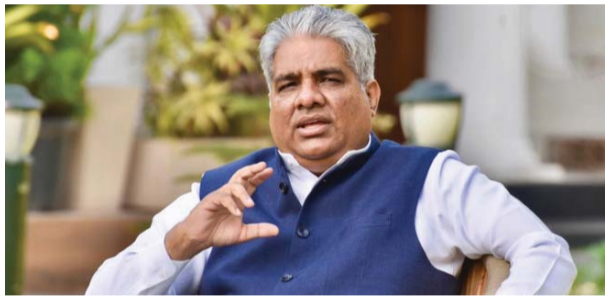
Minister Bhupender Yadav lauds Gujarat's Vidya Samiksha Kendra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gandhinagar

Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav visited the Vidya Samiksha Kendra (Integrated Command and Control Centre for Schools) in Gandhinagar on Friday, describing the technology-driven education monitoring system as a model that could guide education reforms across India.

During his visit, Yadav reviewed the centre's large video wall and real-time data monitoring platform, which tracks the functioning of thousands of Government schools across Gujarat. Education Department officials demonstrated how the system monitors student attendance, teacher attendance, academic performance, midday meal implementation and other key indicators to support informed decision-making.

The minister said technology-backed monitoring can



play a significant role in improving the quality of education by providing accurate data for policy formulation. He noted that the platform can help identify the reasons behind student dropouts, enabling authorities to design targeted interventions to improve retention and learning outcomes.

Yadav also praised the centre's integrated dashboard, saying the Gujarat model has emerged as an example for other states seeking to modernise school governance. He expressed confidence that the Vidya Samiksha Kendra has the potential to become a

leading hub for technology-enabled education management in the country. The Union Minister also interacted with senior officials of the Education Department on initiatives such as Atal Tinkering Labs, STEM education and library development. He emphasised the need for scientific and technology-based assessment methods to strengthen students' reading skills, pronunciation and overall learning.

Bhupender Yadav Lauds Gujarat's Vidya Samiksha Kendra, Calls It a National Model for Technology-Driven School Education.

Chhattisgarh push to connect families with welfare schemes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

The Chhattisgarh government has decided to launch a campaign aimed at taking good governance to every household and ensuring that all eligible families receive the benefits of welfare schemes, officials said on Friday.

The campaign, 'Sughar Chhattisgarh' (Beautiful Chhattisgarh), will be a large-scale saturation drive covering 31 major beneficiary-oriented schemes across 23 districts of the state, with the objective of strengthening their reach, effectiveness and transparency, an official statement said.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said the foundation of a developed Chhattisgarh relies not only on infrastructure development, but also in ensuring effective and timely delivery of Government schemes to every family. "The Government's objective is



Chhattisgarh CM Vishnu Deo Sai

not merely to implement schemes, but to ensure that their positive outcomes are visible in the lives of all families," Sai said in the statement.

The government aims to establish a governance system in which citizens do not have to run from office to office to access benefits, but instead the administration proactively reaches out to eligible recipients and connects them with welfare programmes, he emphasised.

Gujarat clears ₹1,567-crore projects to create 1,200 jobs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Rajkot

The Gujarat Government has approved incentive assistance for 15 large-scale industrial projects involving a combined investment of ₹1,567.18 crore under its Industrial Policy-2015. The approved projects are expected to generate around 1,238 employment opportunities across the State.

The approvals were granted during a meeting of the committee responsible for issuing Final Eligibility Certificates to large industries under the State's Incentive to Industries Scheme. The meeting was chaired by Deputy Chief Minister and Industries Minister Harsh Sanghavi.

The Industrial Policy-2015 was introduced to strengthen Gujarat's position as one of India's most preferred investment destinations while enhancing its competitiveness on the global



Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister and Industries Minister Harsh Sanghavi

industrial map through targeted incentives for new investments.

According to the State Government, the scheme has so far attracted investments worth ₹1,48,336.35 crore, resulting in nearly 1,65,053 direct jobs. Officials also noted that the policy has encouraged the growth of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), contributing to the development of a stronger industri-

al ecosystem across Gujarat. Among the projects approved in the latest meeting, the largest investment is a ₹999.82-crore chemical manufacturing project in Bharuch district. Other proposals include an automobile project worth ₹75.72 crore in Ahmedabad district, an automobile investment of ₹44.56 crore in Surendranagar district, and a ₹13-crore textile project in Gandhinagar district.

Govt attempting to create manufactured mandates: Pilot

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jaipur

Congress leader Sachin Pilot on Friday accused the Centre of attempting to create a "manufactured mandate" to push its political agenda, saying that such efforts were an insult to people's verdict and contrary to democratic values.



Pilot, a Congress general secretary and former Rajasthan deputy chief minister, said the BJP had received a mandate to govern but not a two-thirds majority. "People gave the BJP a mandate to run the Government, but not a two-thirds majority. Attempting to artificially create such a mandate is against democratic values," he said in a statement. He alleged that efforts were being made to reintroduce the Delimitation Bill.

"Trying to bring back a Bill that had already fallen, through a 'manufactured mandate', is an attempt to fulfill a political agenda that the people have not endorsed," Pilot said.

CPI(M) demands reduction of fuel prices following US-Iran pact

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Polit Bureau of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Friday urged the Central Government to take immediate steps to slash the prices of petrol, diesel, and gas, citing a drop in global oil prices following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the United States and Iran. In a press statement, the CPI(M) noted the

diplomatic breakthrough with optimism, stating that the agreement is expected to bring much-needed economic relief globally after the "unwarranted US-Israel aggression against Iran."

The party emphasised that with the US removing its blockade on Iranian vessels in the Strait of Hormuz and Iran allowing the safe passage of ships, global pressure on energy and fertiliser supplies would ease significantly. "Oil prices in the



energy markets have already seen a decline, and the Government of India should take immediate steps to

reduce the increased prices of gas, petrol, and diesel," the statement issued by the CPI(M) Central Committee

Office noted.

The party also demanded urgent measures to secure the availability of essential agricultural inputs, particularly urea, for domestic farmers. Slamming Western foreign policy, the left party asserted that the development demonstrates the "limits of imperialist aggression," pointing out that the US was compelled to lift sanctions, unfreeze assets, and agree to pay reparations due to growing global

public anger and widespread protests.

The CPI(M) further called on Israel to adhere to the UN Charter and desist from attacking Lebanon.

Turning its focus back to domestic foreign policy, the Polit Bureau stated that New Delhi must recognise the global public sentiment against Washington and Tel Aviv, demanding that the Indian Government immediately desist from aligning with them.

NCW asks states to make annual POSH audits mandatory

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The National Commission for Women (NCW) on Friday issued an advisory to all states and Union Territories, recommending mandatory annual POSH audits, and a host of measures to strengthen workplace safety and effective implementation of guidelines under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. The advisory has been sent to chief secretaries and directors general



of police of all states and UTs and has also been disseminated to district magistrates, senior superintendents of police and commissioners of police across the country for grassroots-level enforcement and accountability.

"A woman should never have to choose between her dignity and her livelihood. Every workplace must be a space of safety, respect and equal opportunity," NCW chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar

said. "Effective implementation of the POSH Act is not merely a legal obligation but a collective responsibility towards ensuring women's empowerment and participation in nation-building," she said.

In a statement, the commission said that the advisory seeks to ensure that every workplace, whether in the Government, private, organised or unorganised sector, strictly complies with provi-

sions of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (of Women at Workplace) (POSH) Act and fosters a safe, inclusive and gender-sensitive working environment for women.

In a major step towards institutional accountability, the commission has advised all states and UTs to establish dedicated POSH monitoring cells or digital compliance dashboards to track implementation of the POSH Act,

the statement said. The states have also been urged to conduct periodic reviews at senior administrative levels, facilitate capacity-building, issue necessary guidance to establishments and district authorities, and ensure adherence to statutory obligations and judicial directions. The advisory recommends mandatory annual POSH audits for all establishments employing 10 or more persons.

Stop State-backed corporate land grab: Bhumi Adhikar Andolan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Bhumi Adhikar Andolan (BAA) on Friday strongly condemned what it termed a "State-backed corporate land grab" unfolding across the country under the guise of development. The front alleged that crucial legal safeguards are being systematically diluted and bypassed to facilitate corporate accumulation at the cost of working-class settlements and indigenous communities.



According to data compiled by the collective, India is currently witnessing 1,092 ongoing land conflicts, impacting nearly 1.42 crore people and covering 47.7 lakh hectares of land. Over the past year alone, the BAA

recorded nearly 300 cases of aggressive land acquisition, evictions, demolitions, and displacement-related conflicts. "Bulldozer-led eviction drives across states have displaced at least 6,500 families, demolished more than 5,000 homes, and cleared at least 1,700 acres of land. 'Anti-

encroachment' has become a language to erase the poor, landless, forest dwellers, and minorities," the BAA statement signed by leaders including Hannan Mollah, Ulka Mahajan, and Prafulla Samantara noted.

The organisation highlighted massive land monetisation across sectors, noting that the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) spent ₹16,476.83 crore on land acquisition in FY 2025-26 up to February 2026, while real estate developers acquired 3,093 acres across 149 transactions worth ₹54,818 crore in 2025.

Expressing grave concern over the Great Nicobar mega project, the BAA demanded an immediate halt to the plan. The project requires the diversion of over 130 sq km of rain-forest and Tribal Reserve land, threatening the Shompen PVTG and Nicobarese communities while risking the release of 4.3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. The front further flagged extensive ecological and community disruptions across several states. In

Odisha, concerns were raised over the scale of the Jindal-POSCO steel project in Keonjhar, where the larger plan reportedly aims to acquire nearly 11,000 acres of multi-crop agricultural land against the publicly projected 2,024.66 acres. Meanwhile, in Assam and the wider North East, the BAA recorded 14 major cases of displacement, including the Goalpara eviction affecting 667 families and the corporate transfer of 1.53 lakh bighas in Karbi Anglong.

Unchecked resource extraction was also highlighted in Central India, where the proposed Kente Extension Coal Block in Chhattisgarh's Hasdeo Aranya involves the diversion of 1,742.6 hectares and

the felling of 4.5 lakh trees, while neighbouring Madhya Pradesh has seen over 60,000 acres of forest land diverted over five years. Additionally, agricultural lands are being rapidly urbanised in Haryana and Andhra Pradesh, with Gurugram facing the procurement of 17,358 acres from 36 villages, and Andhra Pradesh witnessing major restructuring for projects like the 601-acre Adani-Google AI Data Centre near Visakhapatnam.

The BAA further alarmed that the weakening of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) has left millions vulnerable. By May 2025, out of approximately 51 lakh FRA claims filed, 18.6 lakh claims were rejected and 7.5 lakh remained pending.

RPF DG reviews security for Amarnath Yatra in J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

Ahead of the annual Amarnath Yatra, Director General of the Railway Protection Force (RPF) Sonali Mishra on Friday reviewed security arrangements at railway stations in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua and stressed the need for enhanced coordination among all agencies.

The pilgrimage is scheduled to commence on July 3 via the twin routes - the traditional 48-km Nunwan-Pahalgam track in Anantnag district and the shorter 14-km Baltal route in Ganderbal district - and will conclude



on August 28 on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan. Mishra visited the railway station at Kathua and assessed preparedness for the forthcoming pilgrimage, which is scheduled to commence on July 3, the officials said.

Speaking to reporters, Mishra said a review of the security measures had been conducted, and arrangements were being further strengthened to ensure the safe movement of pilgrims.



Editor's TAKE

Rebuilding student trust after the paper leak crisis

Trust cannot be rebuilt overnight; it returns only when students see institutions acknowledge their failures and correct them transparently

For a generation that has grown up under the relentless pressure of competitive examinations, the recent spate of paper leaks has fractured something fragile: the belief that merit, not manipulation, decides who gets to become a doctor, an engineer or a civil servant.

When lakhs of students who have spent years preparing discover that a result can be bought or stolen, the damage extends beyond one exam cycle. It corrodes faith in the entire system of public examinations.

The pattern across recent controversies is depressingly familiar. Question papers have been printed and transported through poorly secured logistics chains, sometimes via private vendors with minimal accountability. Centres in remote towns have weak digital infrastructure, making real-time monitoring difficult. There is often a troubling gap between when a paper is finalised and when it is administered – a window long enough for leaks to occur and circulate on messaging apps.

Investigations, when they happen, are slow, fragmented across state and central agencies, and rarely result in swift, visible punishment. Most damagingly, the bodies conducting these exams have repeatedly responded with denial rather than transparency, eroding credibility further with every defensive press statement.

Gen Z's fury is not simply about a single exam gone wrong. It reflects a generation that has watched coaching-centre economics balloon, that has poured family savings into preparation, and that increasingly experiences exams as the only ladder of social mobility available to them. When that ladder appears rigged, the betrayal feels personal and systemic at once – amplified and accelerated by social media, which turns local grievances into national outrage within hours.

Rebuilding trust requires structural change, not just reassurance. First, examination bodies must adopt secure, encrypted digital question-delivery systems with decentralised, randomised paper sets, reducing the value of any single leak.

Second, an independent statutory authority - insulated from political and administrative pressure - should oversee high-stakes national exams, with clear accountability separate from the ministries that benefit politically from smooth exam conduct.

Third, the chain of custody for papers, from the printing press to the exam hall, needs forensic-level tracking, audited by external agencies, not self-certified.

Equally important is the speed and visibility of justice. Leak investigations must run on fixed timelines with public reporting, and those responsible – whether vendors, officials or examination staff – must face consequences that are seen, not just announced. Finally, students deserve a credible grievance and re-examination mechanism. Anything less leaves an entire generation rightly unconvinced.

When rules fail and lives perish

The tragic loss of lives in Delhi's Malviya Nagar fire demands a deeper examination of weakening accountability, persistent impunity for violations, and the urgent need to restore integrity, vigilance and commitment to public service



JS RAJPUT

A devastating fire broke out in the Malviya Nagar locality of South Delhi on June 3, 2026, claiming the lives of 21 people. The tragedy was not merely an accident; it was the consequence of a chain of failures by those entrusted with enforcing the law. Reports indicated that both the construction and the business operating there were unauthorised and illegal. It is difficult to believe that such an establishment could have functioned without the knowledge of the authorities responsible for approving constructions and issuing licences for hotels, restaurants and bed-and-breakfast facilities. Yet, as is often the case, no senior official responsible for monitoring and enforcement appears to have been suspended or arrested. Public confidence in official assurances has eroded to such an extent that many people are convinced that little will change. A few minor violators may face action, some illegal structures may be demolished, and then the status quo is likely to return. The mechanisms through which violations continue to flourish are, unfortunately, well understood by the public.

Occasionally, voices are raised lamenting the decline of the values once preached and practised by the freedom fighters under the leadership of Gandhi. These values-humility, honesty, integrity, compassion and accountability-were expected to guide governance after independence. Sadly, for many citizens, routine interactions with public institutions often reveal a different reality. Whether in municipal offices, revenue departments or police stations, people frequently encounter indifference, inefficiency and a lack of accountability. Can anyone entirely avoid attributing this situation to corruption? Citizens are familiar with the manner in which elected representatives and local authorities are often perceived on matters relating to illegal constructions and regulatory violations.

Reports from different parts of the country concerning commissions, cut-money practices and rent-seeking behaviour have further weakened public faith in governance and justice. The Malviya Nagar tragedy occurred at a time when the nation was already distressed by controversies surrounding examination systems, including the NEET paper leak, difficulties associated with Class XII examinations, technical glitches in CUET and other administrative failures. Although these incidents belong to different sectors, they often stem from similar causes: incompetence, negligence, lack of accountability and insufficient commitment to public welfare.



A HEALTHY DEMOCRACY CAN PROVIDE A BETTER LIFE FOR ALL CITIZENS, PARTICULARLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE PURSUING EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT. HOWEVER, DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS MUST FUNCTION SINCERELY IN BOTH LETTER AND SPIRIT. DEFICIENCIES IN GOVERNANCE, WHETHER ARISING FROM POLICY FAILURES OR ADMINISTRATIVE SHORTCOMINGS, MUST BE IDENTIFIED, STUDIED AND CORRECTED BY THOSE ENTRUSTED WITH PUBLIC AUTHORITY

The author is an educationist, a Padma Shri awardee, and works in religious unity and social cohesion

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Whenever major fire accidents occur, investigations commonly reveal that mandatory safety equipment was either absent, outdated or non-functional. In many cases, fire safety certificates had expired long before the accident. Yet one rarely hears of meaningful penalties being imposed before tragedies occur. Preventive enforcement remains weak, while corrective action usually follows only after lives have been lost. The deeper concern is the gradual erosion of our moral and civic consciousness. Rampant lethargy, inefficiency and corruption reflect a declining sensitivity towards fellow citizens and the larger national interest. Public institutions exist to protect life and dignity, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on the character and commitment of those who operate them.

