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BHOPAL | SATURDAY, JUNE 27, 2026 | PAGES 16 | ₹2.00

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

PAGE 7 NATION

Backdoor jobs row: Omar hits back at Mehbooba's charge



PAGE 10 LAW & JUSTICE

UP *pradhans* can't stay as administrators: HC



PAGE 11: BUSINESS

India's economy to grow 6.6%-6.8% in FY27: EY



PAGE 13 GLOBAL

Xi backs Bangladesh in upholding sovereignty



PAGE 15 SPORTS

Brian, Dutch roll in rain to win over Tunisia



Those found guilty of betraying public trust will face the law: Yogi

The Chief Minister accused Opposition parties of politicising the Ram Mandir controversy while asserting that public faith and transparency must remain paramount

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
 ■ New Delhi/Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister (CM) Yogi Adityanath said on Friday that police action against those accused of embezzling donations at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya commenced immediately after the FIR by UP Police on Thursday night. "The SIT report came, and action started immediately. I assure you that, as I had said, we will separate truth from falsehood," he said. "Playing with public sentiment is unacceptable. Whoever tampers with the faith of Sanatan Dharma will have to face the consequences. No one can be given any exemption," the CM said. He also described Ayodhya as a symbol of collective faith and Sanatan Dharma.

These arrests are the first breakthrough in this high-profile case. On Friday, police took into custody all eight people named in the FIR filed



UP CM Yogi Adityanath and others during a foundation stone laying ceremony of development projects at Barhaj and Rudrapur Assembly constituencies in Deoria, Uttar Pradesh

on June 25 and are now questioning them. The main accused, who was responsible for counting cash and valuables from the temple donation boxes, has been identified as Ramshankar Yadav, also known as Tinnu. Lavkush Mishra, Anukul Mishra, Avinash Shukla, Manish Kumar Yadav, Ramshankar Mishra, Subhash Chandra Srivastava,

and Karunesh Pandey are the other named accused.

The CM characterised the controversy as an effort by certain political parties to target Ram devotees and discredit Ayodhya out of frustration. "When they found nothing else, they started playing with people's faith. They are making allegations against Ram devotees and

trying to defame Ayodhya Dham," he said.

The CM stated that no one would be permitted to undermine public faith and warned that strict action would be taken against those found guilty. "Playing with public sentiment is unacceptable. Whoever tampers with the faith of Sanatan Dharma will have to face the conse-

quences. No one can be given any exemption," he said.

The CM alleged that political parties that had previously opposed the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the temple's simple construction were now expressing concern for devotees' faith. He described this as an attempt to malign Ayodhya and the Ram temple without evidence. "If there is no evidence, stop the propaganda. If there is evidence, submit it before the SIT," he said.

The State Government has said from day one that the truth will come out. The CM called for an end to political rhetoric during the ongoing investigation, noting that professionals are conducting the probe. He urged political parties to allow the process to reach its logical conclusion.

Yogi Adityanath also criticised AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, who called the UP Police FIR a "sham" during his visit to Ayodhya on Friday.

Had the AAP government worked in Delhi as the BJP government did in Ayodhya, "Delhi too would have shone like Ayodhya Dham today", he said.

Police arrest all eight accused

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
 ■ New Delhi/Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh police arrested all eight people named in the FIR in connection with embezzling donations at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The arrests happened on Friday after the FIR was filed late Thursday (June 25) at the Ram Janmabhoomi Police Station. All eight accused were produced before the designated fast-track court in Ayodhya and have been sent to three days of judicial custody.

The FIR was filed on the complaint of a member of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, based on the preliminary findings of the Special Investigation Team (SIT). Those arrested are Ram Shankar Yadav, also known as Tinnu Yadav; Lavkush Mishra; Anukul Mishra; Avinash Shukla; Manish Yadav; Ramshankar Mishra; Subhash Chandra Srivastava; and Karunesh Pandey.

These people mainly handled and counted cash



Police personnel escorting the accused in Ayodhya

and valuables donated by devotees through the temple's donation boxes. They are accused of criminal breach of trust, theft, cheating, and conspiracy. The SIT was established earlier this month following reports of irregularities. It submitted a preliminary report to the UP Government, highlighting problems in the handling of donations and proposing actions.

The three-member SIT, led by Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas

Pant and other senior officials, was formed after the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust requested an investigation into financial irregularities.

The team reviewed donation records, cash-counting methods, storage, and supervision, and questioned temple staff and officials. Their preliminary report, issued around June 24, highlighted serious problems and irregularities in the handling of donations.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

The Bystander



Operation Sindoore martyrs honoured

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 ■ New Delhi

The government, for the first time, has disclosed the names of the six armed forces personnel martyred during Operation Sindoore last year. Their names will be inscribed at the National War Memorial here.

Five Indian Army personnel and one belonging to the Air Force were among six killed in line of action during the



Representative image

military response to the Pahalgam massacre against Pakistan in May last year.

Subedar Major Pawan Kumar, Rifleman Sunil Kumar, Lance Naik Dinesh Kumar, Agniveer Murali Naik, Havildar Sunil Kumar Singh, and Indian Air Force Sergeant Surendra Kumar were among those killed in the line of duty.

The names of these heroes of Operation Sindoore were released alongside the list of all soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice during various military operations in 2025.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Amit Shah pitches for *Nasha Mukht Bharat*

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
 ■ New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said the Government is reviewing the NDPS Act to close loopholes exploited by narcotics syndicates and to take a strict approach toward drug peddlers and suppliers.

Shah released a three-year vision document on narcotics control (2026-2029), developed through extensive consultations with central government departments, drug law enforce-



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

ment agencies, and other stakeholders, highlighting the NDA Government's pitch, *Nasha Mukht Bharat* (Drug

free India).

The document sets out a shared roadmap for the demand-reduction, supply-reduction, and harm-reduction aspects of the drug problem. The roadmap outlines a network-centric enforcement approach.

It defines responsibilities, timelines, and measurable targets for all stakeholders. It integrates enforcement, demand reduction, rehabilitation, public awareness, capacity building, and inter-agency coordination.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

CBSE eases three language rule

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 ■ New Delhi

In a relief to lakhs of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) students currently studying in Classes 7 to 9, who opted for two foreign languages under the three-language policy, they will be allowed to continue with the same language combination till Class 10, officials said on Friday.

"The requirement of studying at least two Indian languages under the new language policy will be implemented prospectively from Class 6 and will not be applied retrospectively to students already studying in Classes 7 to 9. An official notification clarifying the same will be issued soon," a senior board official said. In April, the CBSE had announced a phased implementation of the three-language formula from Class 6.



Representative image

The development comes over a month after the CBSE announced that the study of three languages, including at least two native Indian languages, has been made compulsory for Class 9 students beginning July 1.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Preamble omitted, new NCERT book triggers row

RAJESH KUMAR
 ■ New Delhi

A political controversy has erupted over major changes in the new social science textbook for Class 9 by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The bone of contention is over the omission of the Preamble and the words secular and secularism.

The revised textbook, which integrates history, geography, political science, and economics into a single volume, marks a significant departure from previous editions. Among the most notable changes is the omission of the Preamble from the introductory chapter on the Constitution. References to secular and secularism, which featured in earlier editions, have also been removed from the primary text.

The Congress has accused the Government of attempting to undermine constitutional values and imposing a communal ideology in the revised Class 9 social science textbook. Opposition leaders claimed that deleting the Preamble and the word secular is a deliberate attempt to erase the foundational, pluralistic philosophy of the Indian



Congress Spokesperson Shama Mohamed addresses a press conference on Thursday

Constitution from the school curriculum.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and the NCERT have pushed back against the allegations. They state the new curriculum comprehensively covers constitutional values across various classes and have called the Congress's objections baseless "politics of lies".