The demolition drives initiated after the Malviya Nagar incident appeared relatively orderly and considerate in their execution. They inevitably invite comparison with similar actions undertaken elsewhere, particularly in Uttar Pradesh. Regardless of one's opinion on such measures, they have generated intense public debate about the enforcement of law, unauthorised constructions, land encroachments and the role of government in protecting public interests.

Meaningful reform demands leaders with imagination, courage and a commitment to public welfare over personal gain. Equally vital is whether official training truly instils responsibility towards the weakest and most vulnerable. Where accountability is weak, illegal occupations of land and unauthorised constructions inevitably flourish. One does not need to look far to find examples of such violations. These structures are often visible reminders of administrative failure and the abdication of responsibility by those entrusted with enforcing the law. The Malviya Nagar fire is only one among many such tragedies that have occurred over the years. Yet meaningful reforms and lasting accountability remain elusive.

The public debate surrounding bulldozer action in Uttar Pradesh illustrates another

dimension of governance. Such actions attracted both strong support and sharp criticism. Supporters viewed them as decisive measures against land grabbers, criminal networks and illegal encroachments, while critics questioned their legality, fairness and implications for due process. Whatever one's position, the debate underscores the importance of ensuring that all enforcement actions remain firmly within constitutional and legal frameworks.

A healthy democracy can provide a better life for all citizens, particularly for young people pursuing education and employment. However, democratic institutions must function sincerely in both letter and spirit. Deficiencies in governance, whether arising from policy failures or administrative shortcomings, must be identified, studied and corrected by those entrusted with public authority. The wisdom expressed by Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly, remains profoundly relevant. Addressing the nation on November 26, 1949, he observed that the welfare of the country would ultimately depend not merely on the Constitution but on those who administer it. He warned that even the best Constitution could not succeed if those entrusted with implementing it lacked character and integrity. Conversely, capable and honest individuals could make even an imperfect system function effectively. They could innovate, inspire, learn more and be more pragmatic. The basic factors responsible for the Malviya Nagar tragedy and the NEET and CBSE failures are not much different, nor really distant. Essentially, these failures are rampant in public services across sectors. It creates a general impression among common

people that they can get away with the violation of any sanction, permission or approval. Recent systemic failures that have inflicted avoidable suffering on young students and their parents, or the fire that extinguished lives mercilessly, must necessarily serve as stern reminders that education must focus on nurturing empathy, integrity, responsibility, compassion and the spirit of respecting others. A value-based work culture could help develop men and women of character who would not blindly become slaves to 'maximum accumulation anyhow', but who recognise the limits of material accumulation and the importance of serving society.

Ultimately, institutions derive their strength and reputation from the character and commitment of the functionaries who lead and operate them. If India seeks to prevent tragedies such as the Malviya Nagar fire and strengthen public trust in governance, it must invest not only in better laws and regulations but also in nurturing honesty, accountability and ethical leadership. These values have long been central to India's civilisational ethos. Strengthening them remains one of the nation's most urgent tasks.



PICTALK



A woman looks at Foxglove flowers blooming along a highway, in Bhardwah district, Jammu and Kashmir. PHOTO: PTI

Yoga: A lifelong companion on the journey of ageing



SHARMILA DAS

2ND OPINION

As the world prepares to celebrate International Day of Yoga, this year's theme, "Yoga for Healthy Ageing", has sparked important conversations about wellness in later life. Images of elderly practitioners performing yoga postures with grace and confidence are inspiring, highlighting how the practice can help maintain strength, mobility and independence. Yet the theme also offers an opportunity to rethink a common misconception: ageing is not something that begins in old age.

It starts the moment life begins. From birth onwards, the human body is constantly changing. It grows, adapts, repairs itself and gradually moves through the different stages of life. Ageing is not a sudden event that arrives after retirement; it is a continuous process. The real challenge, therefore, is not avoiding ageing but learning how to support

our bodies and minds throughout that journey.

This is where yoga becomes truly valuable. Many people view yoga as a remedy for stress, stiffness, poor posture or declining health. While it certainly helps address these concerns, its deeper purpose lies in prevention. Yoga encourages us to care for our physical and mental well-being long before problems arise.

Movement is essential to healthy living. Children naturally bend, stretch, squat and balance without conscious effort. As adulthood progresses, however, modern lifestyles often replace movement with prolonged sitting, screen time and repetitive routines. Gradually, flexibility decreases, muscles weaken, posture suffers and balance becomes less reliable. These changes occur so slowly that they often go unnoticed until discomfort or fatigue begins affecting daily life. Yoga offers a simple yet effective way to counter this decline. Stretching practices help preserve flexibility, while mobility exercises keep joints healthy and functional. Strength-building postures support muscles and bones, allowing the body to remain capable and resilient over time. Balance-focused practices improve coordination and stability, reducing the likelihood of injuries as we age. Importantly, these benefits are not limited to senior citizens. A young professional spending hours at a desk may need them just as much as an older adult.

Breathing is another crucial element of healthy ageing. Though it accompanies us throughout life, we rarely pay

attention to it. The demands of modern living often encourage shallow, hurried breathing, which can contribute to stress, poor sleep and reduced energy. Yogic breathing techniques restore awareness to this vital process. A slow, steady breath helps calm the nervous system, supports mental clarity and promotes recovery and relaxation. The ability to regulate one's breath is a skill that benefits people at every age. Equally important is yoga's impact on mental well-being. Many fears associated with ageing stem from concerns about loss-loss of strength, appearance, independence or certainty. Yoga shifts the focus towards qualities that can continue to grow throughout life: awareness, patience, resilience, gratitude and inner balance. It teaches acceptance without passivity and growth without constant struggle. Ultimately, yoga is not merely a practice for old age; it is a practice for life. It requires no expensive equipment, exceptional flexibility or large amounts of time. Even a few minutes of mindful movement and conscious breathing each day can create lasting benefits. Like any worthwhile investment, small and consistent efforts accumulate over time. This International Yoga Day, let us see yoga not as a response to ageing, but as a lifelong companion that helps us move, breathe and live with greater balance. Ageing begins at birth, but so do strength and wisdom.



The writer is a trained Sivananda Yoga teacher

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QUANTUM PROGRESS NEEDS STRONGER NATIONAL COMMITMENT

India's recent progress in quantum technology is encouraging and timely. To remain competitive in the post-AGI world, India must take a quantum leap forward. Having lagged far behind the United States and China in AI foundational technology, quantum computing may well be the next major frontier where India can establish leadership.

The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) has done commendable work in this field, and its ambition of making India self-reliant in quantum computing deserves recognition. Alongside the Central Government's National Quantum Mission, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu also deserves credit for his vision in collaborating with IBM, a global

leader in quantum technology, and TCS to create a "Quantum Valley", much like Silicon Valley, as an epicentre for quantum-based innovation.

However, unlike in the US, Canada, China and Europe, India's private sector has shown limited seriousness towards this transformative technology. Companies like Reliance, Adani, Mahindra and major banks must step up and invest heavily. While the Government faces restraints in budget allocations, the Indian private sector should take the lead in herding in a new age of technological innovation.

Otherwise, India risks repeating its AI experience - forever catching up instead of leading. The time for a quantum leap is now.

YASHI BAIRAGI | UJJAIN

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Challenges overshadow TVK's start

In its first month in power, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay's TVK government has faced criticism from both the public and opposition over key issues such as law-and-order failures, unannounced power cuts, diluted farm loan waivers and the delay in implementing its promise of ₹ 2,500 monthly assistance for women.

Among these, the most serious concern has been the rise in sexual violence against girls and women, which has deeply shaken the State's reputation for safety. Opposition parties and citizens alike have criticised TVK's handling of the crisis.

Political observers have also pointed to TVK's wafer-thin organisational structure and lack of administrative experience. Vijay may be a popular film star, but popularity alone cannot substitute governance. He does not yet appear to have a clear roadmap, while his close circle and ministerial team are not known for policy depth or administrative expertise.

This leaves him heavily dependent on bureaucracy, which is rarely ideal for an elected leader. One month may be too short for results, but it is enough to expect clarity and direction.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR | CHENNAI

Peace built on fragility

Calling this agreement a respite rather than a triumph is both honest and necessary. A fourteen-point memorandum, however detailed, cannot undo four months of devastation or erase years of mistrust. The provisions on down-blending enriched uranium under IAEA supervision and the sixty-day Hormuz passage are constructive steps. The retreat in oil prices from wartime highs to \$74-78 a barrel will also bring relief to energy-importing nations, including India.

What remains concerning is the structural fragility of the agreement. Reconstruction pledges worth \$300 billion remain, as rightly noted, a diplomatic abstraction until actual disbursement begins. Such pledges often lose momentum once initial enthusiasm fades.

More worrying is Netanyahu's admission that Israel does not fully align with Washington's approach, while reserving the right to continue military operations in Lebanon, Gaza and Syria. A framework that excludes Israel's core security concerns is incomplete by design.

The sixty-day negotiation period will be the real test. Markets have celebrated; now institutions and diplomats must turn this pause into lasting stability.

SWATHI SENTHILKUMAR | COIMBATORE

Blending teaching with technology

The article 'The silent burden of modern educators' rightly highlights the immense pressures borne by teachers. They are expected to meet the demands of parents, administrators, regulators and society while nurturing students and delivering measurable outcomes. Supporting teachers is essential if educational standards are to improve. However, the discussion overlooks the growing role of digital education. YouTube educators and EdTech platforms have become powerful tools that complement classroom teaching.

Millions of students now access lessons from excellent teachers, learn difficult concepts at their own pace and revisit topics whenever needed. This has been especially valuable for students in smaller towns and underserved regions. Ironically, online education is often dismissed or mocked.

Such criticism ignores the fact that technology has widened access to quality education far beyond conventional classrooms. Digital platforms cannot replace the mentorship, emotional support and human connection that teachers provide, but they can significantly improve learning outcomes. The real challenge is not choosing between teachers and technology, but creating a system where both work together.

HARSH PAWARIA | ROHTAK

The Aravalli green shield: India's living defence against the desert

The Aravalli Green Wall Project represents one of the country's most ambitious environmental projects. It seeks to revive an ancient ecological system that has protected north-western India for centuries. Its success, however, will depend on ensuring strong legal protection, scientific planning and active community participation



VIVEK SAXENA

Every year on 17 June, the world observes the UN Day to Combat Desertification and Drought under the UNCCD Convention - a reminder that healthy land is the quiet foundation of our food, our water, our biodiversity and our resilience to a changing climate. This year's theme, "Restore the Land. Unlock.", carries a hopeful message: restoring degraded landscapes is not merely an ecological duty but an investment in livelihoods, water security and a sustainable future.

The challenge is sobering. Nearly 40 per cent of the Earth's land is now degraded, affecting billions of lives and threatening economic and ecological stability. India faces its own pressures - declining groundwater, biodiversity loss, expanding aridity and growing climate variability. Yet India has also emerged as a global leader in land restoration, and one of its most ambitious efforts is unfolding along an ancient line of hills: the Aravalli Green Wall.

A green wall, or a green shield?

The phrase "green wall" entered the global vocabulary through Africa. Launched in 2007 by the African Union, the Great Green Wall set out to restore degraded land across the full width of the continent, stretching some 8,000 kilometres from Senegal on the Atlantic to Djibouti on the Horn of Africa. Originally conceived across eleven core Sahel countries and since expanded to many more, it aims to restore 100 million hectares of land, sequester 250 million tonnes of carbon and create 10 million green jobs by 2030.

Africa's experience taught the world an important lesson. A rigid line of planted trees marching across deserts could not survive on its own; the most enduring insight from the Sahel is that the initiative evolved from a tree-planting drive into a mosaic of activities - a comprehensive effort blending water harvesting, soil conservation, grasslands and community livelihoods. The "wall" was never really a wall. This is why, in spirit, we should understand these initiatives not as walls but as shields. The Aravalli Green Wall, properly understood, is India's green shield against the advancing desert - not a barrier of bricks, but a breathing, regenerating landscape.

Reviving an ancient ecological shield

Stretching across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi, the Aravalli Range is among the oldest mountain systems on Earth. For millennia, it has shielded the subcontinent from the eastward march of the Thar Desert while recharging aquifers, regulating local climate and sheltering rich biodiversity. Decades of deforestation, mining, encroachment and unsustainable land use have worn this shield thin - and the consequences reach far beyond the hills. Recognising this, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupendra Yadav launched the Aravalli Green Wall Project in 2023, one of India's most ambitious landscape-restoration programmes, blending afforestation, watershed development, groundwater recharge, the revival of water bodies, dust-storm mitigation, carbon sequestration and community livelihoods.

The Aravalli Green Wall is the on-ground expression of a commitment India has made repeatedly at the highest global forums. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has placed land restoration at the centre of its climate diplomacy. When India hosted the 14th Conference of Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP14) in 2019, the Prime Minister raised India's ambition to restore degraded land from 21 million to 26 million hectares by 2030 - a pledge carried forward in the Delhi Declaration adopted at the close of that conference.

This sits within a wider arc of leadership: India's commitment to Land Degradation Neutrality and the Bonn Challenge; its pledge of net-zero emissions by 2070, announced at Glasgow; and Mission LIFE (Lifestyle for Environment), which the Prime Minister has championed from the G20 to the United Nations as a model for sustainable living. The Aravalli Green Wall translates these global commitments into restored watersheds, regenerated forests and revived water bodies on Indian soil.

If restoration rebuilds the shield, the law defends it - and here the judiciary has been a steadfast guardian of



The Pioneer SINCE 1865

THE ARAVALLI GREEN WALL STANDS AS A POWERFUL SYMBOL OF INDIA'S RESOLVE - A RESOLVE THAT MUST NOW BE MATCHED BY A DEFINITION STRONG ENOUGH TO HOLD THE LINE. REVIVING THE ARAVALLIS IS NOT ABOUT BUILDING A WALL OF TREES; IT IS ABOUT RESTORING, AND DEFENDING, AN ANCIENT LIVING SHIELD FOR THE GENERATIONS TO COME

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the Aravallis. The Supreme Court banned mining in Gurugram, Faridabad and Nuh as far back as 2009, and has intervened repeatedly against illegal mining and encroachment across the range. Yet a deeper problem persisted: the four Aravalli states followed inconsistent criteria for what even counts as an "Aravalli", leaving regulatory gaps that illegal mining exploited. To close those gaps, the Court constituted a committee in May 2024 to recommend a uniform definition. In November 2025, it accepted that committee's formulation - defining an Aravalli hill as a landform rising 100 metres or more above the local relief, and a range as two or more such hills within 500 metres - froze new mining leases and mandated a plan for sustainable mining.

The definition, however, drew sharp criticism: ecologists and citizen groups warned that a purely height-based threshold could exclude vast tracts of the range from protection, endangering groundwater recharge, biodiversity and the very desertification control the Aravallis exist to provide.

Responding to these concerns, the Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance, kept its November judgment and the committee's report in abeyance, and ordered a fresh, independent expert review. In June 2026, it constituted a high-powered committee headed by the Director General of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) to re-examine the definition and demarcation, resolve the "critical ambiguities" in the earlier findings, and submit a comprehensive report by 31 August 2026. Much now rests on this committee. A definition is not a technicality; it draws the line between what is protected and what may be quarried. The expectation - shared by conservationists, scientists and administrators alike - is for a definition that is scientifically rigorous and map-verifiable, yet ecologically precautionary: one that protects not merely the tallest peaks but the connected system of foothills, valleys, recharge zones and ridgelines that make the Aravallis a functioning ecological barrier. Where the science is uncertain, the definition must err on the side of protection. Crucially, the legal boundary of the Aravallis and the restoration ambition of the Green Wall must speak to each other - for it makes little sense to plant a shield on one hand while leaving it legally exposed on the other.

The stakes are highest, and most immediate, for the National Capital Region. The Aravallis are the single most significant natural barrier shielding the NCR from the dust and aridity of the Thar. A healthy Aravalli landscape means cleaner air and fewer dust storms over Delhi and its satellite cities, recharged aquifers beneath one of the world's most water-stressed urban regions, and a cooler, more stable microclimate for tens of millions of residents. The environmental fate of the capital region is, quite literally, tied to the health of these ancient hills.

At the landscape scale, the case is just as compelling. Restoration knits together a continuous ecological corridor from Gujarat through Rajasthan and Haryana to Delhi - reconnecting fragmented wildlife habitats, stabilising watersheds across the basin, and rebuilding the resilience of all north-western India.

A people's shield

The Sahel's experience confirms a simple truth: where communities are excluded, walls crumble; where they are made stewards, shields endure. Through Mission LIFE, the Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign and the Amrit Sarovar Mission, restoration in India has become a people's movement - the work of citizens, schools, civil society and the private sector as much as of government. Every restored hectare, every revived pond, and every nurtured tree adds a fibre to the living shield that guards our water, our biodiversity and our climate. As the world marks World Desertification and Drought Day 2026, the Aravalli Green Wall stands as a powerful symbol of India's resolve - a resolve that must now be matched by a definition strong enough to hold the line. Reviving the Aravallis is not about building a wall of trees; it is about restoring, and defending, an ancient living shield for the generations to come. The time to act is now - for the land, for the climate, and for the future.

Switzerland's ten million: What a ceiling cannot survive



ACHARYA PRASHANT

A referendum asks a society to do what a person is almost never asked about her own life: name a number and stop. Not a target, revised upward the moment reached, but a ceiling the system agrees in advance never to cross.

On June 14, Switzerland was asked to set one. The proposal, brought by the country's largest party, would have capped the permanent resident population at ten million by 2050, with tightening measures triggered earlier and the EU free movement agreement at risk if the cap

held too long. Turnout reached fifty-nine per cent. Nearly fifty-five per cent said no. It is easy to read this as a story about immigration, and at the level of posters and platforms that is what it was. Underneath sat a more interesting question, one the campaign never had to answer because the vote answered it by default: can a wealthy, secure nation set a limit for itself before crisis sets one for it? Switzerland was asked, and found it could not.

Switzerland's fertility rate sits around 1.5, below the 2.1 needed to hold a population steady. The population stood at about 9.1 million by end-2025, with the over-sixties now outnumbering the under-twenties; official projections put the figure at 10.5 million by 2055, almost all from migration. The number the proposal tried to hold was never the country's own; migration supplied nearly all the growth it was meant to stop.

Foreign nationals already make up twenty-seven per cent of residents, over a third of the workforce, with hundreds of thousands more crossing the border daily for work. The campaign cited gross arrival figures without mentioning the exits set against them; net migration, the figure that actually moves the population, is a fraction of that. A cap sounds simple, but in practice meant unwinding the agreement that lets Swiss firms hire across Europe, and with it the trade carrying nearly half of Swiss exports. The government itself had warned that holding to any fixed number would demand measures incompatible with the country's prosperity. It was an accurate description of the bill.

The housing pressure behind the campaign was real: Geneva's vacancy rate fell to 0.34 per cent, among the tightest in Europe. But the shortage is first a matter of construction, zoning and underinvestment, not headcount, and would have produced the same crisis at any population level.

So when Swiss voters said no, they were mostly voting against a specific trigger, attached to a party leaning on fear of outsiders, in a year when severing ties to its largest market looked like self-harm. The no was local, contingent, reasonable on its own terms. But notice what the reasonableness conceals. The question of where a stop might fall was never put to a clean test, because by the time it reached the ballot it had already been wired into every artery that would have to be cut before the question could be answered. The ceiling lost not to greed but to interdependence; the system had arranged itself so growth was the only answer compatible with everything else the country had built. Switzerland had been here before: in 2014 it narrowly voted to cap immigration, then quietly declined to enforce it, because the same agreements made enforcement cost more than the country would pay. The vote can say stop. The structure keeps moving.

Here the deeper pattern shows itself, and it has nothing to do with Switzerland alone. A person never produces a stable figure for enough. Ask someone with savings what amount would let him stop checking, and the number retreats as it is approached. The referendum makes visible that the same movement runs at civilisational scale, without anyone wanting more of anything. Switzerland holds roughly the third-highest income per head on earth, by any ordinary measure a society that has arrived. Yet holding a number, merely holding it, could not survive contact with the machinery of how the place runs. No voter had to be greedy for this: a national income figure has no terminal value past which a country may stop, neither does a trade relationship or a labour market, and together they form a structure with the exact signature of an ego that cannot say enough: permanent forward motion, no terminal state, no one whose task is to ask whether the motion still serves anyone.

The cruder reading says Switzerland is rich and wished to stay rich. The truer reading is stranger: the proposal could have been drafted by cleaner hands, and the verdict would likely have been the same, because it was laid down in decades of treaties and hiring practices, each rational alone, none asking what all of them together were for. A civilisation's reaching is dispersed across millions of decisions made by people not reaching for anything; it only loses anyone willing to own it. None of this makes the campaign innocent; trading in suspicion of outsiders answers for its own language. But the hostility to outsiders is a problem with an address. The inability to define enough has none, and that is why it outlives every election the louder problem loses. A Green parliamentarian, Sibel Arslan, observed that something shifted regardless of the result: capping a population now sits inside speakable policy in a way it did not before. A society can refuse a number and still be changed by having weighed one. A steadier-handed version of this vote might well pass. It would still not answer what this one raised, since passing a tighter mechanism is not the same as a system discovering a working sense of enough. Other wealthy nations should not mistake a different outcome for a different structure: not one keeps a stated population ceiling, and the absence of Switzerland's quarrel elsewhere is not evidence of a healthier relationship to limits. It only means the question has not yet been put plainly enough to compel one. The number Switzerland was asked to hold would have begun retreating the moment it was reached, the way it retreats from a man watching a balance. What the vote leaves behind is who, if anyone, still stands close enough to ask why the retreating never stops.



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

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Why India's youth deserve a seat at the decision-making table



ABHINAV NARAYAN JHA

By all demographic measures, India is a young nation. Nearly 65 per cent of its population is below the age of 35, and the country's median age hovers around 28 years. Political leaders across party lines proudly refer to India's youth as its greatest asset, its demographic dividend, and the driving force of a rising global power. Yet, there is an uncomfortable reality that rarely finds space in political speeches: while young Indians dominate the population, they remain conspicuously absent from the institutions that make decisions on their behalf. India may be one of the youngest democracies in terms of population, but its Parliament and Legislative Assemblies tell a completely different story. The contradiction is glaring. According to available data from the 18th Lok Sabha elected in 2024, fewer than one in ten Members of Parliament are between 25 and 40 years of age. The average age of the House is approximately 56 years - one of the highest in independent India's history.

The question, therefore, is straightforward: how can a democracy claim to represent its people when its largest demographic group remains significantly underrepresented in its highest decision-making bodies? It is a question of democratic legit-

imacy. Historically, the situation was far more encouraging. In the first Lok Sabha constituted in 1952, nearly 30 per cent of MPs were aged 40 years or below. Seven decades later, despite India's youthful population growing substantially, youth representation in Parliament has sharply declined to around 10 per cent. Instead of becoming more inclusive and accessible, Indian politics appears to have become increasingly exclusive. Political parties across the ideological spectrum frequently celebrate young voters. Election campaigns are designed around social media outreach, youth conventions, campus interactions, digital engagement and promises of employment and opportunity. Every political party understands the electoral value of young voters. However, when it comes to distributing party tickets, leadership responsibilities and positions of influence, the enthusiasm for youth participation suddenly diminishes. Young Indians are encouraged to vote. But they are rarely encouraged to lead.

The barriers are both visible and invisible. Electoral politics increasingly demands substantial financial resources, extensive organisational networks and years of political patronage. For first-generation aspirants, the path is extraordinarily difficult. This brings us to another uncomfortable truth: dynastic politics. A significant proportion of younger politicians entering Parliament and Assemblies today belong to established political families. While many of these leaders are capable and deserving in their own right, their presence highlights a deeper structural issue.



For every young leader with a political surname, thousands of equally talented young Indians without such advantages remain excluded from the system. The result is a political ecosystem where youth representation exists, but genuine youth inclusion remains limited. Representation should mean creating opportunities for talented young Indians from diverse social, economic and regional backgrounds to participate in governance.

The implications of this democratic deficit are profound. The twenty-first century presents challenges fundamentally different from those faced by previous generations. Artificial intelligence, cyber security, climate change, digital governance, start-up ecosystems, gig-economy employment, mental health concerns, educational reforms and technological disruptions are shaping the lives of millions of young Indians. Yet the voices most directly affected by these issues remain insufficiently represented in legislative

discussions. A Parliament that lacks youth perspectives risks creating policies that are disconnected from contemporary realities. This does not mean experience is unimportant. Governance requires wisdom that often comes with experience. But democracy functions best when experience and innovation coexist. The challenge becomes even more evident at the state level.

Youth wings exist within almost every major political party, but they often function as mobilisation platforms rather than genuine leadership pipelines. Many young leaders spend years organising events, managing campaigns and mobilising supporters without receiving meaningful opportunities to contest elections. This creates frustration, disengagement and cynicism. When politics appears inaccessible, talented individuals increasingly look elsewhere. Entrepreneurs build start-ups. Professionals join corporations. Scholars enter academia. Few see electoral politics as a realistic avenue for public service.

The solution is not symbolic tokenism. The solution lies in structural reform. Political parties should voluntarily allocate a meaningful percentage of tickets to candidates below the age of 40. Internal party elections must become more transparent and merit-based. Campaign finance reforms should reduce the overwhelming financial barriers that discourage young entrants. Structured mentorship programmes should connect experienced legislators with emerging leaders.

Equally important is the creation of institutional pathways. Youth Parliaments, student legislatures, public policy fellowships and civic leader-

ship initiatives should not remain ceremonial exercises. They must become genuine training grounds that connect young citizens with real political opportunities. India, despite possessing one of the youngest populations globally, risks lagging behind if it fails to address this imbalance.

The responsibility does not rest solely with political parties. Young Indians themselves must move beyond political spectatorship. Democracy cannot be strengthened merely through social media commentary. It requires active participation, organisational engagement, public service and leadership. However, participation can flourish only when opportunities exist. The real question is whether India's political establishment is ready to trust them with it. For decades, political leaders have referred to young people as the future of India. That statement is no longer sufficient. India's youth are not simply the future. They are the present. They are taxpayers, entrepreneurs, innovators, students, professionals, farmers, workers and voters. They are shaping the country's economy, society and global reputation every day. Surely they deserve a greater role in shaping its laws as well. If India truly believes that its youth are its greatest strength, then the time has come to offer them not just a voice in election campaigns, but a seat in Parliament and Legislative Assemblies where the nation's future is ultimately decided.

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'Yoga Day participation not must for public servants'



The Calcutta High Court on Friday disposed of a petition by an employees' union questioning a West Bengal government order on participation in the International Yoga Day function, noting that the state clarified it is a general appeal to all public servants and not mandatory. Claiming that a memo issued by West Bengal's chief secretary called for mandatory participation in the celebration by all employees, the State Coordination Committee of West Bengal Government Employees, a Left-leaning organisation, challenged his authority to issue the directive. Disposing of the petition after receiving the government's stand from additional advocate general Billwadal Bhattacharya, Justice Amrita Sinha verbally observed, "This litigation was not required." The court noted that the written instruction by the West Bengal government mentions that the chief secretary's order "is a general appeal to all public servants to participate in the official function on the occasion of International Day of Yoga."

It stated that the order is "not mandatory in nature and no punitive or coercive action was contemplated or incorporated in case of failure to attend due to personal reasons." (PTI)

Expedite decision on lawyer's plea on Bengal SIR: SC

The Supreme Court on Friday asked an appellate tribunal to expedite decision on an appeal filed by an advocate challenging the deletion of his name from the voters' list after the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal. A bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justice V Mohana noted that the petitioner appeared to be a bona fide resident of West Bengal. The counsel appearing for the petitioner told the bench that the 75-year-old is an advocate for around five decades and he was a valid voter before the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise was carried out in the state. "You (petitioner) appear to be a bona fide resident of West Bengal. You know the mechanism which we have created," the bench said.

The counsel said the petitioner had filed an appeal before the appellate tribunal against the deletion of his name, but it had not been decided yet. The bench noted that the petitioner is stated to be an advocate in Murshidabad since 1977 and his name was deleted from the electoral rolls in the SIR exercise. It disposed of the plea while requesting the appellate tribunal to decide his appeal expeditiously and preferably within two months.

Approximately 700 judicial officers from West Bengal and neighbouring Odisha and Jharkhand were deployed to deal with around 60 lakh claims and objections of those whose names were deleted from the voters' list during the SIR exercise.

Later, at the direction of the top court, the chief justice of the Calcutta High Court set up 19 appellate tribunals headed by former high court chief justices and judges to decide appeals against deletion of names from the voters' list. (PTI)

SC dismisses probe into May 13 trust vote in TN Assembly

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a plea seeking probe into the alleged irregularities and corruption in the May 13 trust vote in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice V Mohana refused to entertain the plea, observing it was based upon "vague, wild and casual allegations" without any reliable material on record to substantiate the claim.

On May 13, the C Joseph Vijay-led TVK government in Tamil Nadu crossed a major hurdle by comfortably winning the trust vote with the support of 25 rebel AIADMK MLAs amid a walkout by the DMK.

Although the TVK on its own did not secure the majority in the 234-member Tamil Nadu Assembly, Vijay managed to get support from the Congress, VCK, CPI, CPI (M) and IUML to gather 120 MLAs and cross the 118 mark to form the government, an act seen as a demonstration of his political adaptability beyond his image as a popular actor. The Opposition made allegations of horse-trading that were rejected by Vijay. (PTI)



SC refuses urgent hearing on NEET-UG pleas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to accord urgent hearing on two separate pleas related to the NEET-UG 2026 re-test which is scheduled for June 21.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice V Mohana said these petitions would be heard by a bench headed by Justice P S Narasimha in July when the apex court will resume normal functioning after the partial court working days.

"All NEET matters will go before Justice Narasimha's bench," the CJ said when one of the lawyers mentioned the matter for urgent listing.

On May 12, the National Testing Agency (NTA) had cancelled the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate), or NEET-UG, held on May 3 for medical admissions amid allegations of paper leak.

The CBI is currently investigating the matter, and a re-test is scheduled for June 21.

Advocate Adeel Ahmed men-



tioned a separate petition filed by students and NEET-UG aspirants before the bench and sought urgent listing.

The top court said the plea would be heard by Justice Narasimha-led bench, which is already seized of petitions related to the exam.

The plea has sought a direction to the Centre and others to reconsider the feasibility of conducting the examination on June 21 after

taking into account the representations of aspirants.

It said the petitioners have collected and placed on record a compilation of representations received from aspirants belonging to multiple states and Union Territories across the country.

"The representations disclose a remarkable uniformity of concerns, including mental trauma, severe anxiety, uncertainty arising from

cancellation of the original examination, inadequate preparation time, apprehensions concerning examination integrity, clashes with other examinations, logistical difficulties and adverse effects on mental health," the plea said.

It said the decision to conduct a fresh examination was not under challenge and the grievance of petitioners was confined to the "arbitrary and unreasonable fixation" of the re-test date without affording adequate preparation time to candidates.

The plea said abrupt cancellation of the original examination and the subsequent announcement of the re-test date resulted in widespread uncertainty and psychological distress amongst candidates.

It said the "atmosphere surrounding the re-examination has been marked by repeated circulation of alleged paper leak claims, purported leaked question papers, social media rumours and widespread misinformation, requiring repeated responses and clarifications from the authorities themselves".

"Public reports have highlighted

serious mental-health consequences amongst NEET aspirants following the cancellation and controversy surrounding the examination process, including reports of suicides by aspirants," the plea said. It has also sought a direction to the authorities to postpone and reschedule the re-NEET-UG 2026 examination after providing a reasonable preparation period to all affected candidates.

While hearing a batch of separate pleas related to NEET-UG 2026, the top court on May 29 stressed that the real problem relating to the medical entrance examination would not stop till "actual accountability arises".

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta had then told the apex court that the government was seriously concerned about the concerns of the youths and Prime Minister Narendra Modi was personally supervising the situation so that "there is no lacunae".

Mehta had also said that some new mechanisms have been put in place for the NEET-UG re-test scheduled for June 21.

SC bats for creation of young lawyers assistance fund to prevent brain drain

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Noting that young and bright advocates are deserting the profession due to financial hardships, the Supreme Court on Friday said a "Young Lawyers' Professional Assistance Fund" must be created to stop the "brain drain".

The apex court also took note of problems faced by women lawyers and said when they are required to spend substantial portions of their day within the court premises, availability of basic infrastructure necessary for their comfort, privacy, safety and professional functioning assumes utmost significance.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice V Mohana issued notice to the Centre, all states and Union Territories and others seeking their responses on a plea which highlighted the financial challenges faced by young lawyers during the formative years of practice.

The plea filed by a group of women advocates also raised issue concerning the accessibility, inclusiveness and long-term sustainability of women lawyers in the legal profession.

The bench said the issue



concerning financial challenges faced by young lawyers is gender-neutral and also merits serious consideration. It said a young first-generation lawyer entering the Bar does not immediately inherit an office, a library, a stable clientele or a predictable source of income.

It said during this formative period, many junior advocates remain dependent on modest stipends paid by their seniors or in some places, by the local Bar associations, which are often insufficient to meet even their basic living expenses.

The top court said absence of a steady stream of clients and the limited remuneration available during these years tends to create extreme financial hardship.

"It is this period of turmoil that often compels capable

and promising young lawyers to abandon practice at the Bar altogether. We apprehend that such attrition may produce a form of professional brain drain, diminishing the ability of the Bar to attract and retain the young and meritorious," the bench said.

It said the challenge was particularly acute for first-generation lawyers and those belonging to economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

"It thus seems to us that a Young Lawyers' Professional Assistance Fund must be created and should be established under the exclusive control of the jurisdictional high courts or an autonomous body constituted by the Union of India in consultation with the state governments," the bench said.