The war of words erupted on a day when the SIR had completed one year, notwithstanding fierce protests by the Opposition and its several run-ins with the Election Commission of

India (ECI). Nearly six crore voters, so far, have been deleted during the revision now on in 19 states and Union Territories.

Interestingly, SIR of electoral rolls also finds mention in the book along with a separate chapter explaining the functioning of the Election Commission of India, meaning of elections, electoral rolls, voter registration, the conduct of elections and party system in India.

The textbook also includes a dedicated chapter on the 1975-77 Emergency, describing it as

one of the most significant periods in independent India's democratic history. The chapter examines the suspension of civil liberties, press censorship, arrests of political leaders, and the eventual restoration of democratic processes after the Emergency ended.

It also includes a verse from the *Manusmriti* to claim that women were accorded respect in the Vedic period but their status "fluctuated, even declined" as social and political conditions changed over time.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Centuries-old Rajasthani royal custom welcomes its first girl heir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
 ■ Jaipur

In a significant break from centuries-old custom, a 13-year-old girl has been formally declared the heir to a erstwhile royal family in Rajasthan's Pali district, marking a rare shift towards gender inclusion in a traditionally male-dominated practice.

Tejaswi Kumari Jodha was invested with the ceremonial turban under the traditional "Paag Ka Dastoor" at Kherwa village on Thursday, symbolising her succession to the Kherwagarh lineage following the death of her father, Harish Chandra Jodha.

The ceremony, held at the historic Kherwa Fort which is

believed to date back to the 17th century, drew hundreds of villagers and onlookers. It marked for the first time in the region that a girl was recognised as an heir under this long-standing Rajput custom.

As part of the elaborate ritual, Vedic chants were recited while Tejaswi sat through the ceremony with composure. A ceremonial pink turban, signifying the end of mourning and the assumption of responsibility, was placed on her head.

The turban was sent by the former royal family of Jodhpur-Marwar according to tradition. A 'tilak' was also applied on her forehead using blood drawn through a ritualistic gesture, in keeping with age-old customs.



Representative image

The "Paag Ka Dastoor" has historically been practised in parts of Pali that were once under the Jodhpur kingdom, where the heir of a deceased family head dons a turban as a mark of succession.

The ritual symbolises not only inheritance but also the transfer of social and moral responsibility within the community. However, it has traditionally been reserved for male heirs.

Community elders said the decision to recognise Tejaswi as the successor was taken collectively, as her father had no son. The Kherwagarh family had not performed the ceremony for nearly 65 years due to the absence of a male heir, making this occasion both

rare and symbolic. Villagers described the move as progressive and reflective of changing social attitudes. Ravindra Singh, a resident of a neighbouring village, said the community chose to uphold the tradition while adapting it to modern values of equality.

Another resident, Ajay Singh, said the decision was also intended to honour the legacy of Tejaswi's father, who was known for his social contributions and had served twice as sarpanch.

"It is a matter of pride for all of us that, for the first time, a daughter has been recognised as the head of the family in this region," former sarpanch Kanhaiya Lal told reporters.



CM honours democracy fighters, announces welfare package

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Friday announced a series of welfare measures for democracy fighters, including free medical treatment, air ambulance services and a special pilgrimage train, while addressing the state-level Democracy Fighters' Memorial Day conference at Ravindra Bhawan.

Paying tribute to those who resisted the Emergency and defended democratic values, Yadav said no national interest can be greater than the interest of the country. He said a strong democracy is India's greatest strength and credited democracy fighters with safeguarding the Constitution and preserving the country's democratic traditions despite facing imprisonment, torture and hardship.

"The sacrifices made by democracy fighters can never be repaid. Their courage and commitment ensured that democratic values remained intact, making India one of the world's strongest democracies," the Chief Minister said.

During the programme, Yadav honoured senior democracy fighters, including 96-year-old Lakshmi Narayan Patidar from Ratlam district and 95-year-old Shantilal Sanghvi, along with former minister Umashankar Gupta, who played a prominent role during the Emergency. The event began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp, the singing of Vande Mataram and the screening of a short film on the Emergency. The Chief Minister also visited an exhibition



depicting events from the Emergency period.

Announcing several welfare initiatives, Yadav said democracy fighters would be provided a special train under the Chief Minister Teerth Darshan Yojana for pilgrimage. They will also be allowed to stay at government rest houses for up to two days.

He further announced that the state government would bear the full cost of medical treatment for democracy fighters. In medical emergencies, they would also be eligible for free PM Shri Air Ambulance services to reach higher healthcare centres.

The Chief Minister said commemorative copper plaques would be presented to all democracy fighters. Memorial plaques would also be installed in the names of deceased democracy fighters, while public buildings, parks and roads in their native villages, towns or residential

areas would be named after them. He added that democracy fighters would be allowed to change the bank branch linked to their monthly honorarium in case of a change of residence and would receive priority treatment at all government offices.

Reflecting on the Emergency period, Yadav said democracy fighters endured severe hardships to protect the nation's democratic foundations. He recalled that his own father had spent 19 months in jail during the Emergency and said many activists were subjected to inhuman treatment for refusing to compromise their principles.

He also said the preservation of democracy has enabled people from ordinary families to occupy the country's highest constitutional positions, citing Prime Minister Narendra Modi as an example. India, he added, continues to strength-

en its position globally because of its democratic institutions.

Former Governor Captain Singh Solanki called for democracy fighters across the country to be granted the same status as freedom fighters and urged the Centre to make the monthly financial assistance of Rs 30,000 tax-free. He also highlighted India's economic growth, stating that the country's GDP growth rate of 7.8 per cent reflects its rising global stature.

Democracy Fighters Association national president Kailash Soni described the struggle against the Emergency as India's "second freedom movement", saying democratic rights and freedom of expression were severely curtailed during that period. He said commemorating the Emergency serves as a reminder of the importance of protecting constitutional values and democratic institutions.

CM begins two-day Kukru visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav will visit Kukru hill station in Betul district on a two-day tour beginning Saturday.

He will visit the Sunset Point, attend a night chaupal at Gram Panchayat Kukru and interact with villagers before participating in a cultural programme.

On Sunday, the Chief Minister will meditate at Sunrise and Butch Points, review activities run by women's self-help groups, take part in a plantation drive, inspect a coffee plantation, interact with local public representatives and join the collective listening of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Mann Ki Baat programme.

The visit is aimed at promoting eco-tourism and rural development in the region.



Shia Muslims participate in a religious procession on the occasion of Muharram in Bhopal on Friday. Pioneer photo

Action against illegal colonies near Kerwa Dam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

The district administration intensified its drive against illegal colonies around Kerwa Dam on Friday, demolishing unauthorised developments in Mendori and Barkhedhi Bajafat villages in Huzur tehsil. Roads laid inside the colonies were dug up and boundary walls razed as part of the enforcement action.

According to Huzur SDM Vinod Sonkiya, the operation was carried out under the supervision of Tehsildar Atul Sharma as part of the ongoing campaign against illegal colonies developed around the environmental-sensitive Kerwa Dam area.

In Mendori village, officials acted against an unauthorised

colony allegedly being developed by Rajeev Dwivedi on 1,590 hectares of land recorded in the name of Muntiyaz Ali. The administration said the colony was being developed within 33 metres of the Full Tank Level (FTL) of Kerwa Dam, where construction is prohibited. The estimated market value of the land is around Rs 15 crore.

A similar action was taken in Barkhedhi Bajafat village, where an illegal colony was allegedly being developed by the same person on 1,570 hectares of land recorded in the name of Shahwaz Khan. Revenue officials demolished the unauthorised structures and internal infrastructure at the site.

The land involved is valued at approximately Rs

12 crore. Officials said both colonies were being developed without obtaining the mandatory permissions from the competent authorities, violating land development and environmental regulations.

The administration used heavy machinery to remove roads, boundary walls and other infrastructure created as part of the illegal layouts. The crackdown forms part of a larger campaign launched by the district administration to curb unauthorised colonisation around Kerwa Dam and other ecologically sensitive areas. Over the past six days, authorities have taken action against more than 15 illegal colonies in the Huzur subdivision.

14-year-old killed by lightning

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Anuppur

A 14-year-old boy died after being struck by lightning while collecting mangoes in a field near Bijodi village in Anuppur district on Friday evening.

The victim, identified as Rishabh Kumar Yadav, had gone to a farm near Sareha Nala with other children when the weather suddenly changed around 4 pm. Strong winds, rain and thunderstorm activity began before lightning struck the area.

The frightened children took shelter and later found Rishabh lying unconscious near a tree. They alerted nearby electricity department workers, who rushed to the spot but found him dead. His family was later informed of the incident.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav addresses the State level Loktantra Senani Sammelan, marked as Samvidhan Haya Diwas on the 51st anniversary of 1975 Emergency, at Ravindra Bhawan in Bhopal on Friday. Pioneer photo

AIIMS study finds need for diaper hygiene education

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

A study by AIIMS Bhopal has found that mothers living in urban areas have significantly better knowledge of proper infant diaper care than their rural counterparts, although important gaps in hygiene and safe diaper disposal persist across both groups.

The research, conducted by Meena, an MSc Nursing (Pediatric Nursing) student of the 2024 batch at the AIIMS Bhopal College of Nursing, assessed awareness levels among mothers of children aged up to 36 months. The study was carried out under the guidance of Professor-cum-Principal In-charge Mamta Verma and co-guide Kumaraswamy A.P.

Researchers surveyed 276 mothers—138 each from urban and rural areas of Bhopal—using a structured question-

naire that evaluated knowledge across five key aspects of diaper care: diaper selection, frequency of changing diapers, hygiene practices, safe disposal and prevention of diaper rash.

The findings revealed a clear urban-rural divide. Urban mothers recorded a mean knowledge score of 14.47 ± 2.86, compared with 12.51 ± 3.52 among rural mothers. Around 40.6 per cent of urban mothers demonstrated good knowledge of diaper care, while only 14.5 per cent of rural mothers fell into the same category. Poor knowledge was observed in 34.8 per cent of rural mothers, compared with 14.5 per cent of urban respondents.

According to the study, urban mothers were better informed about selecting appropriate diapers and the recommended frequency of diaper changes, likely due to greater access to healthcare

information and awareness resources. However, researchers identified a common concern across both groups. Knowledge of hand hygiene during diaper changes and the safe disposal of used diapers remained inadequate, highlighting the need for broader public education on these practices.

The study notes that improper diaper care extends beyond causing skin irritation and rashes. Delayed diaper changes and poor hygiene can increase the risk of fungal infections such as candidiasis and, in severe cases, bacterial infections. Researchers emphasised that effective diaper care involves timely diaper changes, keeping the infant's skin clean and dry, maintaining proper hand hygiene and disposing of used diapers safely.

The authors concluded that targeted health education

programmes are needed in both urban and rural communities to improve awareness of diaper hygiene and safe disposal practices. They said simple preventive measures can significantly reduce the risk of infections while also promoting better household hygiene and environmental cleanliness.

The AIIMS Bhopal study highlights the need to strengthen practical knowledge of infant care through community-based awareness initiatives, particularly in rural areas where knowledge gaps remain more pronounced.

The researchers said the findings could help healthcare professionals and policymakers design targeted awareness programmes through hospitals, anganwadi centres and community health workers to improve infant care practices, particularly in rural areas where knowledge gaps were more evident.

Police, ATS probe blast during Ujjain Muharram procession

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ujjain

Security agencies have launched a detailed investigation after a vehicle suspended from a crane exploded during a Muharram procession in Ujjain district's Badnagar town. The incident, captured on video and widely circulated on social media, has led to the arrest of three people, while the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) has joined the probe alongside the local police.

The incident took place on the night of June 23 during a Muharram procession organised from Adan Mohalla. A Tata Magic van was suspended around 40 feet above the ground using a crane, with two men standing on its roof waving red flags. The vehicle bore the slogan "Le, Phir Aa Gaye", which also appeared on placards carried by some participants.

Moments later, the vehicle exploded, prompting concerns over public safety and the nature of the blast. Police have arrested Shoab, Zahid and Tapsee Alias Tasleem in connection with the inci-

dent. A case has also been registered against the owner of the crane used to suspend the vehicle.

According to police, Shoab organised the procession under the banner of Adan Akhada and arranged for the scrap vehicle to be lifted by the crane. Zahid and Tapsee were seen standing on the roof of the vehicle before climbing down shortly before the explosion.

The accused told investigators that the blast was caused by firecrackers worth around Rs 8,000, and have produced a purchase bill, which police are verifying.

Given the sensitivity of Ujjain, Unhel, Nagda and Mahidpur, security agencies have expanded the investigation. The ATS is examining three key aspects: the motive behind the explosion, the significance of the slogan displayed on the vehicle, and the exact nature and source of the explosive material used.

Crane owner Gopal Rathore told police he had been informed that the crane was required for showering flower petals during the procession.

STR Assistant Director suspended

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department has suspended Vinod Verma, the in-charge Assistant Director of Satpura Tiger Reserve, with immediate effect after a video showing him feeding poha to a sambar went viral on social media.

The suspension order, issued on June 25, followed widespread criticism over the incident and growing demands for action. The move was taken on the instructions of Principal Secretary (Forest) Sandeep Yadav.

According to an order issued by Satpura Tiger Reserve Field Director Rakhi Nanda, the viral video, recorded on June 21, showed Verma behaving inappropriately with a wild sambar. The department termed the act a serious lapse and inconsistent with the responsibilities of a forest official.

The Forest Department said the conduct violated Rule 3 of the Madhya Pradesh Civil Services Conduct Rules, 1965, and suspended Verma.

Panic after tiger sighting in Bhopal's Chandanpura area

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

Panic gripped residents after a tiger was spotted in the Chandanpura area of Bhopal on Friday morning, prompting the Forest Department to launch a search operation. The big cat was seen by several people who had gone for their morning walk between 6:30 am and 7 am.

A couple had a close encounter with the tiger after it came within a short distance of them. The woman raised an alarm, following which the animal retreated into nearby bushes.

Recounting the incident, the woman said she initially mistook the animal for a stray dog but soon realised it was a tiger. She shouted to alert her husband, who was walking a few metres behind her, after which the tiger disappeared into the vegetation.

Several other morning walkers also claimed to have seen the tiger, while some said they heard it roar. The sighting caused panic in the area, with many people fleeing to safety. Some onlookers recorded videos of

the animal from a safe distance.

According to eyewitnesses, the tiger later entered the boundary of a private farmhouse in Chandanpura. The Forest Department was informed and a team reached the spot around 9 am to begin a search operation.