House help murder case: Accused doctor sent to two-day police custody

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

A Delhi court on Friday sent a 50-year-old dermatologist, accused of killing his domestic help at his upscale south Delhi residence, to two days' police custody.

The doctor has admitted his guilt during interrogation, according to officials.

Judicial Magistrate Anurag Chhabra heard the Delhi Police plea seeking two-day custody of the accused and allowed it.

According to police, Dr Manish Gupta allegedly killed his domestic help, Meena, at his residence on Thursday morning by bludgeoning her with a cricket bat and stabbing her multiple times. He allegedly suspected her of practising black magic and held her responsible for persistent discord in his family.

Delhi Police sought Dr Gupta's custody, contending that they need to investigate if other people were also involved and to find new facts in the case.

Opposing the plea, defence counsel submitted before the court that the accused has been in police custody for the past 24 hours. "Everything has been seized by the police; he has been in police custody for



the last 24 hours. He is already suffering from depression, and he is a well-reputed doctor," he argued.

According to police, the accused is on antidepressants and allegedly attacked his 45-year-old domestic help on his terrace. He was found standing near the blood-soaked body when police arrived and allegedly confessed to the killing.

Police said the exact motive behind the murder at the doctor's Mount Kailash house is yet to be conclusively established, and all angles, including disputes within his family and his mental state, are being examined.

Police received a PCR call at around 11.36 am from a resident who reported that a woman had been murdered on the terrace of a neighbouring building and

was lying in a pool of blood. The accused was immediately apprehended and taken into custody. During preliminary questioning, he allegedly admitted that he had first assaulted Meena with a bat and then stabbed her with a knife. Police have seized both the bat and the knife from the spot.

However, investigators said the accused has claimed during questioning that he believed Meena practised black magic and that her presence in the house had disturbed peace within the family.

According to sources, the doctor had wanted to remove Meena from employment for the past two to three years, but his wife was opposed to the move. This reportedly became a recurring source of tension within the family.

Court issues summons to actor Allu Arjun, others

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Hyderabad

A city court has issued summons to top Telugu actor Allu Arjun and other accused to appear before it in person on June 22, in a case related to the death of a woman in a stampede during the premiere of 'Pushpa 2' at Sandhya theatre here.

The Hyderabad police had earlier filed a charge sheet against 23 persons in the court in connection with the case.

Following the charge sheet, filed on December 24, the court issued summons to all 23 accused, including Allu Arjun, directing them to appear before it on June 22. The theatre's owner, part-



ners, manager, lower-balcony in-charge and gatekeeper were named as accused No. 1 to 10 in the charge sheet, while Arjun has been named as accused No. 11.

Allu Arjun was arrested after the 35-year-old woman died and her eight-year-old

son was injured in the stampede during the screening of 'Pushpa 2' at the theatre on December 4, 2024.

The stampede occurred as fans gathered to catch a glimpse of the actor during the 'Pushpa 2' premiere. Following the incident, the

city police registered a case against Allu Arjun, his security team and the theatre management under different sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at the Chikkadpally station, based on a complaint lodged by the deceased woman's family.

Allu Arjun was arrested on December 13, 2024 in the case, and was released the next day after the Telangana High Court granted him interim bail. He was granted regular bail later.

Allu Arjun and the makers of 'Pushpa 2' had extended financial assistance to the family of the boy.

The Telangana government had also announced financial assistance to the family.

MP HC vacates stay on SSE-2025 main exam



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jabalpur

The Madhya Pradesh High Court has vacated its interim stay on holding the main exam of the MPPSC State Services Examination (SSE)-2025.

This ends the year-long wait for around 4,000 candidates aspiring to become deputy collectors, deputy superintendents of police, tehsildars and other state positions. An official said they will now be able to take the main exam after clearing the preliminary test.

A division bench comprising Acting Chief Justice Vivek Ruisia and Justice Pradeep Mittal passed the order on Thursday while hearing a clutch of petitions challenging certain provisions and procedures related to the examination process.

The court, on April 2, 2025, had directed that the main exam of the State Services Examination should not be conducted without its permission. Senior advocate Rameshwar Thakur, appearing for the petitioners, submitted that since their pleas were unlikely to be disposed of in the immediate

future, the stay on the main examination should be lifted and the remaining legal issues could be heard separately at a later date.

Accepting the request, the division bench vacated the interim stay and permitted the Madhya Pradesh Public Service Commission (MPPSC) to conduct the main examination, Thakur said.

The petitioners have challenged, among other issues, the constitutional validity of rules relating to the non-disclosure of category-wise cut-off marks in the preliminary examination results of the SSE-2025.

The petitioners also questioned the alleged non-selection of meritorious reserved category candidates against unreserved posts and the non-migration of candidates who availed age relaxation and other concessions to the unreserved category, Thakur said.

During the proceedings, the MPPSC submitted category-wise cut-off marks to the court in a sealed cover but did not specifically respond to the issues raised in the petitions, he said.

The high court will next hear the matter on July 17.

Create enabling conditions for women lawyers: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday stressed the need to create conditions that enable women advocates to discharge their professional responsibilities effectively, safely and on equal terms.

Taking note of issues raised in a plea that flagged the absence of adequately equipped ladies' Bar rooms and other essential facilities in most of the courts, tribunals and commissions across the country, the apex court said the concerns raised could not be brushed aside as a matter of mere convenience.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice V Mohana said the legal profession has witnessed a steady and encouraging increase in the participation of women over the last few decades.



"However, the mere opening of doors alone cannot be a sufficient cause for celebration," the bench said.

"In order for their participation to be made meaningful, it must be accompanied by the creation of conditions that enable women advocates to discharge their professional responsibilities effectively, safely, and on equal terms," it said.

The top court said availability of adequately equipped

spaces for women professionals within the court complexes was one such indispensable condition.

The bench issued a notice to the Centre, all states and Union Territories and others, seeking their responses on the plea.

It said a court complex may simply appear to be a designated venue where legal proceedings are conducted, but those who live their lives in service of the law know it to be much more.

"It functions as a workplace where substantial portions of their professional lives are spent and, not infrequently, assumes the character of a second home," the bench said, while highlighting that most of the advocates spend long hours within these premises.

It said the absence of a designated area where such basic facilities are made available to women, disproportionately

impacts them and may, in certain cases, discourage them from continuing practice.

"The provision of such essential facilities prima facie bears a direct nexus with the fundamental guarantee of life and dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution," the bench said.

It said the expression 'life' under Article 21 has consistently received an expansive interpretation from the apex court and has been understood to encompass those conditions which enable an individual to live and work with dignity.

"When women advocates are required to spend substantial portions of their day within court premises, the availability of basic infrastructure necessary for their comfort, privacy, safety, and professional functioning assumes utmost significance," the bench said.

Jio board approves draft papers for IPO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

The board of Jio Platforms Ltd, the digital and telecommunications arm of Reliance Industries, approved filing draft papers for an initial public offering involving a fresh issue of up to 27 crore equity shares, RIL said on Friday.

Addressing the 49th annual shareholder meeting of Reliance, chairman and managing director Mukesh Ambani said the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP), approved by the board of Jio Platforms, will be filed with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Friday. The proposed IPO

comprises a fresh issue of up to 27 crore shares with a face value of ₹10 each. The issue price will be determined through a book-building process in accordance with SEBI regulations.

Jio Platforms is a subsidiary of Reliance Industries and houses the group's telecommunications, digital services and technology businesses.

The company did not disclose the price band or the total size of the offering, which will depend on the final issue price and regulatory approvals.

Ambani called the Jio IPO the company's most significant value-creation event of the year, saying the listing



Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani addressing the 49th Annual General Meeting (post-IPO) of Reliance Industries Limited in Mumbai. PTI

would unlock value for Reliance shareholders while offering new investors an opportunity to participate

in the company's growth. He said the IPO process is being led by his children — Akash, Isha and Anant —

who will spearhead the next phase of growth and value creation at Jio.

"The proposed listing of Jio will demonstrate to the world that India can build technology companies of global scale, global capability, and global value," Ambani said. The Jio IPO is described as "the most important value creation milestone this year", one that will "unlock great value for Reliance shareholders and offer an attractive investment opportunity to others".

Alongside the IPO announcement, five strategic priorities for Jio's next phase of expansion were outlined. The company plans to

accelerate the adoption of its JioTrue5G network, targeting migration of its entire subscriber base to 5G by 2030, while advancing India's role in the development of 6G standards.

Jio also aims to expand high-speed broadband access through JioAirFiber, its fixed wireless access service.

The company will continue its efforts to digitise small and medium-sized businesses through products such as JioPC, a cloud computing service delivered via a set-top box, and expand the use of artificial intelligence across consumer services, network operations and customer support.

Selloff in IT stocks; Sensex down 600 points



Stock market benchmark indices ended lower on Friday, snapping a five-day rally, with the Sensex declining 607 points and the Nifty falling to the 24,013.10 level, dragged by heavy selling in IT firms after global tech giant Accenture trimmed its full-year revenue growth guidance. Renewed geopolitical uncertainty over postponement of talks to finalise US-Iran peace deal in Switzerland also dampened investor sentiment. The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 607.08 points, or 0.78 per cent, to settle at 76,802.90. During the day, it tanked 940.26 points, or 1.21 per cent, to 76,469.72. The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 154.90 points, or 0.64 per cent, to end at 24,013.10. The Sensex had jumped 3,577.43 points, or 4.84 per cent, in the last five trading sessions, and the Nifty climbed 1,006.4 points, or 4.34 per cent. Among the 30-share Sensex constituents, IT firms were the major losers. The BSE IT index dropped 3.57 per cent. Infosys dived 6.69 per cent, Tata Consultancy Services dropped 3.53 per cent, HCL Tech 2.74 per cent, and Tech Mahindra ended 2.45 per cent lower. HDFC Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance Industries and Hindustan Unilever were also among the laggards. However, Eternal, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid and NTPC were among the winners. US Vice President JD Vance has postponed his visit to Switzerland to meet Iranian negotiators, with the White House citing logistical issues. The negotiations, aimed at resolving the technical aspects of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the US and Iran, were scheduled to take place in Switzerland on Friday. "Indian equity markets retreated after five consecutive sessions of gains, as investors booked profits amid renewed geopolitical uncertainty and sharp selling in IT stocks. Sentiment weakened following Accenture's cautious earnings outlook, while the postponement of scheduled US-Iran negotiations undermined expectations of a smooth progression in the broader peace process," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. (PTI)

Mukesh Ambani urges engineers to build Indian AI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Reliance Industries' Chairman Mukesh Ambani on Friday placed the country's engineering talent at the centre of Jio's massive artificial intelligence push, calling on them to join forces to "build for India" as the Reliance Intelligence enters the next phase, of execution.

Asserting that India should not remain a mere consumer of AI built elsewhere, Ambani outlined Jio's next growth chapter that pivots heavily toward artificial intelligence. "I firmly believe that India should not be a mere consumer of AI created elsewhere. It must become a creator, adopter, and global leader in AI," Ambani said while speaking at Reliance Industries' 49th AGM.

He noted that Reliance Intelligence announced last year aimed to build a profitable AI infrastructure, platform, and services business serving consumers, enterprises, and governments at scale. "We set out with a clear vision, identified the focus areas, and



began building the right partnerships with Google, Meta, and NVIDIA. Now, we are entering the next phase — Execution," he said.

Jio delivered on its promise made a decade ago of providing broadband connectivity to everyone, everywhere, and Reliance Intelligence is now promising AI to everyone, everywhere, he said.

"And we shall deliver on this promise too," he added. Ambani attributed the success of the Jio revolution to courage, creativity, and commitment of thousands of young Indian

engineers who helped Jio in shattering the myth that the country could only import foreign technology.

"Before Jio, many believed that India could only import technology from the world. Our engineers proved otherwise. They built, tested, deployed, and operated technologies at an unprecedented scale," Ambani said.

Today, Jio is not just integrating technology, it is creating original technology. Reliance Intelligence offers an even bigger opportunity to young, promising engineers.

"They will get to work on problems of national scale and impact. They will build and deploy technology for 1.5 billion Indians.

They will create India-born innovation that the world can adopt," Ambani said. Inviting them to "come, build with us, and build for India," Ambani promised the scale, resources, and freedom to develop powerful, language-fluent, and affordable AI that empowers everyone from farmers to creators while actively driving productivity and job creation.

"...Come, build with us. And build for India. Build AI that serves humanity; AI that is powerful, trusted, yet affordable; AI that is fluent in every Indian language; AI that empowers farmers, students, doctors, shopkeepers, workers, creators, and families... We will give you the scale, the resources, the freedom, and the responsibility to solve some of the most important challenges of our age," Ambani added.

Reliance eyes India's own satellite broadband network

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

After taking the lead in the telecom services segment on the ground, IPO-bound Jio is now looking to step up its game in connectivity from the skies with indigenous communications satellites, Jio Platforms managing director Akash Ambani said on Friday.

At present, the satellite communications segment is dominated by foreign companies like Elon Musk-led Starlink and French service provider Eutelsat.

"Jio connected India on the ground. Now, we must connect India from the skies. There are still remotest villages, island communities, and border outposts where the Jio network cannot reach. For them, satellite connectivity will be the bridge to the rest of India. Jio is evaluating the development of a



sovereign Low Earth Orbit satellite constellation for India," Ambani said. While speaking at the 49th Annual General Meeting of Reliance Industries Limited, he said Jio is also partnering with a global constellation for leasing satellite capacity.

"We are also partnering with the leading global constellation providers by leasing satellite capacity, so that we can accelerate service availability while building our own long-term sovereign capability.

This dual approach will enable Jio to meet India's connectivity needs faster, while laying the foundation for the Indian satellite broadband platform of global scale," Ambani said.

Gold slumps ₹3,392 to ₹1.45 lakh on weak global trends

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Gold futures slumped ₹3,392 to ₹1.45 lakh per 10 grams on Friday, tracking weak global trends amid uncertainty over the implementation of a US-Iran peace agreement, which eroded demand for the precious metals.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, the yellow metal for August delivery extended their losses for the second straight session, declining ₹3,392, or 2.27 per cent, to ₹1,45,917 per 10 grams in a business turnover of 9,099 lots. Analysts said the initial optimism over the US-Iran

peace agreement faded after high-level talks scheduled in Switzerland were called off, raising doubts over the implementation of measures aimed at ending hostilities and restoring oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz.

Switzerland's foreign ministry said talks scheduled for Friday to discuss the next phase of the agreement "have been postponed for the time being". According to reports, US Vice-President JD Vance had postponed a planned visit, while Iran's participation in discussions also remained uncertain.

These developments have left investors unconvinced



that the peace process will be implemented smoothly, analysts said. Gold prices faced downward pressure on Friday amid a stronger US dollar, which has contributed to this decline, Gaurav Garg,

Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said. In the global markets, Comex gold futures for August contract declined \$95, or 2.24 per cent, at \$4,150.90 per ounce in New York.

SILVER FUTURES SINK 4 PERCENT

New Delhi: Silver futures tumbled by ₹8,766 to ₹2.28 lakh per kg on Friday as investors dumped precious metals amid uncertainty over the US-Iran peace agreement and a broader selloff in the global markets. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, the white metal for July delivery slumped by ₹8,766, or 4 per cent, to ₹2,28,806 per kilogram in a business turnover of 11,080 lots. The metal had suffered a steep correction in the previous session, plunging ₹14,235, or 5.7 per cent, to close at ₹2.37 lakh per kg from Wednesday's closing level of ₹2.51 lakh per kg. Analysts said optimism surrounding the US-Iran peace process faded after high-level talks scheduled in Switzerland were called off, raising doubts over the implementation of measures aimed at ending hostilities. US Vice President JD Vance postponed his visit to Switzerland. According to reports, no Iranian delegation had been confirmed, raising fresh questions about the timeline for restoring oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz. (PTI)

Bandhan Bank increases FCNR(B) deposit rates



Private sector lender Bandhan Bank on Friday said it has increased interest rates on Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) [FCNR(B)] deposits for non-resident Indian customers. The bank will now offer an interest rate of 7.1 per cent on US dollar-denominated FCNR(B) deposits of USD 1 million and above for tenures ranging from 3 to 5 years, according to a company release. For deposits up to USD 1 million, the interest rate has increased to 7 per cent, the bank said in a release. "We are pleased to introduce this attractive FCNR(B) deposit offering for our NRI customers at a time when they are seeking stability and value in their overseas investments. This offering allows them to lock in competitive returns for a longer duration while effectively mitigating currency-related risks," said Rajinder Kumar Babbar, executive director and chief business officer of Bandhan Bank. The offering comes in the wake of the RBI's decision to introduce a USD-Rupee forex swap facility for banks on fresh FCNR(B) deposits mobilised for a minimum tenor of three years and up to five years. The central bank's move aims to encourage foreign currency inflows into the domestic banking system and ease pressure on liquidity. Bandhan Bank said the revised FCNR(B) rates provide NRIs an opportunity to lock in competitive returns over a medium- to long-term horizon while reducing exposure to currency fluctuations, particularly in the event of rupee depreciation. (PTI)

Mahindra Lifespaces buys Mumbai land for project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Realty firm Mahindra Lifespace Developers has acquired a 15-acre land parcel in Mumbai to develop a housing project with an estimated revenue of ₹5,600 crore. In a regulatory filing on Friday, the company said the land parcel is located at Kandivali East, Mumbai.