Wildlife expert Rashid Noor said the area is located close to a natural tiger corridor. He noted that although a protective fence has been installed, one section remains open, which may have allowed the tiger to move in and out of the area.

Noor also pointed out that increasing human activity, ongoing construction and land development are affecting the tiger's natural movement routes. He warned that unless timely measures are taken, incidents of human-wildlife conflict could increase in the future.

The Forest Department has advised residents to avoid morning walks and visits to forest-fringe areas in and around Chandanpura until the search operation is completed. Teams are continuing efforts to trace the tiger's location.

THINK Gas expands CGD footprint

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

THINK Gas, one of India's leading City Gas Distribution (CGD) companies, has accelerated the expansion of its natural gas network across the Bhopal and Rajgarh geographical areas, strengthening access to clean and reliable energy for households, businesses and industries.

The company has commissioned around 189 km of steel pipeline, while a total of 206 km has been laid and is under maintenance. Its extensive polyethylene (PE) pipeline network has made Piped Natural Gas (PNG) accessible to more than 80,000 households. Over the next six months, THINK Gas plans to provide 6,000 new residential PNG connections and add 25 commercial and industrial consumers.

The company currently operates 42 CNG stations, including an LCNG station at Bagroda, and plans to commission nine more stations, including upgraded facilities. Supported by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and PNGRB, THINK Gas is also expanding its network across industrial hubs such as Bagroda, Govindpura, Acharpura and Piliukhedhi.

Students struggle as LPG prices surge, connections remain shut

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

The recent conflict between the United States and Iran has significantly impacted LPG prices, with both domestic and commercial cylinders becoming costlier across Madhya Pradesh. The sharp increase has pushed cooking expenses up by nearly 20 per cent, while the suspension of new LPG connections has left thousands of consumers waiting.

Oil marketing companies have stopped issuing new LPG connections over the past three months, forcing applicants to wait indefinitely. In Bhopal alone, more than 8,000 applications for new connections are pending.

Students living in rented accommodation are among the worst affected. Raghav, a NEET aspirant, said that before the supply disruption, LPG cylinders were available in the black market for Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,200. However, the price has now risen to between Rs 2,500 and Rs 3,000, putting additional pressure on his monthly budget.

He said he applied for a new LPG connection but was informed by the agency that fresh connections had been suspended. Despite visiting the agency multiple times, he was told that oil companies had temporarily halted the process.

Following the announcement of a ceasefire, consumers are hopeful that new connections will resume soon. Bhopal Food Controller Chandrabhan Singh Jadaun said discussions have been held with oil companies, which indicated that talks are underway at higher levels. A decision on restarting new LPG connections is expected next month.

With the online portal for new 14-kg LPG connections remaining closed, consumers have instead been offered 5-kg cylinders as an alternative. Around 6,000 such cylinders were supplied to 41 gas agencies across Bhopal, of which nearly 5,500 have already been sold. Officials, however, said it is yet to be decided whether these 5-kg connections will be converted into regular 14-kg domestic LPG connections once the online portal resumes operations.



CM to inspect 1,920 MW pumped storage project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Neemuch

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav will visit the under-construction Greenko Gandhi Sagar Pumped Storage Project at Khimla village in Neemuch district on June 29 to review the progress of what is set to become India's largest pumped storage project.



Being developed by the Greenko Group at an investment of Rs 11,470 crore, the 1,920 MW Gandhi Sagar Pumped Storage Project (PSP) is expected to significantly strengthen Madhya Pradesh's renewable energy capacity while generating large-scale employment in Neemuch, Mandasaur and neighbouring districts.

The foundation stone of the project was laid virtually on October 4, 2023, by

then Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. Since taking office, Mohan Yadav has described the project as one of the state's flagship clean energy initiatives.

Designed with an energy storage capacity of 10,326 MWh, the project will use the existing Gandhi Sagar Reservoir as the lower reservoir and a newly constructed upper reservoir at Khimla.

have a gross storage capacity of 1.90 TMC and will be built using a rockfill embankment with an asphalt face, reaching a maximum height of 35 metres. The underground power station will house nine reversible Francis turbine units—seven units of 240 MW each and two units of 120 MW each—which will operate in both pumping and electricity generation modes.

Officials estimate the project will achieve a cycle efficiency of 79.44 per cent, while the generating units are expected to maintain 95 per cent availability, ensuring reliable power supply to the grid.

Electricity generated by the project will be evacuated through an 80-km-long 420 kV double-circuit transmission line connecting the

plant to the Power Grid Corporation of India Limited's 400/220 kV substation at Neemuch.

The project requires around 503 hectares of land, including forest land and temporary areas for roads, construction facilities and debris management. It is targeted for completion within three-and-a-half years.

Construction is progressing rapidly on the Aravalli plateau in Rampura tehsil, where more than 3,000 workers are currently engaged. Besides boosting local employment, the project is expected to stimulate economic activity across the region. The company has stated that the work is being carried out in coordination with the local administration and surrounding communities.



Preparations underway ahead of the International MSME Day-2026 celebrations at Ravindra Bhawan in Bhopal on Friday.

Excise department seizes illegal liquor, scooter in Indore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Indore

The Excise Department seized 12 bottles of illegally transported foreign liquor and an Activa scooter during a patrol operation in Indore, officials said.

The action was carried out on June 24 under the directions of Collector Shivam Verma and Assistant Excise Commissioner Abhishek Tiwari. The operation was led by Controller Devesh Chaturvedi, Deputy Controller Manoj Agrawal, ADEO Jahangir Khan and Sub-Inspector Priyanka Rani Chaurasia of Balda Colony Circle.

Acting on suspicion, the excise team intercepted an Activa scooter bearing registration number MP09-UD-6294 on Dussehra Maidan Road.

During the search, officials recovered 12 bottles of Black Venture foreign liquor, equivalent to 9 bulk litres, which was allegedly being transported illegally.

The liquor and the scooter were seized, and a case was registered against Raj Singh, son of Sohan Rajput, under Section 34(1)(a) of the Madhya Pradesh Excise Act, 1915, as amended in 2000.

Officials said the combined market value of the seized liquor and vehicle is estimated at around Rs 89,200. Constables Sangeeta Yadav and Bablu Sisodiya were part of the operation.

Further investigation is underway to ascertain the source and intended destination of the seized liquor.

Decision on MP Governor's tenure awaited

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bhopal

Speculation has intensified in political and administrative circles over the future of Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangubhai Patel, whose five-year term is set to end on July 6. It remains to be seen whether the President will grant him an extension or appoint a new Governor for the state.

Mangubhai Patel assumed office as the 19th Governor of Madhya Pradesh on July 7, 2021. A senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader from Gujarat, he previously served as a minister in the Gujarat government and as Deputy Speaker of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly in 2014 before being appointed Governor.

During his tenure in Madhya Pradesh, Patel focused extensively on tribal welfare, particularly the elimination of sickle cell disease among tribal communities. He actively promoted awareness, screening and treatment initiatives, contributing to Madhya Pradesh emerging as a leading state in the country's efforts to combat the genetic disorder.

Under the Constitution, a Governor's tenure is ordinarily five years, although an incumbent continues in office until a successor assumes charge unless reappointed or granted an extension. With Patel's term nearing completion, discussions have begun over whether he will continue or a new appointment will be announced by the President.

If Patel completes his tenure without

interruption, he will become only the second Governor in the past 15 years to serve a full five-year term in Madhya Pradesh. Ram Naresh Yadav, who served as Governor from September 8, 2011, to September 7, 2016, was the last Governor to complete a full term in the state.