The project has an estimated revenue potential of ₹5,600 crore and development potential of around 1.8 million square feet. The land



has been acquired through a competitive bidding process, the company said, but did not disclose the bid value.

India, Germany aim for energy independence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India and Germany share a common challenge of reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels and increasing energy independence, said German Ambassador to India Philipp Ackermann.

He was speaking at the tenth edition of the GSDP Conversation Series under the theme 'Energy Security through Renewable Energies' on Thursday.

"India has made significant progress in renewable energy deployment, with renewable sources now con-



tributing around 26 per cent of electricity generation," he added.

The Indo-German Partnership for Green and Sustainable Development

address, Ackermann said renewable energy is no longer just a climate imperative but also an economic and strategic necessity. Renewables create a powerful trinity of climate action, economic opportunity, and energy security, he opined.

The GSDP partnership is particularly significant as India and Germany mark 75 years of diplomatic relations.

The longstanding bilateral development cooperation has evolved into a partnership addressing climate action and sustainable development for resilient economic growth.

India beauty market to hit \$39 billion by 2030: Report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India's beauty and personal care (BPC) products market is projected to reach \$39 billion by 2030, driven by a fundamental shift in consumer behaviour, according to a report by e-commerce major Flipkart.

Once an aspirational segment, beauty is increasingly being viewed as a daily essential for self-care and identity rather than an occasional indulgence, the report said.

According to the 'Flipkart GlamUp Annual Beauty Trends Report 2026', the Indian beauty market, currently valued at approximately \$27 billion, is identified by



industry experts as one of the most attractive growth markets globally.

"India's beauty market is at an inflexion point. What was once an aspirational category has become a daily expression of self-care, confidence, and identity. The opportuni-

ty is significant. India's beauty market is valued at \$27 billion today and is expected to reach \$39 billion by 2030, making it one of the world's most attractive growth markets," Priyanka Bhargava, Senior Director of Brand Strategy & Insights at Flipkart,

said. The leading e-commerce platform noted that consumers purchase 12 beauty products every second on its website.

During the first quarter of the financial year 2025-26, the platform's BPC business recorded a 1.5x year-on-year growth in Gross Merchandise Value (GMV), while both orders and units in the category grew by 1.6x.

A significant portion of this growth was attributed to Gen Z consumers, who now account for more than half of BPC buyers on the platform.

The report further highlights the democratisation of beauty across the country, noting that two out of every three beauty-related search-

es originate from non-metro markets. Furthermore, almost one-third of BPC sales on the platform now come from Tier-2 and smaller towns.

This has led to the emergence of 'PIN code Beauty', a trend in which demand is shaped by hyperlocal factors such as regional climate, pollution levels, and water quality. For example, consumers in Bengaluru have shown a distinct need for hard-water scalp care, while those in Rajasthan frequently seek barrier repair and hydration products.

With a registered user base of more than 500 million, Flipkart's marketplace offers over 150 million products across 80+ categories.

India initiates anti-dumping probe against Chinese, Japanese chemicals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India has initiated an anti-dumping probe against imports of a chemical, used in tyre and rubber products, from China and Japan, a commerce ministry notification said.

The investigation followed a complaint in this regard by Atul Ltd to the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR). The applicant has alleged that the cheap imports of 'Resorcinol' is significantly harming the domestic industry. "On the basis of the duly substanti-



ated application filed by the applicant and having satisfied itself, on the basis of the prima facie evidence submitted by the applicant, regarding dumping of the subject goods...the authority hereby initiates an anti-dumping

investigation," the DGTR's notification said.

In the probe, the directorate would determine the existence, degree and effect of the alleged dumping of the chemical exported from China and Japan.

FROM THE WORLD

NEPAL
Zoo closed over Bird flu

The Central Zoo in Jawalakhel in Nepal's Lalitpur district, the only zoo in the country, has been closed for at least two weeks from Saturday after the detection of bird flu in several birds and animals. Ganesh Koirala, the zoo's spokesperson, said several birds and animals have died from avian influenza, the Kathmandu Post newspaper reported. The National Trust for Nature Conservation, which manages the Central Zoo, announced the closure of the zoo on Friday until further notice. The bird flu test conducted on the carcasses of crows and pigeons found inside the sanctuary confirmed the fowl infection. Koirala said the virus was detected in egrets, owls and vultures housed at the zoo. It has also been confirmed in civets and leopard cats. He said around eight to 10 birds and animals have died in the outbreak.

SOUTH SUDAN
Vietnamese sent home

A Vietnamese national deported to South Sudan by the Trump administration under its controversial third-country deportation program was repatriated to Vietnam on Friday after spending more than a year in detention. South Sudan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the repatriation of 44-year-old Tuan Phan at a press briefing on Friday. "We are grateful that while in our custody Mr. Phan was very disciplined, joyful, and importantly, he remained healthy," said spokesperson Agok Anyar. Phan and seven other men were sent to Africa in May 2025, rerouted first to a US military base in Djibouti after a federal judge blocked their deportation to South Sudan midflight, citing procedural irregularities. They arrived in Juba, South Sudan's Capital, aboard a military aircraft in July 2025 after a Supreme Court ruling greenlit their removal.

Israeli strikes kill 21 amid intense fighting in Lebanon

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Jerusalem

Talks between the US and Iran were called off on Friday after intense fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, three officials said, raising questions about a nascent agreement to end the war in Iran. Iranian officials didn't travel as planned to Switzerland, insisting that the fighting in Lebanon must stop before the talks can take place, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the ongoing mediation to try to get the talks rescheduled. US Vice President JD Vance also cancelled his trip. Israel's military



Displaced family riding with their belongings in the back of a truck as they leaving southern Lebanon

struck targets in southern and eastern Lebanon overnight, and Hezbollah reported intense fighting. Lebanon's Health Ministry said at least 21 people were

killed, and Israel said four soldiers died. The conflict between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah is the most precarious part of the Iran deal. Neither Israel nor the

militant group signed the agreement - but it is supposed to end their fighting, and Iran has signaled its willingness to risk renewed war in the region for the sake of

its interests in Lebanon and its most important regional ally.

Mediators are now scrambling to reschedule the meetings, which were supposed to begin addressing how to restrict Iran's nuclear program - the core issue over which Israel and the US went to war on February 28.

The talks are also supposed to bring about a permanent end to the conflict. The interim deal has already reopened the Strait of Hormuz to international shipping, after Iranian attacks and threats all but stopped the flow of oil and natural gas through the waterway. A new Iranian authority charged with overseeing the strait issued guidance Friday calling

on ships to register with it even as transits are currently free - signalling Tehran's intent to likely start charging.

The Israeli military said strikes were ongoing on Friday after four of its soldiers, including a lieutenant colonel, were killed in an attack on a tank in a village near the southern Lebanese city of Nabatiyeh. An explosive drone attack wounded another five, it added.

Israel then launched multiple strikes against "Hezbollah infrastructure sites" in Nabatiyeh and other areas, according to a military statement, which accused the militant group of "blatant ceasefire violations."

Later, the military said it also struck targets in the

Beqaa Valley in eastern Lebanon, with Lebanese media saying the village of Douris was hit.

"Israel will not tolerate attacks on our soldiers or on our territory, and it will exact a very heavy price from Hezbollah for these attacks," Netanyahu said in a statement Friday.

Hezbollah acknowledged targeting Israeli tanks and said its attacks were in response to what it called Israel's own violation of the ceasefire. It said the attacks came after Israeli forces attempted to reach the northern side of Ali al-Taher hilltop, a strategic point that overlooks Nabatiyeh and that Israeli troops have been trying to capture.

Pak delegation to attend funeral of Ali Khamenei

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
Islamabad

A Pakistani delegation will attend the funeral of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was assassinated in the US-Israeli strikes in February, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced on Friday. Addressing the National Assembly, Sharif said that he held a telephone call with Iranian President Masoud Peshkian on Thursday evening. During the call, Sharif said, the Iranian president repeatedly expressed his gratitude for standing by them in difficult times. Sharif said the Iranian president



asked him to attend the funeral of Ayatollah Khamenei on July 3-4. "I said, Pakistan's delegation will be present there, so we can tell the world how much respect we have for him in our hearts," Sharif told the lawmakers.

He also boasted of Pakistan's role in the peace agreement signed between the US and Iran. (PTI)

Iran signals intent to charge ships for Hormuz transit

AGENCIES
Dubai/New Delhi

A new Iranian authority charged with overseeing the strait issued guidance Friday calling on ships to register with it even as transits are currently free - signalling Tehran's intent to likely start charging.

The notice came from the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, a new agency in the Islamic Republic. The reopening of the Strait of Hormuz marks the end of nearly four months of disruption that sent crude oil prices soaring and heightened concerns over global energy supplies.

The Strait opened after a Memorandum of Understanding, signed by US



President Donald Trump and his Iranian counterpart Masoud Peshkian to end the war, came into effect.

The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, handles roughly 20 per cent of global energy

supplies in normal times. Shipping through the waterway was severely disrupted since February 28, when the US and Israel launched joint attacks on Iran.

Before the conflict, around 138 ships used to pass through the strait every day,

according to the Joint Maritime Information Centre.

At the height of the disruption, the number fell to a single digit. Tehran moved to shut the waterway soon after the US-Israeli bombing began, and Washington responded weeks later with a naval blockade of Iranian ports. The reopening of the Strait is expected to bring relief well beyond the region.

Commodity data firm Kpler estimates that a reopened strait could release roughly 93 million barrels of stranded non-Iranian crude from the Gulf, with a further 72 million barrels of Iranian crude - currently stuck on tankers west of Chabahar - freed up if Washington eases sanctions further. The impact of

the reopening is being felt well beyond West Asia.

A reopened route would allow exports to Europe and Asia to flow again without the costly detours that have pushed up freight and transport costs in recent months. For India, one of the world's largest energy importers, the development offers significant relief, but experts caution that the underlying vulnerabilities exposed by the crisis are far from resolved.

The Strait of Hormuz is the principal export route for Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar. With this Gulf chokepoint blocked, large volumes of crude queued up on tankers waiting for the waterway to clear.

Pak refutes Afghan Taliban's claim of targeting terrorist camps in border areas

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
Islamabad

Pakistan on Friday refuted the Afghan Taliban's claim of targeting terrorist camps of the Islamic State in the border areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan using rudimentary drones.

"The claims are false as usual," the Ministry of Information said in a post on social media. "Terrorist camps, including that of Daesh (ISIS) and more than two dozen other terrorist organisations, are factually located, run and patronised from inside the territories under control of the Afghan Taliban regime," it added. The ministry, however, said



that one rudimentary drone of the Taliban regime intruded inside Pakistan airspace near Shinko, Khyber, which was "immediately identified and neutralised by the alert Air Defence system." Pakistan often blames

Afghanistan for allowing militants to use their soil for attacks against it. The development comes over a week after Pakistan carried out strikes on alleged terrorist hideouts along its border with Afghanistan. (PTI)

EU leaders squabble over outreach to Moscow

SAM MCNEIL
Brussels

European Union leaders have been unable to agree on setting up a back-channel with Moscow to ensure that the bloc's interests are protected should progress be made in negotiations to end Russia's war on Ukraine, some of them said on Friday.

European Council President Antonio Costa, who chaired their two-day summit, had directed his office to reach out to the Kremlin and proposed a senior official to make contact. Costa said his aim was not to mediate or set up a parallel negotiating track to the one led by the United States, which is making little progress. Debate has been swirling around Europe in



Antonio Costa

recent months about whether to appoint a mediator for talks with Russia to help get things moving again, but this has been largely rejected as many believe that Russian President Vladimir Putin would be unlikely to negotiate anyway.

Instead, the 27 EU countries have focused on concessions that Russia should make to secure peace.

Speaking to reporters, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis said the leaders had failed to resolve their differences over the approach overnight. "Europe is unable to agree even on whether there will be negotiations or who will lead them," he said. Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin said that "opening up a channel is not a mistake in our view, and I trust Antonio Costa."

"What was very clear last evening is that any negotiations would have to be first and foremost between Ukraine and Russia, but there are no indications that Russia is coming to the table at all," he said. Putin has tried to cut out Europe and Kyiv from its negotiations with the United States over

Ukraine's future. But the Kremlin said Friday that it would be open for talks with Europe if it abandons its desire to talk to Moscow from the position of force.

"We are ready for contact, we were not the ones who initiated cutting such contacts, terminating them completely," said spokesperson Dmitry Peskov. "If forces emerge that realize the need to resume dialogue with Russia, not to lecturing it or, worse, to issue ultimatums ... then President Putin and the Russian side would certainly be open to it."

As the leaders left their meeting overnight, Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever joked that Costa would be the envoy to Moscow. (AP)

Nepal pushes diplomacy to restart tea exports

SHIISH B PRADHAN
Kathmandu

Nepal has taken diplomatic measures to resume the export of Nepalese tea to India that has been halted for some time.

As Indian authorities imposed strict rules to import Nepalese tea, tea producers in Nepal have suspended their production since Wednesday asking the government to take measures to clear obstacles on way to the export Nepalese tea to India.

"We have already taken diplomatic initiatives to resume export of Nepalese tea to India," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lok Bahadur Paudel Chhetri said.

"There has been continu-



ous coordination between the bodies concerned of Nepal and India regarding the matter," he pointed out. "The talks are heading towards positive direction and we are hopeful for early resolution to the problem,"

he added. On Thursday, a delegation from the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) met Minister for Foreign Affairs Sishir Khanal and requested him to take initiatives to resolve

the problems surfaced in the export of Nepalese tea to India through diplomatic channel. A team led by FNCCI President Anjan Shrestha met the foreign minister and drew his attention towards the problem facing the Nepalese tea industry.

Nepalese tea producers are facing problem due to the new arrangements introduced by the Tea Board of India. Minister for Foreign Affairs Sishir Khanal assured the FNCCI delegation that the government was serious towards obstruction surfaced in the export of Nepalese tea and diplomatic efforts were underway with Indian side regarding this matter. "We have already initiated talks with Indian authorities to resolve issue." (PTI)

Congressman flags rising anti-India hate in US

SAGAR KULKARNI
Washington

Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi has voiced concern on the increase in anti-India hate incidents in the US and urged Americans to stand against bigotry, prejudice and discrimination.

In a social media post on Thursday, the Democratic lawmaker cited an incident in Frisco city in Texas where a group of White supremacists shouted anti-India slogans and tore the Indian flag in front of City Hall.

"I want to sound the alarm on the rise of anti-Indian hate in the United States. Just a couple of weeks ago, in Frisco, Texas,



a group of white supremacists appeared in front of City Hall and said the following: they said, 'Go back to India, stop the Hindu takeover of Texas, and you will not replace us,'" said the Congressman from Illinois.

He said hate has no place in the United States. (PTI)

Freed Israeli hostage Guy Gilboa-Dalal recounts sexual abuse in Gaza

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Jerusalem

An Israeli man who said he was sexually abused while he was held hostage in the Gaza Strip is hoping to use his voice to help empower victims who have suffered similar assaults, including in conflict zones, he said in remarks ahead of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Guy Gilboa-Dalal, 25, spent two years in captivity in Gaza after Palestinian militants abducted him and 250 others during the Hamas-led attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023.

"I feel like I have a mission to spread to the world, to use my voice and empower other victims of sexual assaults," he said Sunday in a conversation with Israel's first lady Michal Herzog in Jerusalem. "I want people who have been through those experiences to know that they're not alone."

The Associated Press does not typically identify people who say they have been sex-

ually assaulted unless they come forward publicly.

According to the United Nations, conflict-related sexual violence is on the rise worldwide, with cases more than doubling in 2025, as state and non-state actors increasingly use it as a tactic of war, torture and political repression.

In Israel and the Palestinian territories, the use of sexual violence as part of the conflict has become highly politicised since the October 7 attacks and the start of the war in Gaza.

Rights groups and the United Nations have investigated and documented cases beginning with allegations of widespread rape during the initial Hamas attacks. The UN also said last month that it has verified multiple incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, "including as a form of torture" perpetrated by Israeli military and security forces against Palestinian men and women in Gaza and the West Bank, charges Israel denies. (AP)



Indian envoy to China shows facilities available for Manasarovar pilgrims

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Beijing

Indian Ambassador to China Vikram Doraiswami, who recently visited Tibet to review arrangements for Indian pilgrims for Kailash Manasarovar Yatra, has posted a video explaining the facilities.

"Greetings, friends from India, pilgrims on the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra. This is from the Embassy of India in Beijing. We wish you a warm welcome in Yadong County, China," he said in the video taken in Yadong County of Tibet posted on the Indian Embassy website on Friday.

He said the pilgrims will be received by the Chinese Customs and Immigration authorities at Nathulla Pass entrance. After immigration formalities, they will be



taken by bus to Yadong County, which is a journey of about 35 to 40 minutes. A special facility was built at Yadong County for the Border market, which is to start sometime soon, he said. Doraiswami explained the amenities, such as restaurants and foreign currency exchange, and cautioned pilgrims about the cold climate. He also promised to post more videos to highlight the facilities at different places.

Doraiswami went to Lhasa last week on his first visit to the Tibet Autonomous Region to jointly review arrangements made by local government authorities for Indian pilgrims on the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra.

The pilgrims are scheduled to arrive later this month. Doraiswami took over as ambas-

sador early last month and has been interacting with the senior Chinese foreign ministry officials on the bilateral issues.

The pilgrimage, organised by the Ministry of External Affairs, was suspended initially in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently because of the military standoff between the two sides on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. It resumed in June last year after the first batch of Indian pilgrims arrived at Manasarovar Lake in Tibet after a five-year hiatus.

Resumption of the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra was the first initiative taken by both countries last year after the resumption of ties following the meeting between PM Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping at Kazan in Russia in 2024.

India calls Pakistan a Frankenstein state at UN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
United Nations

India has slammed Pakistan at the United Nations, calling it a "Frankenstein State" that gets shocked when its "own monster bites back", as it accused Islamabad of "hosting, training and deploying" terrorists.

The remarks were made by Anupama Singh, First Secretary at India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations after Pakistan and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) raised the issue of Jammu and Kashmir during the Interactive Dialogue on the UN High Commissioner's annual report.

"India is compelled to exercise this right of reply in response to references made to it by Pakistan and the OIC. We categorically reject the baseless and malicious allegations made by Pakistan," Singh said.

The diplomat further said: "We also categorically reject



the references to Jammu and Kashmir made by the OIC... For the record, Jammu and Kashmir was, is, and will always remain an integral and inalienable part of India. The only unresolved issue is Pakistan's illegal occupation of Indian territories and their return." She also said that

Pakistan is a country whose sitting defence minister "boasts of hosting, training and deploying terrorists as state policy."

"This should surprise no one. An illegal illegitimate occupation can be sustained only through force," Singh said. "This is the

country with the sitting Defence Minister boasts of hosting, training, and deploying terrorists and state policy, and yet Pakistan calls itself a victim of terrorism."

The diplomat further said: "Indeed, a paradox which only Pakistan could sustain. It is a living example of a

PAK WRITES TO UNSC ON INDUS WATERS TREATY

Islamabad: Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar has urged the UN Security Council to take notice of India's alleged violations of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).

The treaty, brokered by the World Bank in 1960, was suspended after the Pahalgalam terror attack in April 2025 that killed 26 civilians. The treaty has governed the distribution and use of the Indus River and its tributaries between India and Pakistan since 1960. Pakistan's Permanent Representative

to the UN, Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, said that he delivered a letter from Dar to UNSC president Leonor Zalabata Torres to highlight Islamabad's concerns. In a post on X, Asim said that the letter "draws urgent attention of the UNSC" to two Indian infrastructure projects linked to the Chenab River.

"I also briefed the president of the UNSC on the overall situation in South Asia..." he said. Dar wrote a similar letter to the UNSC president in April. (PTI)

cated on goodwill and friendship," Singh said.

The decades-old treaty was suspended after the Pahalgalam terror attack in April 2025 that killed 26 civilians. "It is equally undeniable that the treaty is now outdated. No technical arrangement can remain frozen in time while the world around it is transformed," the diplomat said. Singh also said that a treaty negotiated in 1960 cannot be treated as a perpetual entitlement "insulated from accountability, detached from present-day realities and untouched by the profound changes of the past six decades".

The Indus Waters Treaty, brokered by the World Bank, has governed the distribution and use of the Indus River and its tributaries between India and Pakistan since 1960. Singh added: "instead of coveting Indian territories, Pakistan would serve itself and its people far better by putting its own house in order."



Police charge a third suspect in Melbourne synagogue arson

ROD MCGUIRK
Melbourne

Police charged a third suspect on Friday with an arson attack on a Melbourne synagogue that was allegedly directed by Iran.

The 20-year-old man was one of three masked offenders who broke into the Adass Israel Synagogue, doused the interior with flammable liquid then set it alight in the early hours of December 6, 2024, a police statement alleged. The fire caused extensive damage to the synagogue and a worshipper sustained minor injuries.

The Victorian Joint Counter Terrorism Team, which brings together federal and state police with a spy agency, charged the man, who has not been named, with offenses including arson.

He was charged in a Melbourne jail where he was already being held in custody on unrelated offenses. Police declined to elaborate on those offenses. His co-accused Giovanni Lallu, 21, was arrested in July last year and another suspect, Younes Ali Younes, 20, was arrested a month later. (AP)



Burnham win sparks Labour leadership showdown fears

JILL LAWLESS
London

Labour's Andy Burnham, the current mayor of Greater Manchester, has won a special election for a seat in Parliament that puts him in a position to challenge embattled Prime Minister Keir Starmer for leadership of the country. Burnham decisively won the seat of Makerfield in northwest England over Rob Kenyon of the anti-immigration party Reform UK.

The victory announced early Friday cements the status of Burnham, a 56-year-old politician nicknamed the King of the North, as the top contender to replace Starmer as leader of the Labour Party and the country.

Burnham won almost 55 per cent of the 45,510 votes cast for a field of more than a dozen candidates, over 9,000 more than runner-up Kenyon. Burnham's victory speech left

no doubt that he wants to lead the country, and not just be one of the more than 400 Labour lawmakers in the 650-seat House of Commons.

"Everyone knows that politics isn't working," he said. "Everyone can feel that the country isn't where it should be. Tonight could, just could, be the turning point."

Starmer congratulated Burnham, writing on X that voters "chose Labour's campaign of hope and optimism over division and hate."

But he insisted he would fight attempts to oust him.

"Yes, I will run, I will stand," if there is a Labour leadership contest, Starmer said. "I've said repeatedly I'm not going to walk away from that."

Burnham has led Manchester since 2017, overseeing rapid regeneration for the city where the Industrial Revolution was forged. (AP)

Italy slams Trump over claims of Meloni begging for photo

NICOLE WINFIELD
Rome

The Italian Government on Friday slammed US President Donald Trump's claim that Premier Giorgia Meloni had "begged" for a photo with him during the recent G7 summit, a push-back that suggested the longtime US ally had had enough of Trump's boasting.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani abruptly cancelled a planned trip to the United States this weekend, calling Trump's claims

"serious and offensive" toward Meloni and all of Italy.

For her part, Meloni posted a video calling Trump's claims "completely fabricated," which she concluded with: "Italy and I do not beg." Trump had made the comments in an interview broadcast Friday morning on the La7 network. The La7 correspondent had asked Trump about Ukraine, but Trump raised Meloni and the conversation turned to their meeting, caught on video, during the just-con-



cluded G7 meeting in Evianles-Bains, France. Meloni and Trump were filmed speaking at several points, including alone on a small sofa.

According to La7, Trump

mentioned the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan, calling it "outdated".

"Our position on the Indus Water Treaty is well known. It defies logic that a state which exports terror as an instrument of policy continues to demand the privileges of cooperation predi-

version of the conversation online, not the original English audio.

In her video, Meloni said she was responding to Trump's claims because "certain things deserve an immediate response."

"Donald Trump's statements are completely fabricated. I am frankly stunned," she said. "I don't know why the president of the United States behaves this way toward his own allies. After all, this isn't the first time this has happened." (AP)



People take part in a yoga session during the 12th International Day of Yoga celebrations organised by Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, in New York, US (PTI)

Indian jurist elected as judge of ITLOS

YOSHITA SINGH
United Nations

An eminent Indian jurist, Bimal Patel, has been elected as Judge of the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).

Patel is a Member of the UN International Law Commission, Chairman, Working Group Succession of States in respect of State Responsibility and Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Public International Law at Rashtriya Raksha University.

He is also a member of the National Security Advisory Board, National Security Council Secretariat, Prime Minister's Office



"Congratulations to Prof. Dr. Bimal N. Patel for being elected as Judge of the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in New York today. His

election takes forward India's enduring commitment to multilateralism and the Law of the Sea," the Permanent Mission of India to the UN said. (PTI)

India-UK FTA more than just about trade: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri

ADITI KHANNA
Paris

The India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) goes beyond just trade and technology to open many doors for the people in both countries, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri has said.

Addressing the media on Thursday, Misri highlighted trade, technology, regional and international security as the key pillars of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit across a range of bilateral discussions on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in Evian. During a meeting with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, both leaders announced July 15 as the

date for the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Partnership (CETA) to enter into force.

"The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, which was signed last year in the presence of the two Prime Ministers in the UK, will enter into force from July 15. So, a major development so far as bilateral relations with a major trading partner are concerned," Misri said.

He went on to highlight that the impact of CETA, which is expected to significantly boost annual bilateral trade from the current annual estimate of 48 billion pounds, will be felt on the



wider India-UK relationship.

"Now that a date for entry into force has been announced, I am sure that businesses on both sides have been gearing up for

some time to get into this," he told PTI.

"The UK is one of our largest trading partners, an important technology partner. And this agreement is about more than just trade

and technology. It speaks to mobility between the two countries as well. And I think it will open very important doors for people in both countries," he said.

The Foreign Secretary noted that businesses in both countries have been "quite eager" to have the agreement enter into force at an early date so that they can roll out their expansion and growth plans.

Trade talks with the European Union (EU) also progressed during this week's visit, where Prime Minister Modi met jointly with both European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and

European Council President Antonio Costa. The conclusion of negotiations towards an India-EU FTA took place earlier this year in New Delhi, with an agreement expected before the end of this year.

"This is something that came up in their meeting in Evian on the sidelines of the G7 meetings, and they once again reaffirmed their desire and instructed the respective teams to do whatever was necessary to make this signing happen before the end of the year," Misri told reporters. Prime Minister Modi concluded his tour of France on Thursday evening with an address to the Indian community in Paris. (PTI)



Cambodia's Supreme Court upholds Opposition leader's conviction, sparking outrage

SOPHENG CHEANG/ DAVID RISING
Phnom Penh

Cambodia's Supreme Court on Friday upheld the incitement conviction of a prominent opposition politician while suspending the remainder of his sentence, keeping him out of prison but unable to practice politics for years and renewing questions about the Government's efforts to quash criticism.

The decision against Rong Chhun, a top adviser to the Nation Power Party, was met with anger by some 300 supporters from around the country who had gathered outside the Supreme Court complex in Phnom Penh.

"Even though he is not in prison, I'm saddened that his freedom has been restricted and he has become a sub-citizen, meaning he has no right to vote or participate in politics," said Nek Ratha, a 55-year-old from the capital. "The verdict is hard for us to accept because he is not free, and he has done nothing wrong." The 56-year-old had been found guilty last year of

inciting social unrest after meeting with villagers displaced by Government construction projects, in what was widely seen as one of many legal moves taken by the Government of Prime Minister Hun Manet to stifle criticism.

Rong Chhun told his supporters the verdict was "completely unfair" and accused the court of following orders of the Government rather than the rule of law.

"If the powerful leader wants black, the court will paint it black for them," he said. "And if the powerful wants white, the court will paint it white for them."

Bryony Lau, deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch, said the ruling demonstrates Cambodia's courts "lack of independence from the ruling party."

"Hun Manet's Government should stop using the courts to silence the political opposition and instead reopen space for parties and civil society groups to operate freely ahead of next year's election," she said. (AP)

Children, teachers evacuated after fire breaks out in Tokyo

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Tokyo

A fire broke out at an elementary school in downtown Tokyo Friday, but all of about 300 students and teachers were evacuated or rescued, officials said.

The Tokyo Fire Department said the fire at the Takinogawa No. 3 Elementary School broke out near a music room on the top floor of the four-story building late morning Friday.

Firefighters rescued one teacher and several schoolchildren out of the building, with non-life-threatening injuries, the department said.

Television footage showed black smoke billowing out of windows on the fourth floor, as firefighters combated the



fire at the scene. Dozens of fire engines were deployed.

All others inside the building when the fire broke out had evacuated to a nearby park on their own and no one was left behind, officials said. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

Dragon Boat festival preserves ancient Chinese traditions

MARIA TERESA HERNANDEZ
Beijing

The Dragon Boat Festival was celebrated Friday across mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan with colourful boat races, lion dances and other festivities.

The more than 2,000-year-old holiday is best known for its sporting events, but its origins are rooted in Chinese history and ancient beliefs about health, protection and harmony with nature.

"The Dragon Boat Festival is probably the richest and most diverse of all traditional Chinese festivals," said Tsinghua University's history professor Liu Xiaofeng.

"Across different regions, people developed a wide variety of traditions based



Competitors splash water on each other during the Aberdeen Dragon Boat Race to celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival in Hong Kong (AP)

on ideas connected to the summer solstice and the balance of yin and yang."

The festival is widely associated with the ancient poet Qu Yuan, who according to legend drowned himself more than 2,000 years ago. The tradition of dragon boat races was born from the

story that people raced out in boats to search for the poet and threw rice into the river so fish would not eat his body.

A three-day race in Beijing features men's, women's and mixed dragon boat races over distances of 100, 200 and 500 meters. Teams

from Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shanxi and Guangdong will compete throughout the holiday weekend.

Guided by the thunderous beat of their drummers, crews pulled their paddles through the water in unison, each boat surging toward the finish line as spectators cheered them on.

Others watched the races at home as they enjoyed a traditional sticky rice treat known as "zongzi" with their families. Beijing's 2026 celebrations will continue through June 21 at the capital's Grand Canal.

"The competition helped strengthen our team spirit," said Li Maoshan, a participant in Friday's races. "It also gave us an opportunity to demonstrate the spirit of perseverance and hard work." (AP)



VIT University climbs to 597 in QS 2027



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Vellore

VIT University has achieved a notable milestone by securing the 597th position in the prestigious QS World University Rankings 2027. The global higher education analysis firm, QS Quacquarelli Symonds, released the latest edition of its World University Rankings, evaluating more than 1,500 institutions worldwide across five key parameters: Research and Discovery, Learning Experience, Employability, International Engagement, and Sustainability. This year, VIT has demonstrated strong progress, advancing 94 positions from its previous ranking of 691 in 2026.

Commenting on the achievement, VIT Chancellor Dr G Viswanathan said, "In an intensely competitive global environment, VIT University's significant improvement in the QS World University Rankings is a matter of great pride." He added, "The university also excelled in the Sustainability category, securing the 352nd position worldwide and seventh place in India in the 2026 rankings. In the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026 for Engineering and Technology, VIT is ranked 119th globally, and 6th rank among Indian institutions. Through innovation in teaching and groundbreaking advancements in research, VIT aims to break into the top 200 universities worldwide."

Transformation along India's frontiers



India's borders signify more than just geographical boundaries. They represent the front-line of the country's sovereignty and security and serve as the initial line of defence against external threats. In today's world, threats extend beyond conventional warfare and include illegal infiltration, transnational crime, and demographic shifts. Given these challenges, border management has emerged as an essential component of national security. In the past, India's border architecture suffered from neglect. Difficult terrain, inadequate connectivity, and limited technological integration often hampered the effective functioning of the security forces. Large stretches of the border were prone to infiltration and smuggling, while security operations were more reactive. However, over the last decade, there has been a funda-



mental shift in this approach. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, border management has transformed into a central pillar of India's national security framework. The emphasis has now moved from mere guarding to comprehensive border management. The Ministry of Home Affairs' approach combines infrastructure, technology, intelligence, and institutional coordination. This shift has certainly been brought about by the government's political will and policies. Both Prime Minister Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah have repeatedly visited sensitive border regions. They have directly interacted with security personnel and the population.

A defining feature of this new doctrine has been the unprecedented focus on border infrastructure. Faster connectivity to remote frontier regions has improved troop deployment, logistics management, and surveillance capabilities. Areas that were once difficult to access year-round are now increasingly integrated into the security grid. Alongside physical infrastructure, technology has become a force multiplier. Building on this technological push, Shah recently announced the rollout of a nationwide 'Smart Border' project. The initiative aims to establish a comprehensive security grid across nearly 6,000 kilometres of India's international borders. The objective is to detect threats before they materialise rather than respond after damage has been done. Moreover, illegal infiltration holds long-term implications that go beyond immediate law-and-order concerns. Unchecked migration, when sustained over decades, alters local demographic patterns. Shah has increasingly conveyed that every single illegal infiltrator living on India's soil will be identified, and those who compromise

the country's security will be shown the right path. One region where this is becoming evident is India's eastern border region. The India-Bangladesh border remains one of the most sensitive and dynamic border regions in the country. It necessitates continuous surveillance and security measures. The recent efforts by the BSF to secure unsecured stretches with fencing are yet another important step towards strengthening border integrity. Reflecting a broader understanding of national security and recognising the emerging realities, Shah announced the establishment of a 'High-Level Committee on Demographic Change.' The committee has been tasked to examine demographic trends through a strategic lens. Such an approach demonstrates a shift from crisis management to preventive governance. Security preparedness has received a major boost in the strategically vital Siliguri Corridor (Chicken's Neck). The recent transfer of approximately 120 acres of land to the BSF in this region by the West Bengal government will facilitate enhanced deployment and

infrastructure development, reinforcing security in the region. The transformation of the borders is also about the people who live there, as they are stakeholders in national security. PM Modi has made it clear that the villages located on India's borders are not the 'last villages,' but the 'first villages.' Through improved connectivity and development initiatives, the government has transformed border villages into vibrant centres of economic and strategic importance. Secure borders facilitate economic growth and legitimate movement while deterring unlawful activities. This is why border management is not just about securing India's territorial integrity but also about enabling its developmental aspirations. India's borders are being viewed as strategic assets that link security and development. This transformation aims to enhance the country's long-term stability, and national resilience in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment.