Following Yadav's tenure, Madhya Pradesh witnessed frequent changes in the Raj Bhavan. Lalji Tandon served as Governor from July 29, 2019, until his death on July 21, 2020. During the intervening periods, Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel twice held the additional charge of Madhya Pradesh Governor—first from January 23, 2018, to July 29, 2019, and again from July 1, 2020, to July 7, 2021. O P Kohli also briefly held additional charge before Anandiben Patel resumed the responsibility.

With the expiry of Mangubhai Patel's tenure just days away, attention is now focused on the President's decision. While there has been no official announcement so far, political observers expect clarity soon on whether Patel will receive an extension or a new Governor will be appointed to lead the constitutional office in Madhya Pradesh.

The appointment and tenure of Governors are decided by the President under Article 156 of the Constitution. While the normal tenure is five years, a Governor continues in office until a successor assumes charge, allowing the Union government flexibility in making appointments or granting extensions.

CM to lead International MSME Day event

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav will participate in the 'Empowered Entrepreneurs, Prosperous Madhya Pradesh Summit' at Ravindra Bhawan on Saturday to mark the 10th International MSME Day 2026. The summit, centred on the theme 'Heart of Prosperous India, Heart of Development', will bring together entrepreneurs, startups, financial institutions, policymakers and industry leaders to promote the growth of the state's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

MSMEs in the food processing, textiles and apparel, and engineering sectors to facilitate business opportunities and market linkages.

The Chief Minister will inaugurate an MSME exhibition and an Ease of Doing Business Clinic. Around 60 stalls will showcase products, services and government initiatives related to MSMEs, startups, One District One Product (ODOP), women self-help groups, and scheme beneficiaries. The exhibition will also feature participation from the Central Institute of Petrochemicals Engineering and Technology (CIPET), MSME Technology Centre Bhopal, Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), Government e-Marketplace (GeM), National Institute of Technical Teachers' Training and Research (NITTTR), banks, and leading e-commerce platforms such as Walmart and Flipkart. Participants will receive information on various government schemes, financing options and business support services available for entrepreneurs. The summit will also feature addresses by MSME Minister Chaitanya Kumar Kashyap and Chief Secretary Anurag Jain, while Principal Secretary, MSME, Raghvendra Kumar Singh will

deliver the welcome address. Short films highlighting the achievements of the MSME, Horticulture and Food Processing, Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Rural and Cottage Industries, Tourism, Science and Technology, State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM), and Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion (IPIP) departments over the past two-and-a-half years, along with their future action plans, will be screened during the event.

More than 2,000 participants, including MSME entrepreneurs, startup founders, representatives of financial institutions, e-commerce companies and women self-help groups, are expected to attend the summit. Three thematic sessions will be organised as part of the programme. The first, titled 'New Markets, New Opportunities', will focus on expanding market access for MSMEs and self-help groups, with participation from FIEO, CSIR-AMPRI, ONDC, ECGC and India Post. The second session, 'Access to Capital - Funding the Next Generation MSMEs', will feature experts from NPCL, Central Bank of India, RXIL TReDS Platform and NABARD. The third session, organised in collaboration with

Borrower sent to civil jail

Narmadapuram: A court in Narmadapuram has ordered the civil imprisonment of a borrower for failing to repay outstanding dues on a vehicle loan despite repeated notices and opportunities to clear the amount.

According to advocate Sunny Tilachorya, the order was passed by the Principal District Judge in a recovery case filed by Shriram Finance Limited. The borrower, Sahib Singh Chouhan, a resident of Rasulia in Narmadapuram district, had availed a vehicle loan from the company's Narmadapuram branch.

The company stated that an outstanding amount of around Rs 1.42 lakh remained unpaid. Despite repeated demand notices and court proceedings, the borrower neither appeared before the court nor deposited the dues.

After considering the matter, the court ordered Chouhan's civil imprisonment for non-payment of the decretal amount.

Shriram Finance officials Mahesh Sharle and Yogesh Jat said several opportunities had been provided to settle the dues before the court issued the order. The company was represented by panel advocates Anurag Dubey and Sunny Tilachorya.

Police seize MD drugs worth Rs 1 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ratlam

In a major crackdown on narcotics trafficking, Ratlam Police arrested an alleged interstate drug trafficker and seized 1 kg of MD drugs valued at around Rs 1 crore during a special operation in the district. The accused has been booked under the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

According to Jaora SDOP Sandeep Malviya, the action was carried out by the Dhodhar police outpost under Ringnod police station

following a tip-off received from an informer. Police were alerted that a man carrying a large quantity of narcotic substances would pass through the Dhodhar area via the Mhow-Neemuch four-lane highway.

Acting swiftly on the information, a police team reached Barkhedi Phanta and laid a trap. During the operation, officers intercepted a suspect and conducted a search. The accused was identified as Yunus, 52, son of Niyamat Khan Pathan, a resident of Kotdi village under Kotdi police station in Rajasthan's Pratapgarh district. During the search,

police recovered 1,000 grams (1 kg) of MD drugs from his possession. Officials estimated the market value of the seized contraband at around Rs 1 crore. The drugs and other relevant material were seized, and a case was registered against the accused under the NDPS Act.

Following the seizure, Ratlam Superintendent of Police Amit Kumar visited Ringnod police station on Friday afternoon to review the operation. He held discussions with the investigating officers and directed them to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the case.

Women, students honoured at Mehgaon event

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhind

A cooking competition, free bicycle distribution programme and e-scooty distribution ceremony for meritorious students were organised in Mehgaon in the presence of Renewable Energy Minister Rakesh Shukla.

The cooking competition, organised by Janpad Panchayat Mehgaon at Sandipani Boys Higher Secondary School, saw participation from local women, who showcased their culinary skills through traditional as well as contemporary recipes. Winners were selected based on taste, presentation and innovation, and were presented with prizes and certificates by the minister.

Addressing the gathering, Rakesh Shukla said women are the backbone of families and society, and their creativity and skills deserve recognition and encouragement. He stressed the importance of promoting local products and creating self-employment opportunities, saying home cooking can be developed into small-scale enterprises to strengthen women's economic independence.

He also encouraged the younger generation to preserve traditional culinary practices while ensuring nutrition and hygiene. The minister appreciated the efforts of Janpad Panchayat Mehgaon, the school administration and local volunteers for successfully organising the event.

On the occasion of the

International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, Rakesh Shukla administered an anti-drug pledge to those present. He said the social and economic damage caused by substance abuse can be reduced through collective awareness and support for affected individuals. He added that the state government is continuing its efforts towards a drug-free society through education, rehabilitation and effective law enforcement, while emphasising the need for community participation.

Later, at Sandipani Government Excellence Higher Secondary School in Mehgaon, the minister distributed free bicycles to students and e-scooties to meritorious students under the state government's scheme.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav honours medal-winning players of Madhya Pradesh from the Indian team of the Under 18 Boys and Girls Hockey Asia Cup held in Japan from May 29 to June 6, at the CM's residence in Bhopal on Friday. Pioneer photo

Over Rs 2,000 crore logistics projects reshape Indore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Dhar

The Indore-Pithampur region is set to emerge as one of India's most significant industrial and logistics hubs, with multiple infrastructure projects involving investments of more than Rs 2,000 crore expected to strengthen supply chains, boost exports and create over 14,650 direct and indirect employment opportunities.



The flagship project is the Multi Modal Logistics Park (MMLP) at Pithampur, which is being developed over nearly 255 acres at an estimated cost of more than Rs 1,110 crore. Around Rs 160 crore has already been spent on the project. Construction of approximately 4 lakh sq ft of warehousing space is underway, along with a 150-room hotel. Warehousing operations are expected to commence next month.

The park will be connected through both road and rail networks, ensuring seamless cargo movement across the country. It will also have 25 acres reserved for commercial activities and another 25 acres dedicated to a customs-bound Inland Container Depot (ICD) and warehousing facilities. The project is expected to generate nearly 10,000 direct and indirect jobs while providing industries with efficient access to ports and national markets.

Another major development is the Xsio Logistics Park at Machal near Indore. Spread over 22.3 hectares, the project involves an investment of around Rs 600 crore and will feature modern warehousing, smart inventory management

systems, cold chain infrastructure, truck terminals and transportation support facilities. The project is expected to generate around 4,000 employment opportunities and provide a major boost to e-commerce, manufacturing and distribution operations in central India.

In Pithampur Sector-7, the Kamakhya Logistics Park is also under development over nearly 20 acres with the proposed investment of Rs 127 crore. The facility will provide advanced warehousing and logistics services to industries operating in the region and is expected to create around 200 jobs. Officials said the project is likely to become operational shortly.

Private sector participation is also increasing in the region. Gateway Distriparks has acquired nearly 30 acres of private land in Pithampur and

plans to invest around Rs 200 crore in developing another large logistics park. The proposed project is expected to create around 450 jobs while significantly expanding warehousing capacity, container handling facilities, multimodal transportation services and value-added logistics operations.

Collectively, these projects are expected to strengthen the industrial ecosystem of western Indore and Pithampur, which already serves as a major manufacturing base for the automobile, engineering, pharmaceutical, textile and allied sectors. Improved logistics infrastructure will provide industries with faster and more economical transportation options for raw materials and finished products, enhancing operational efficiency and competitiveness.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE
Registered Office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai- 400051

ICICI Home Finance
Corporate Office: ICICI HFC Tower, JB Nagar, Andheri Kurla Road, Andheri East, Mumbai- 400059
Branch Office: 1st floor, The Empire, Office No.-F-05, 33-City Centre, Ward no. 30, Near Income Tax Building, Opposite Madhav Rao Scindia Park, Gwalior (MP)- 474011

Whereas
The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the demand notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited. The Panchnama for refusal of possession of the said mortgaged property by the aforesaid borrower/co-borrowers is filed by duly appointed authorized officer.

The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of property/ Date of Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Sorav Kumar Gupta (Borrower), Nikita Gupta (Co-Borrower), LHGWA00001408591	Plot No 41, Part of Survey No. 192, Village Salapura, P. H. No. 37, RMN 02, District Sheopur Madhya Pradesh 476337 Bounded By- East: 20 Ft Road, West: Plot No. 27 And 28, North: 20 Ft Road, South: Plot No.42./ Date of Possession- 23-06-2026	24-06-2025 Rs. 9,91,185/-	Gwalior
2.	Sorav Kumar Gupta (Borrower), Nikita Gupta (Co-Borrower), LHGWA00001408592	Plot No 41, Part of Survey No. 192, Village Salapura, P. H. No. 37, RMN 02, District Sheopur Madhya Pradesh- 476337 Bounded By- East: 20 Ft Road, West: Plot No. 27 And 28, North: 20 Ft Road, South: Plot No.42./ Date of Possession- 23-06-2026	24-06-2025 Rs. 53,263.83/-	Gwalior

The above-mentioned borrower(s)/ co-borrower(s)/ guarantor(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.
Date : June 27, 2026, Place: Sheopur
Authorized Officer, ICICI Home Finance Company Limited



Rahul Gandhi vows to keep fighting for people's rights

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said he would keep fighting for the people of the country and carry their voice to the corridors of power as the Lok Sabha leader of the Opposition.

In a post on social media, Gandhi shared a short video, listing issues he raised both inside and outside Parliament, as he completed two years in the key parliamentary post.

"Today marks two years since I became the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. Every single day of these two years has been dedicated to one task - to carry the voice of every Indian to the corridors of power.



NEET aspirants, exposing electoral fraud, or defending the Constitution, I have stood with you on every front. I stand with you today, and I always will," he said in Hindi.

Gandhi said that from the streets to Parliament, the people's trust is his greatest strength.

"The journey is long, but my resolve remains the

same - I will keep fighting every battle for you. Jai Hind, Jai Constitution," Gandhi said, sharing in the three-and-a-half-minute video of speeches he made over the past two years.

Gandhi has been a five-term MP and currently represents the Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha constituency, which was earlier represented by his mother, Sonia Gandhi.

BJP TARGETS RAHUL OVER FOREIGN VISITS

New Delhi: The BJP on Friday alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is always in "constant vacation mode" and is frequently absent whenever Parliament, elections or his party needs him. The ruling party claimed that Gandhi was away on "yet another foreign visit."

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said for Gandhi, LOP does not mean Leader of Opposition but "Leader of Paryatan (tourism) and Partying." "Rahul Gandhi should rename LOP as 'Leader of Paryatan and Partying' because that's what he always does - partying, tourism and travel," he said in a video statement.

Marshal Arjan Singh was exceptional soldier and statesman: Delhi LG Sandhu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh was an "exceptional soldier and a statesman", and across the different roles he assumed during his illustrious career, there remained a striking consistency in his professionalism and commitment to service, Delhi Lt Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu said on Friday.

Delivering the Arjan Singh Memorial Lecture hosted by the IAF at Subroto Park here, he also underlined that the legendary military officer had also "served with distinction" as Delhi's LG, and this legacy carries a special significance.

"As we remember him today, we honour not only an exceptional soldier and a statesman but also the values he embodied throughout his life - professional excellence, humility, integrity, and unwavering commitment to service," the LG said.



Extolling his distinguished career, in uniform and beyond, Sandhu said that few individuals in independent India's history have had careers that intersected so fluidly with the defining transition of the Indian State.

His life traversed British India, the Second World War, India's Independence, military modernisation, diplomacy and institutional building, the LG said.

roles, there remained a striking consistency in his approach, seriousness of purpose, professionalism and a quiet commitment to service," he asserted.

An iconic figure in the country's military history, Arjan Singh was the first and only officer of the Indian Air Force to be awarded the rank of Marshal in 2002. Born on April 15, 1919, at Lyallpur in undivided Punjab, his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had served in the cavalry. Singh led a fledgling IAF in

the 1965 India-Pakistan war when he was in his 40s. He died in September 2017 at the age of 98. In his address, the Delhi LG also mentioned that his own grandfather's life was associated with a social movement in Lyallpur (now Faisalabad in Pakistan).

"Arjan Singh came of age during a period of enormous critical and strategic change," the LG underlined, adding he excelled in swimming and team games.

"Aviation was not a pre-determined path, but during his studies in Lahore, he came across an opportunity to train at the Royal Air Force, Cranwell, and chose to pursue it," Sandhu said.

During his initial training, his flying assessments were "described as average", yet through persistence and sustained practice, he improved steadily and emerged as "one of the strongest performers of his cohorts".

Delhi BJP marks Emergency anniversary with tribute event

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi BJP on Friday commemorated the 51st anniversary of the Emergency by organising a seminar at the NDMC Convention Centre. At the seminar, 115 Loktantra Senanis jailed during the 1975-77 Emergency were felicitated and honoured for their role in resisting what party leaders described as an assault on democratic values.

The event was attended by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, former Union Minister Smriti Irani, BJP Parliamentary Board member and Loktantra Senani Satyanarayan Jatiya, and Delhi BJP president Harsh Malhotra, besides several MPs and senior party leaders.