(The writer is a columnist with diverse experience across leading national news organisations)

PROSPECT



Pijush Hazarika, Minister for Agriculture, Govt Of Assam, addressing a workshop on Natural Farming and Organic Farming organised by BJP Kisan Morcha, Assam Pradesh as part of the celebrations marking 12 years of transformative governance under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi

Akshay Kumar, Karan Johar unveil ₹100 crore fashion startup hunt as pitch to get rich returns bigger than ever

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Following a successful debut season that helped emerging fashion brands unlock funding, mentorship, and accelerated growth, the Fashion Entrepreneur Fund (FEF) has officially opened registrations for Pitch To Get Rich Season 2, India's first fashion-focused business reality show. In a newly launched campaign, Akshay Kumar and Karan Johar, as promoters of FEF, announced a massive ₹100 crore investment commitment for promising fashion businesses across India; marking a 150 per cent increase over Season 1 and making it one of the largest funding opportunities available to homegrown fashion entrepreneurs. More than just a reality show, Pitch To Get Rich has emerged as a launchpad for fashion founders looking to scale their businesses



through capital, mentorship, industry access, and strategic guidance. Season 1 demonstrated the impact of FEF's venture studio model, proving that fashion founders need more than just capital to scale. Through a combination of funding, mentorship, strategic guidance and industry access, participating brands achieved remarkable growth. Menswear label Banana Club crossed ₹105 crore in net revenue. Love Kiki recorded 227.6 per cent revenue growth while expanding into more than 10 cities and securing international orders from

Saudi Arabia. House of Armuse nearly tripled its average order value while expanding into menswear. DMO Dot scaled its presence across multiple retail outlets and international markets. Furthermore Stylox more than doubled its retail footprint from 25 to 58 outlets across India. These success stories highlight how FEF's hands-on approach helps entrepreneurs build stronger, more scalable and future-ready fashion businesses. Building on these success stories, Akshay Kumar, Ravi Jaipuria, Naveen Jindal,

Karan Johar, Gaurav Dalmia, Sonali Dugar, Manju Yagnik and Chairman Vagish Pathak, are now inviting the next generation of fashion entrepreneurs to take their shot at building India's next breakout fashion brand. From apparel, footwear, accessories and couture to sustainable fashion, D2C brands and emerging lifestyle businesses, founders with scalable ideas and strong growth potential are encouraged to apply. Commenting on the launch of Pitch To Get Rich Season 2, Akshay Kumar, Promoter & Investor, Fashion Entrepreneur Fund (FEF), said: "India's fashion entrepreneurs have the talent and ambition to build world-class brands. Through Pitch To Get Rich, we're creating opportunities for founders to access the capital, mentorship and support they need to scale. This ₹100 crore commitment is our investment in the future of Indian fashion."

SMPP partners with KNDS to manufacture advanced loitering munitions in India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India's defence self-reliance, SMPP has signed a strategic teaming agreement with European land defence leader KNDS to locally manufacture state-of-the-art loitering munitions in India. The agreement, inked today at the Eurostatex 2025 Exhibition in Paris, combines technology transfer with indigenous production under the Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India initiatives. It aims to meet the Indian Army's urgent requirement for advanced precision strike systems capable of addressing modern battlefield challenges.

been validated in recent conflicts and will significantly strengthen the Indian Armed Forces' deep strike and precision engagement capabilities," the companies stated in a joint release. This latest collaboration builds on the teaming agreement signed in November 2025 for the KATANA@ 155 mm precision-guided artillery munition, reflecting growing Indo-European defence cooperation. SMPP, a leading Indian defence technology firm, specialises in ballistic protection, precision strike systems, drones, counter-drone solutions, and advanced ammunition. The company is focused on indigenous inno-



The partnership will cover the VELOCE and RODEUR loitering munition systems along with the ISTAR family of drones. These battle-proven platforms deliver highly effective "search-and-destroy" capability, allowing operators to locate, track, and neutralise high-value targets with exceptional accuracy. Equipped with a hybrid guidance system integrating multi-constellation GNSS and INS, the munitions ensure reliable performance across diverse terrains and contested environments. Their fire-and-forget mode further enhances operational flexibility in complex scenarios. "These systems have

valuation and world-class manufacturing to enhance national defence preparedness. KNDS, formed by the alliance of Nexter and Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, is a pan-European giant employing nearly 11,000 people with ₹4.4 billion revenue in 2025 and a ₹33.1 billion order backlog. The group is trusted by over 40 armies worldwide and excels in developing integrated manned-unmanned solutions and full life-cycle defence systems. The partnership is expected to accelerate local production, reduce import dependence, and create a robust domestic supply chain for critical munitions.

Ujjivan SFB reports 27% drop in call drop-offs post cloud shift

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Ujjivan Small Finance Bank (SFB) on Friday announced a strategic overhaul of its customer-engagement infrastructure, reporting a 27 per cent reduction in call drop-offs and customer-satisfaction scores above 90 per cent after migrating from legacy systems to a cloud-based contact centre. The move signals a shift in the bank's approach to customer experience towards more integrated, data-driven engagement as banking increasingly adopts real-time, digital-first models. Serving more than 10

million customers across mass-market segments, Ujjivan has been scaling its engagement infrastructure to handle rising volumes and complexity. The cloud platform will unify voice and outreach channels, introduce self-service and IVR-led automation at scale, centralise customer journeys, and reduce manual processes and operational friction. The change mirrors a broader industry trend from on-premise and private-cloud setups to flexible cloud models. Ujjivan is building an intelligent IVR system with automation on the Genesys Cloud™ platform.

NHAI launches Rajasthan's 1st multi-lane, free flow tolling system at Daultapura toll plaza

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

State-owned NHAI on Friday said it has launched Rajasthan's first multi-lane free flow (MLFF)-based tolling system at the Daultapura toll plaza on the Delhi-Jaipur section of NH-48. The MLFF framework introduces barrier-less tolling with minimal human intervention, enabling vehicles to pass through toll locations without stopping and ensuring seamless traffic flow. Following the launch at Daultapura, the statement said NHAI is also planning to transit toll plazas at Shahjahanpur and Manoharpur to MLFF system, making commuting on the busy Delhi-Jaipur section



seamless and barrier-free. The system integrates automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) technology with FASTag-based electronic toll collection to facilitate automated user fee collection with minimal human intervention. Earlier, NHAI launched

MLFF-based tolling system at the Chorayasi Toll Plaza on the Surat-Bharuch section of NH-48 in Gujarat and at the Mundka-Bakkarwala Toll Plaza on the Urban Extension Road-II (UER-II) in Delhi. By enabling zero waiting time and uninterrupted vehicular movement,

DAILY SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

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



SOLUTION (19.6.26)

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

DOUBLE CROSSWORD SATURDAY | JUNE 20, 2026

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		9					
10					11		
			12				
13	14				15	16	
			19				
20	21				22	23	
24				25			
		26					
27					28		
		29					
30						31	

- ACROSS**
1 They're seen as a striking effect (5)
6 Mammal, maybe a mule at the end of its tether (5)
9 Choose one for mother - the best! (7)
10 Hotel cabbage? (5)
11 To see a short distance is not difficult (5)
12 Step taken by one in prison? (5)
13 Part with not a word about what happened (7)
15 Sorry to have to dash back, breathless (3)
17 Walked in for an introduction (4)
18 Dan's silly to get Eva in a state (6)
- DOWN**
2 Sort of bullet that might get Carter? (6)
3 Shouted support for that little bouncer Ted (6)
4 Agent of intelligence? (3)
5 Only part of a form? (5)
6 Devilish old cigarette lighter! (7)
7 A little of the mighty (4)
8 Ready for a bath? (6)
12 Took lots, perhaps, before finishing crime (5)
13 It's difficult for a motherless dog! (5)
14 Love to appear in something gripping, say (5)

- 19 Blare noisily at Tony (5)
20 Unreliable half-back in the line (6)
22 Old Bill, showing a cool head on operations (4)
24 An opponent, possibly of note (3)
25 When there'll be no more need for longing? (7)
26 Maybe it isn't bad? (5)
27 Airman's awfully good fortune (5)
28 Team needing a wing replacement? (5)
29 A terrible overtaker! (7)
30 Celebrated with a meal around opening time (5)
31 Pond creatures caught in nets out West!
- 15 Wooden boats possibly showing signs of wear (5)
16 She is seen in a natural light (5)
18 A late faller (5)
19 In bed, a lot twisted and swollen (7)
21 Tincture used in painting (6)
22 Tom's bit of naval experience (6)
23 The willow plant contains one (6)
25 Poles always seem unimpressed! (5)
26 Acoustic quality of a wrong note (4)
28 Success in rowing (3)

SOLUTION (19.6.26)

ACROSS	24, Merrited	DOWN	20, Weigh
3, M-adam	26, O-races	1, Nacre	21, Fri-ar
8, Hazel	29, FO-e	2, Tenable	23, Re-entr
10, Lit up	31, Herod	4, A-jar	24, Medico
11, Con	32, Pin-nac-e	5, A-liday	25, Ton
12, Ralls	34, MIMIC	6, Miser	27, Re-gal
13, Dreame-r	35, Tit	7, Bulls	28, Co-mic
15, Dealt	36, Pa-nic	9, Zobe	30, Actor
18, Bag	37, Below	12, Rig-ales	32, P-ill
21, Flyaway	38, Could	16, Al-me-d	17, The-RL
22, Ere		19, Pacific	
23, Rear			

BRIEFLY

Neymar ruled out of Brazil's second match due to injury



Neymar has been ruled out of Brazil's second World Cup match because of a lingering calf injury. The Brazilian soccer confederation said Thursday that Neymar wasn't going to travel with the rest of the squad for Friday's match against Haiti in Philadelphia.

"He will remain in New Jersey to optimise the final phase of his recovery process," the confederation said in a statement. The Brazilian confederation said the 34-year-old Santos player will continue his recovery at the facilities of the team's hotel. Neymar was back on the training field for the first time on Tuesday, doing physical conditioning exercises. He rejoined his teammates for parts of the session on Wednesday, being applauded by them after getting on the field. Neymar has yet to practice in fuller sessions with the rest of the team since reporting to Brazil's squad while nursing an injured right leg.

Looking to play in his fourth World Cup, Neymar had undergone tests on his right calf on Monday to determine the progress of the injury that he sustained while playing with Santos on May 17. The five-time World Cup champions began their tournament with a 1-1 draw against Morocco on Saturday in Group C. (AP)

South Africa keeps hopes alive with draw against Czech Republic



JAMES ROBSON ■ Atlanta

Teboho Mokoena started the game with tears in his eyes and finished it with a smile on his face after converting a second-half penalty in South Africa's 1-1 draw with the Czech Republic on Thursday at the World Cup.

Thapelo Maseko's long range shot late in the match caught the hand of Czech opponent Pavel Sulc in the area.

Mokoena, who was shown on camera with tears rolling down his cheeks during the pre-game national anthem, stepped up to the penalty spot and sent his shot low past Czech Republic goalkeeper Matej Kovar in the 83rd minute.

The South Africa midfielder said he was overwhelmed before kick off, thinking about his late grandfather.

"I know, wherever he is, he would be proud of me," Mokoena said. "I just felt his presence in that moment. I thought

if he was here, he would be proud of me because I know he believed in me when nobody believed in me." Michal Sadilek had given the Czechs the lead in the sixth minute at Mercedes-Benz Stadium. Alexandr Sojka played in Sadilek and he slid a shot past goalkeeper Ronwen Williams. Both teams lost their opening matches, and both knew another setback would seriously hinder their chances of reaching the round of 32.

South Africa faced some strong criticism following its 2-0 loss to co-host Mexico, which raised the prospect of the country extending its run of

never having advanced to the knockout phase of a World Cup - even as host in 2010.

"If we go on like that and if we can make another performance like today I think we have a chance to go in the second round," South Africa coach Hugo Broos said.

South Africa will next face South Korea on Wednesday in Group A, but will be without Mokoena, who is suspended after picking up his second yellow card of the tournament.

The Czechs lost to South Korea 2-1 in their opening match. (AP)

Iniyan emerges champion at Global Chess Festival



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Grandmaster Iniyan Pa lived up to his top billing, dominating proceedings from start to finish to emerge champion in the masters category of Global Chess Festival here on Friday.

Already in sight of the title after the penultimate round, the 24-year-old national champion settled for a quick draw against Ajay Santhosh Parvathareddy to claim the title in his debut appearance to pocket the winner's purse of ₹8 lakh. Nithin Babu clinched the Challenger Category and Madhvendra Pratap Sharma triumphed in the Junior Master Category.

Both Nithin and Madhvendra have directly qualified to play the Masters Category in the 10th season scheduled for next year.

The Erode-based GM Iniyan amassed 7.5 points to emerge

champion, maintaining an unbeaten stint while conceding only three draws. Boris Savchenko had to settle for a draw against Aakash Sharadchandra Dalvi and finished second with 6.5 points.

Babu, seeded sixth, defeated Ashirwad Swain in an intense battle on the top board of the Challenger section. Viresh Sharnarhi, who had been leading the event with a stupendous run of six wins from six matches, crashed to defeat in the last two rounds and finished 10th.

Nithin took home ₹3 lakhs and a trophy.

The 13-year-old Madhvendra Pratap Sharma, the top seed, also had the luxury of indulging in another quick draw against A Amanlal and tallied eight points for the title. Madhvendra earned ₹2 lakh and a trophy in the event touted as the richest prize money competition for kids in the world.

India eyes return of F1 by 2030: FMSCI president



Efforts are on to bring Formula 1 back to India by 2030, and a round of the World Rally Championship (WRC) and MotoGP by 2028, said FMSCI President Arindam Ghosh, after a meeting with the Sports Ministry in Delhi.

Earlier in March, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya had made a push to revive Formula One in the country, holding a meeting with the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI) to discuss a framework that would create a "strong pipeline" of drivers and technicians.

Now, at the FMSCI Annual Awards function, Ghosh said "the meeting with Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, Minister of State Raksha Khadse, senior officials and potential stakeholders in New Delhi, focused primarily on bringing F1, MotoGP and a round of the WRC to India." (PTI)



David propels Canada to its first World Cup win

ANNE M PETERSON ■ Vancouver

Jonathan David scored three goals and Canada won its first World Cup match while all but securing a spot in the knockout round with a 6-0 victory over Qatar on Thursday.

Qatar was reduced to nine players because of red cards in the chaotic match.

Cyle Larin scored his second goal of the tournament on a rebound in the 16th minute. David doubled the lead with a right-footed volley in the 29th, for his first goal in the run of play in more than a year.

Canada made it 3-0 in first-half stoppage time when David scored in a scramble in front of the net off a shot that caromed off the crossbar.

Nathan Saliba, who came in as a substitute for Kone, scored on a free kick in the 64th to make it 4-0. Mohamed Manai deflected a shot past his goalkeeper for an own goal in the 75th. David completed the



hat trick in stoppage time, joining Argentina's Lionel Messi as the only players with three goals in a match in this World Cup.

Qatar scored a stoppage-time goal to earn a surprising 1-1 draw with Group B favorite Switzerland in its opener. (AP)

Awer Mabil one of refugees playing in the World Cup



JANIE MCCAULEY ■ Alameda (US)

Awer Mabil's face quickly turned to pure joy. He beamed and fought his emotions, a reaction Australia's veteran forward hardly could have seen coming.

It had nothing to do with a soccer result, either. But rather a reflection that took him back to his tumultuous youth as a refugee and how some good fortune landed him in Australia for a new start in life.

Mabil looked into the audience during his media conference after training Tuesday and discovered a familiar face in David Basheer, the longtime commentator on Australia's SBS network who had just offered a question days ahead of the Soccerroos' World Cup matchup against the United States on Friday in Seattle.

"I grew up watching you," Mabil said, so taken aback that he asked Basheer to repeat himself. (AP)

Lionel Messi's family pleads for 'humanity'



DEBORA REY ■ Dallas

Lionel Messi's father is undergoing medical treatment for an undisclosed illness and his family asked the media for "humanity" on Thursday amid rumors about Jorge Messi's health while his son competes at the World Cup.