Addressing the gathering, the chief minister said June 25, observed by the Centre as Samvidhan Hatya Diwas, should be remembered so that future generations understand the consequences of the Emergency. "Every year when we burn the effigy of Ravana, it symbolises the victory of truth over falsehood and good over evil. Similarly, Samvidhan Hatya Diwas is remembered so that future



generations remain aware of this chapter in history and no leader ever dares to repeat such an act again," she said.

The Chief Minister also paid tribute to those imprisoned during the Emergency, recalling former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's writings from jail. "Despite being imprisoned, respected Atal Bihari Vajpayee ji's pen continued to work and became the voice of lakhs of democracy warriors," she said.

Former Union Minister Smriti Irani accused the Congress of attempting to rewrite the history of the Emergency and urged young people to learn about the period. "Congress leaders spread misconceptions from Parliament to the streets and claim that they are the true protectors of the Constitution. Therefore, the

youth must know what happened to the Constitution during the Emergency," she said.

Irani also alleged that the suffering of women during the Emergency has largely been omitted from historical accounts. "There is no mention of what happened to women during the Emergency because the atrocities committed against women have been removed from the pages of Emergency history," she claimed.

Delhi BJP president Harsh Malhotra said the Emergency demonstrated the importance of democratic institutions. "The young generation that did not witness that period must understand what the mindset of Congress was at that time and how those who today talk about the Constitution had once strangled it," he said.

Bengal will bring strict anti-conversion law, implement UCC: Suwendu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari on Friday said his government would bring in a stringent law against 'land jihad', 'love jihad' and religious conversion, besides implementing the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) as part of measures to strengthen national security and preserve the state's cultural identity.

Addressing a programme at Rabindra Sadan here to mark the 150th anniversary of 'Vande Mataram', Adhikari alleged that infiltration had led to demographic changes and posed a threat to the

state's social fabric and national security.

"Give us some time. A strict law against land jihad, love jihad and forced religious conversion and Uniform Civil Code will be introduced in West Bengal," he said.

Claiming that his government had strengthened border security by providing land required for border infrastructure, the chief minister said holding centres had been set up in border districts to identify and send back "infiltrators" to their place of origin.

"Those entering illegally and engaging in activities that threaten India's culture and national security will be



sent back," he said.

Drawing a distinction between illegal immigrants and refugees covered under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), Adhikari said Hindus who had come to India after facing religious persecution were "not infil-

trators" and would be granted citizenship under the law.

"We will not allow any anti-national activities on the soil of Bengal, the land of Ramakrishna, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Bankim

Chandra Chattopadhyay," Adhikari said.

"Those who live here but insult the country's defence forces, oppose Operation Sindoor, remain silent on the Pahalgam incident and speak only of humanity would not be allowed to indulge in such activities in the state," he added. Mookerjee gave the slogan of 'Ek Desh, Ek Vidhan, Ek Pradhan, Ek Nishan', and we remain committed to that vision, the CM said.

He asserted that his government would not allow any force to weaken West Bengal's cultural identity or national character, describing the state as India's "cultural and spiritual capital".

Ayodhya will become BJP's Lanka: Akhilesh Yadav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Friday asserted that Ayodhya will prove to be the Lanka for the BJP and the mask of the "devout" will come off.

Lanka Kaand is an important chapter of Ramcharitmanas that symbolises the victory of good over evil with Lord Ram killing demon Ravana.

"The Lanka Kaand of the BJP will take place in Ayodhya



itself. The mask worn by these 'daanbhakto' (devotees of charity) has finally come off, because the Lord's

divine power has indeed revealed its miracle," Yadav said on X in Hindi, referring to the scam in cash and valu-

ables donated to the Ram Temple.

"Now, the glittering Lanka empire of the BJP's arrogance will meet its end, as well as the 'Lankadhipati' (chief of Lanka) himself," he said.

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister also said that the ruling BJP used to claim that its office-bearers do not give resignations and are now calling their act of quitting "tyagpatras". This is just the beginning, and an inlight is in the offing, he asserted. "Amid this battle of divi-

Delhi Police conducts raids, seizes large quantities of counterfeit Havells packaging material across Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Police, in coordination with Havells India, conducted multiple raids across the National Capital Territory (NCT), seizing thousands of counterfeit Havells packaging materials and

printing equipment allegedly used for producing fake electrical wire packaging.

The enforcement action comes amid growing concerns over the increasing availability of counterfeit electrical wires in the market, particularly following a rise in fire incidents.



Havells has urged authorities to intensify efforts against the supply of spurious electrical products, stating that counterfeit electrical wires pose a serious threat to public safety and may contribute to fire-related accidents.

The raids occurred on two

occasions in June - June 7 and June 22 - and are expected to continue in the coming months as part of a broader initiative to curb the circulation of counterfeit electrical goods.

According to Havells, the operation aims to protect consumers, discourage the

sale of fake products, and safeguard government tax revenues.

During the first phase of the operation, authorities raided a godown located near Moti Cinema Compound, Chandni Chowk, and another premises at Amar Vihar, Karawal Nagar,

Delhi. The raids were conducted with operational support from the Kotwali Police Station.

Police officials detained two individuals during the operation and seized approximately 11,600 counterfeit outer box packaging sheets bearing the Havells

brand. The packaging materials were allegedly intended for use in marketing counterfeit electrical wires.

Acting on leads from the initial raids, Delhi Police carried out a second round of searches in the Mandoli and Shahdara areas.

FROM PAGE - 1

Operation Sindoor martyrs honoured

The 'Tyag Chakra' (Circle of Sacrifice) at the National War Memorial is dedicated to the nation's bravehearts. It comprises 16 circular granite walls; the name, rank, and unit of every soldier who made the supreme sacrifice for the country after Independence are inscribed on the bricks of these walls.

Now, these six heroes from Operation Sindoor will also become a permanent part of this memorial. The names of the fallen soldiers and the air warrior have been included in the Roll of Honour on the National War Memorial website and inscribed on Wall 3D of the National War Memorial in New Delhi under the 2025 section dedicated to personnel who made the supreme sacrifice in service of the nation.

The inclusion of their names at the National War Memorial marks the first formal confirmation by the government of fatalities suffered by the Indian armed forces during Operation Sindoor.

India launched punitive strikes on May 7 last year, targeting terrorist camps in Pakistan and Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) in retaliation for the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam that claimed 26 lives. The military action killed more than 100 terrorists and inflicted heavy damage to six to seven strategic airbases and allied infrastructure in Pakistan.

It retaliated triggering aerial engagements, drone attacks and heavy shelling across the border. The military operation, named "Operation Sindoor", carried deep symbolic messaging.

The word "Sindoor" refers to the red vermilion traditionally worn by married Hindu women and was chosen to signify vengeance for the widowing of women whose husbands were killed

in the terror attack. The conflict lasted four days ending on May 10.

Police arrest all eight accused

Police are now checking records, questioning the accused, and looking for any signs of diverted funds. More arrests could happen as the investigation continues. The investigation is now focusing on tracking any possible diversion of funds, and more action may be taken if new evidence is found.

The case began with claims that cash and valuables donated by millions of Ram devotees through temple donation boxes were misused. Sources say some of the accused were caught on CCTV, showing how serious the alleged breach of public trust is. The government has made its position clear: nobody will be spared, regardless of who they are.

The SIT is expected to expand its investigation as more records are checked. Devotees and priests have supported the action and want those responsible to be punished so that such incidents do not happen again, a senior police official said.