The family did not specify the illness that the 68-year-old Jorge Messi is suffering from.

"Jorge is going through a health situation," the Messi family said in a statement. "He is currently under medical observation, recovering and progressing favorably within his current condition." (AP)

Switzerland beats Bosnia-Herzegovina 4-1 at World Cup

GREG BEACHAM ■ Inglewood (US)

Substitute Johan Manzambi scored his first World Cup goal on an outstanding volley in the 74th minute, and Switzerland erupted late for a 4-1 victory over Bosnia-Herzegovina on Thursday.

Ruben Vargas scored in the 84th minute for the Swiss shortly after Tarik Muharemovic was sent off for a dangerous tackle, leaving Bosnia with 10 men.

Manzambi scored again in the 90th on a pass from Vargas, and captain Granit Xhaka converted from the penalty spot with the final kick of the game in stoppage time.

Ermin Mahmic scored in second-half injury time for Bosnia, which still has a legitimate chance of reaching the knockout stage of only its second World Cup after hanging with higher-ranked Switzerland deep into the second half.



Switzerland drew up its disappointing 1-1 draw with Qatar last week by largely dominating play against the momentum-laden Dragons, who were unbeaten in

German club Freiburg - and then Muharemovic's red card changed the match.

Manzambi scored three minutes after coming on for standout winger Dan Ndoye. Manzambi jumped and connected perfectly on Amar Memic's attempted clearing header, setting off a wild celebration in the nervous Swiss section of SoFi Stadium.

Bosnia was backed by a raucous cheering section with tens of thousands of fans in the crowd of 70,026 celebrating their nation's second World Cup appearance. The Dragons had less possession and fewer chances, yet every good moment was greeted by roars. (AP)

India to send 125-130 athletes to CWG: Iyer



PHILEM DIPAK SINGH ■ New Delhi

India will be represented by 125 to 130 athletes covering eight able-bodied and four para sports at the scaled-down Glasgow Commonwealth Games in July-August, Indian Olympic Association (IOA) CEO Raghuram Iyer said on Friday while asserting that the body would steer clear of any selection disputes.

The 2026 CWG - scheduled from July 23 to August 2 - will feature just 10 able-bodied and six para sports to ensure a cost-effective event. Glasgow stepped in as the host city after the Australian state of Victoria pulled out due to escalating costs.

"We will have a total of 125-130 participants, athletes. One third of the number of athletes will be the support staff," IOA CEO Raghuram Iyer told PTI.

"We will compete in eight able-bodied and four para sports," he said on the sidelines of the second edition of

the IOA Athletes Forum here.

The sports programme for the Glasgow CWG comprises athletics and para athletics, swimming and para swimming, 3x3 basketball and wheelchair 3x3 basketball, bowls and para bowls, boxing, track cycling and para track cycling, gymnastics, judo, netball, and weightlifting and para powerlifting.

The 2022 CWG in Birmingham had featured 19 able-bodied and eight para sports, and India had sent 208 athletes, winning 61 medals (22 gold, 16 silver, 23 bronze) to finish fourth in the final standings. The IOA is expected to announce the full contingent after June 23 which is the deadline for sending the list of participants to the Glasgow Games organisers.

"The teams have been selected. All the NSFs have sent us the names. The uniforms and the ceremonial dress (for the contingent members) are being planned. All the logistics are being planned," Iyer said. (PTI)

Macau Open: Ashmita storms into semifinals, Anmol out

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Macau

Indian shuttler Ashmita Chaliha continued her impressive comeback from injury, defeating Korea's Kim Min Sun in straight games to enter the women's singles semifinals, but compatriot Anmol Kharb bowed out after a quarterfinal defeat at the Macau Open Super 300 tournament here on Friday.

The 26-year-old from Assam, who returned to competition in May after a three-month injury layoff, took 37 minutes to see off world No.99 Kim 21-16 21-18 to continue her impressive run.

It is her first semifinal appearance in a BWF tour event this year. She had registered quarterfinal finishes at the China Masters Super 100 and Malaysia Masters super 500 events since returning to the court.

World No. 63 Ashmita, who had to undergo surgery and an extensive rehabilitation period after suffering



a medial meniscus tear in her right knee during the Korea Open, will now face Korea's Park Ga Eun for a place in the final.

In the other match, world No. 51 Anmol, however, failed to capitalise on a strong start, going down 21-14 15-21 13-21 to fourth seed Han Qian Xi, ranked 36th in the world, in a 60-minute clash.

Dominant Indian women eye Chile scalp en-route FIH Nations Cup final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Auckland

Dominant so far in the tournament, a confident India will look to continue in the same vein and upstage a lower-ranked Chile in the semifinals of the FIH Nations Cup here on Saturday in their pursuit of reclaiming their place in the elite FIH Pro League.

India have literally muscled their way to the semifinals from Pool A with three wins from as many games, topping the group with nine points ahead of the USA. Hosts New Zealand, on the other hand, topped Pool B with an all-win record and will take on the USA in the other semifinal.

India are determined to win the FIH Nations Cup to earn their place back in next season's elite FIH Pro League, from which they were relegated last year. The Indian women's team was relegated from the elite FIH Pro League to the



second-tier FIH Hockey Nations Cup following its last-place finish in the 2024-25 season, after managing only 10 points from 16 matches.

The winner of the eight-nation FIH Nations Cup will progress to next year's FIH Pro League.

Going by rankings and current form, India will definitely start as favourites against Chile.

In red-hot form, India are currently ranked ninth in the world, while Chile are placed 13th, but rankings hardly matter in modern-day hockey. But going into the semifinal, India's chief coach Sjoerd Marjine should have a few concerns as his side had to dig deep to prevail over 17th-ranked Uruguay in their last pool match.

West Indies beats Scotland by 7 runs to stay unbeaten: T20 WC

EDDIE PELLASAP ■ Leeds

The West Indies overcame Scotland by seven runs and stayed unbeaten at the Women's Twenty20 World Cup after a madcap match at Headingley. Scotland needed 154 to win, a record chase, and was in it at 132-5 with two overs left. Then medium-pacer Aaliyah Alleyne came to the West Indies' rescue.

She took three wickets in the 19th over, including Darcey Carter on 59. Scotland required 17 off the last over and was all out on the last ball for 146 on Thursday.

Only the West Indies and England were two for two in Group 2, with the top two making the semifinals.

Scotland had the West Indies on the ropes in both innings. Tight bowling and fielding reduced the West Indies to 124-6 after 18 overs.

But another veteran, Stafanie Taylor, who missed the West



Fraser and Carter then gave Scotland a brilliant flying start to the chase.

Indies' opening win over defending champion New Zealand, rescued the batting effort. Her unbeaten 47 off 19 balls with 34 runs in boundaries lifted her side to a competitive 153-6 total. West

Indies added 29 off the last two overs, 26 by Taylor.

Katherine Fraser starred in the field for Scotland with two wickets, including bowling Hayley Matthews, a leaping catch on the boundary, and a run out of Shemaine Campbelle on 36.

Fraser and Carter then gave Scotland a brilliant flying start to the chase. But West Indies fought back with four wickets in 13 balls into the eighth over, and Scotland's run rate dropped below the required run rate for the first time. Carter injured her leg in the fourth over and was dropped on 19. Struggling to run, she didn't hit a boundary after the fifth over until the 18th. Scotland went nearly five overs without a boundary. But Scotland stayed in the game thanks to poor bowling and fielding. (AP)



Roadmap for 2027 World Cup is ongoing process: BCCI secretary



KUSHAN SARKAR ■ New Delhi

The deliberations on India's roadmap for the 2027 World Cup are "not meant for public consumption", BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said in an interview to PTI, refusing to be drawn into any discussion on individual players and their much-speculated future in the team.

Veterans Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli dominate the chatter whenever there is any talk around the Indian team's 2027 global campaign but Saikia is categorical that "strategic discussions in the board room" are best left inside. While both former skippers are determined to play the mega-event, chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar and head coach Gautam Gambhir have been non-committal on whether the squad will have space for the white-ball legends.

Asked if the BCCI has had any internal conversations on the matter, Saikia said all stakeholders are aligned in their views in what is essentially an ongoing process.

"We have a very well-knit team and a lot of experts. All stakeholders are taken on board," Saikia told PTI during an exclusive interaction.

"Whatever decisions that are made involve the cricket committee, the selectors and all other stakeholders, including the support staff, the head coach and the players concerned.

"There are regular conversations taking place. For that reason, we do not need any special session of interaction. This is an ongoing process," the secretary said, keeping all his cards close to his chest.

He maintained that he would not divulge any board room information.

"I do not think I should disclose anything before the media or the public because these are strategic discussions. I am not authorised to speak about them before the media." "Secondly, these are matters that should remain within the boardroom."

BCCI to follow government diktat on Bangladesh:

The Indian cricket team had postponed its white-ball tour of Bangladesh last year due to unrest in the neighbouring nation. (PTI)

Shreyanka Patil ruled out with ankle injury

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Leeds

In a major blow to India, off-spinner Shreyanka Patil has been ruled out of the ongoing Women's T20 World Cup due to an ankle injury, with uncapped legspinner Prema Rawat named as her replacement.

The 23-year-old Patil sustained the injury during India's 95-run victory over the Netherlands here on Wednesday. The incident occurred in the final over of the Powerplay when Patil twisted her ankle while attempting to stop the ball.

She was seen clutching her right leg immediately with the team physio rushing onto the field. Unable to put any weight on the injured ankle, Patil was stretchered off after bowling just one delivery.

"The Event Technical Committee of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 has approved Prema Rawat as a replacement for Shreyanka Patil in the India squad," an ICC media release stated.

The 24-year-old Rawat earns her maiden call-up to the senior national team. She has featured in two seasons of the Women's Premier League, playing six matches for



Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Rawat was part of the India A squad scheduled to tour England for a six-match white-ball series begin-

ning with the first T20 in Northampton on Saturday.

She had also impressed at the Rising Stars Women's Asia Cup, claiming eight wickets at an economy rate of 4.27 as India A won the title.

The setback continues Patil's unfortunate run with injuries in recent years.

A broken finger in July 2024 ruled her out of that year's T20 World Cup. She subsequently battled shin splints in both legs before suffering a stress reaction in her wrist, making the latest injury another frustrating blow in an injury-plagued phase of her career.

Vaibhav can revive Test cricket: Srikanth

SUMAN RAY ■ Chennai

Teenage batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi could trigger a "revival of Test cricket" if he fulfils his potential in the longest format, said former India captain Krishnamachari Srikanth, urging fans and experts to stop over-analysing the youngster's performances.

Riding on his IPL exploits, Sooryavanshi has earned his maiden call-up in the Indian T20 set-up. The teenager has been picked for the seven-match tour of Ireland and England, comprising two games against Ireland and five against England, beginning in Belfast on June 26.

Srikanth said the 15-year-old possesses a rare ability to attract audiences and should be allowed to develop naturally without being burdened by expectations.

"What I like about



Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is he has an appetite to score runs and an appetite to dominate.

At the same time, he could stay there and play also," Srikanth told PTI at his residence here. "If he progresses beyond T20 cricket to one-day cricket, and then to Test cricket, and if he clicks in Test cricket, which he will, I am sure then you will see a revival of Test cricket. (PTI)



Shreyas makes a good leader: Vysakh

G UNNIKRISHNAN ■ Chennai

Shreyas Iyer's maiden audition as India's full-time T20 skipper will take place in England next month, and his Punjab Kings teammate Vysakh Vijaykumar said the Mumbai cricketer's exceptional man management skills will stand him in good stead. Iyer was given the reins of the T20 squad after the Ajit Agarkar-led selection panel decided to move on from Suryakumar Yadav earlier this month.

"I think the way he treats everybody equally, that is the biggest thing because youngsters will be, obviously, under a lot of pressure. So, the way you handle them, speak to them, makes a lot of difference,"



Vysakh told PTI.

"The IPL is a tough competition, and, you know, Indian players are the ones who are going to win the tournament for you. So, the way he handled all the Indian players, uncapped players, was calming and a lot of learnings (from it) for me and everyone, and it makes him a good leader," he added.

Vysakh, who joined PBKS ahead of IPL 2025, has played

two seasons under Iyer, seeing from close quarters the evolution of him as a leader and batter. "From the first time that I have seen him in 2025, he has matured so much as a captain and player. Every day he is bringing new things on the table and every day he is eagerly wanting to try it out. "He has this fire and aura that he carries every time he goes into the field, as he wants to win it no matter what and the way he handles himself and the way he handles everybody in the team, it's such a pleasure," he said. The Karnataka pacer, who played 10 matches this season, said Iyer gave him ample opportunity to prove his mettle. (PTI)



Jaiswal, Rahul, Rana in focus

G UNNIKRISHNAN ■ Chennai

Along with a dominance-extending series clean sweep, India will eye substantial runs from KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal in the third and final ODI against Afghanistan here on Saturday. While Rahul's spot in the one-day squad has never really been in doubt, Jaiswal would welcome a heavy knock to stake his claim for a space in the already-crowded top-order. Jaiswal was brought back to the 50-over format for the first time since December 2025, and he was dismissed for 4 in the second match against the Afghans at Lucknow.

The left-hander had made an unbeaten 116 against South Africa at Visakhapatnam in his

previous appearance but since then the return of Ishan Kishan has added one more contender to the top-order positions. Kishan did no harm to his reputation with a hundred at Lucknow, and skipper Shubman Gill dropped himself to No. 3 to accommodate Jaiswal.

But once Virat Kohli returns to the side after recovering from his hamstring injury, the batting superstar is certain to occupy the No. 3 slot. It leaves Gill with no other option but to return to opening the innings alongside Rohit Sharma. With Kishan and Shreyas Iyer occupying the No. 4 and 5 respectively, Jaiswal perforce needs to make use of the limited opportunities that come his way.

It's a tight and uncomfortable space for any batter, let alone for a hugely talented cricketer like Jaiswal but the team combination rigmarole is an all-consuming maze at this point. (PTI)

Neeraj Chopra joins fight against doping

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Two-time Olympic medallist Neeraj Chopra has taken the lead in fighting the menace of doping that plagues Indian sports with his foundation inking an MOU with the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) to launch a campaign that aims to educate athletes against it.

At the IOA athletes forum here on Friday, Chopra delivered a video message announcing the initiative between Neeraj Chopra Foundation and the IOA.

"I have seen how kids want to enhance performance by doping to win big medals. But from my story, I can tell you it took me 10 years to get to the Olympic medal," he said.

"You need patience to achieve something in sports. I am seeing that it has come down in today's kids. They want to achieve things quickly, cross 80m in one year. It takes five years to do that.



"Sometimes kids take supplements which might be contaminated. When I was a junior, whenever I heard about doping bans, I used to get so surprised by the time lost. I had promised myself then that I would never take this route," he added. India has been topping the World Anti Doping Agency's annual list of highest dope offenders for the last three years.

Yuvraj Singh to join Delhi Capitals as batting coach; Pant likely to be traded

KUSHAN SARKAR ■ New Delhi

Former white-ball stalwart Yuvraj Singh is all set to join Delhi Capitals as its batting coach for the 2027 season, IPL sources tracking the development said on Friday. Yuvraj, India's player of the tournament in both 2007 T20 World Cup and 2011 ODI World Cup, has worked as a personal mentor for current India skipper Shubman Gill and world's No. 1 ranked T20 batter Abhishek Sharma in recent years. Even Rishabh Pant had sought Yuvraj's advice when he underwent a slump in form.

The assignment with Delhi Capitals will be Yuvraj's first coaching assignment in the cash-rich league.

Yuvraj played last of his 132 IPL matches in 2019 for Mumbai Indians before calling time on his competitive career. "There will be complete overhaul of coaching staff in Delhi Capitals as JSW will be

running the management for the 2027-28 seasons as per agreement. The trio comprising Venugopal Rao, Hemang Badani and Munaf Patel, who were appointed by co-owners GMR, will make way for new support staff. "Sourav Ganguly will take over as Director of Cricket and Yuvraj will join as the batting coach," the IPL source told PTI. As per the agreement, co-owners GMR and JSW take turns in managing the affairs of the men's team for two years. DC could not qualify for the play-offs in last two seasons and their planning, strategy and choice of players at the auction left a lot to be desired. It is understood that Ganguly, who has had a big influence on Yuvraj as his first international captain, wanted the flamboyant southpaw on board. While Ganguly as the Director of Cricket and also looked after JSW's SA20 franchise Pretoria Capitals and also DC Women, Yuvraj will only have to look after the DC men's team.



India concede two goals against Germany in FIH Pro League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rotterdam

India inexplicably conceded two late goals to lose to reigning world champions Germany 1-2 in their FIH Pro League match here on Thursday. The two sides were goalless at the half time before Jugraj Singh struck from a penalty corner in the 38th minute to give India the lead.



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