Preamble omitted, new NCERT book triggers row

The reference appears in the chapter, State and Society up to 1000 CE, which describes the Vedic age as "a period during which women held a high and respectful position in society."

"Women participated in scholarly learning, took part in rituals alongside men in certain contexts, attended public assemblies, and several hymns of the Rig Veda are traditionally attributed to women sages such as Apala,

Visvavara, Ghosha and Lopamudra. Where women, verily, are honoured, there gods rejoice; where, however, they are not honoured, there all sacred rites prove fruitless," the textbook states. The textbook also revisits the concepts of caste, arguing that social identity in early Vedic society was not determined solely by birth.

Amit Shah pitches for Nasha Mukta Bharat

A government statement said, "This vision document will serve as a guiding framework for policy formulation, implementation and institutional strengthening across the country to curb the menace of drugs."

"For the future of our nation over the next 100 years, we must fight this collectively with unwavering resolve. All governments should unite on a single platform. We must also involve seers who guide the public, youths who shape the future, and the influence of mothers in this effort," he said.

At the 10th apex-level meeting of the Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD), he also asked states to submit suggestions for amendments to the law. The Home Minister also pointed to progress by agencies in tackling drug-related issues in the country, saying that seizures of synthetic drugs rose sharply from 26 lakh kilograms during 2004 to 2014 to 1.18 crore kilograms during 2014 to 2024, showing the campaign was moving steadily toward success.

He said the value of the drugs seized between 2004 and 2014 was approximately ₹40,000 crore, whereas the value of the drugs seized between 2014 and 2024 was approximately ₹1.84 lakh crore.

He said these figures showed a significant

improvement in the effectiveness and reach of government actions.

The Union Ministry of Finance is reviewing the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act to strengthen it, and it has asked states to share their input.

He advised the Director General of police to send their suggestions to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Chief Secretaries should submit their reports to the Department of Revenue under the Ministry of Finance.

During the event, Shah presented a three-pronged strategy to combat drug trafficking: detect, disrupt, and destroy.

He called for a strict approach toward traffickers and operatives, while recommending a compassionate approach for victims.

The home minister outlined a four-pillar approach: enforcement; intelligence collection, dissemination, and operations; control of precursors and synthetic drugs; demand reduction and public awareness; and capacity building, coordination, and monitoring by anti-narcotics agencies. These priorities should guide the response to the drug problem.

He also urged state governments to ensure real-time information sharing.

He urged all chief secretaries and police chiefs to upload crime details for their respective states to these portals in a time-bound manner, saying this would enable the government of India to review the cases and provide necessary feedback and suggestions.

He encouraged all chief secretaries and police chiefs to ensure that NCORD decisions are implemented effectively and reviewed in the next meeting. Shah stated that the country is at a critical point in the fight against narcotics, saying the next three years will determine whether addiction conquers us or we conquer addiction. He asked whether decisions

are implemented, reviewed at the next meeting, and analysed thoroughly, and said that state-level efforts to make meetings result-oriented can lead to success.

"For the future of our nation over the next 100 years, we must fight this collectively with unwavering resolve. All governments should unite on a single platform. We must also involve seers who guide the public, youths who shape the future, and the influence of mothers in this effort," he said.

Shah also released the Narcotics Control Bureau's 2025 annual report and inaugurated the agency's zonal offices in Jammu and Guwahati at the same event. He also launched the Drug Disposal Fortnight Campaign, under which approximately 2,09,500 kg of drugs valued at ₹6,000 crore will be destroyed across India by central and state law enforcement agencies.

CBSE eases three language rule

Several students and parents had approached courts against the CBSE order.

The Board had said in May that till the dedicated third language textbooks are available, Class 9 students shall use the Class 6 third language textbooks (2026-27 edition) of the chosen language.

The move is part of the CBSE's alignment of its scheme of studies with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023.

According to the circular issued on May 15, students opting for a foreign language may do so only as the third language after studying two native Indian languages or as an additional fourth language.



India launches Op Amistad to aid quake-hit Venezuela

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Under the 'Operation Amistad', launched by India to offer humanitarian assistance to quake-hit Venezuela, two IAF C-17 Globemaster aircraft carrying relief supplies and a 41-member rescue team departed on Friday to assist the ongoing relief and rescue efforts in that country.

"India stands shoulder to shoulder with the government and the people of Venezuela during this difficult period," the Ministry of External Affairs said.

In a gesture of solidarity with the people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, India has launched Operation Amistad, a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) mission, in response to the devastating earthquake that has caused extensive loss of life, injuries and widespread destruction. "Operation Amistad underway! Two @IAF_MCC C17s took-off today for Venezuela with urgent assistance to support their post-earthquake relief efforts. The assistance contains an Indian Army @adgpi Field Hospital Unit and over 35 tons of relief supplies, medicines and medical equipment, including two BHISHM cubes. India is committed to supporting the government and people of Venezuela in



A 41-member team of the Indian Army, from the 60 Para Field Hospital, including nine medical officers, being deployed in Venezuela to support humanitarian relief efforts as part of 'Operation Amistad'. PTI

this difficult time," External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in a post on X.

The MEA said in its statement on Friday that as part of the operation, two C-17 aircraft of the Indian Air Force departed for Venezuela on June 26 morning, carrying humanitarian relief supplies and a 41-member rescue team to assist the ongoing relief and rescue efforts.

"The relief consignment included a self-reliant Indian medical task force, an Indian Army Field Hospital unit with HADR pallets and medicines, 30 tons of relief supplies, six tons of medicines and medical equipment and

two BHISHM cube portable hospitals," it said.

The 41-member team, comprising experienced rescue personnel and medical professionals, will work closely with the Venezuelan authorities in search and rescue operations, emergency medical care and humanitarian relief efforts in the affected areas.

"India stands shoulder to shoulder with the government and the people of Venezuela during this difficult period. The government of India extends its heartfelt condolences to the families who have lost their loved ones and wishes a speedy recovery to those injured.

India will remain in close coordination with the government of Venezuela and stands ready to provide further assistance as may be required," it said.

The 7.2- and 7.5-magnitude earthquakes that struck Wednesday evening were among the strongest in Venezuela in more than a century and were felt throughout the region.

The death toll from two powerful quakes in Venezuela rose to 589, with 2,980 injured, acting President Delcy Rodriguez said early Friday.

The number of casualties may climb, with thousands reported missing.

Ram temple donation row: Priyanka seeks transparent probe

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday said that instead of a "cover-up" in the name of an investigation into the alleged embezzlement of donations received at the Ram temple in Ayodhya, a transparent inquiry must be conducted into the "theft" and all those involved must face severe punishment.

The Congress general secretary also asked whether low-level employees acting alone could switch off CCTV cameras and embezzle offerings worth thousands of crores.

"The entire nation has been left stunned by the deceitful act of theft and plunder committed against Lord Ram — the embodiment of righteousness (Maryada Purushottam) and the upholder of truth and 'Dharma' — and the faith of his millions of devotees," Priyanka Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X.

"Lord Ram resides in the sacred sentiments of millions; it is with this very reverence that people bow their heads and offer donations at the temple," she said.

Those who indulged in "theft" at the Ram temple have committed a grave sin by violating the very essence of faith and 'dharma', she said.

"A crucial question also



arises — could low-level employees acting alone switch off CCTV cameras and embezzle offerings worth thousands of crores, or is there collusion involving powerful individuals?" Priyanka Gandhi said.

"Instead of a cover-up in the name of an investigation, a transparent inquiry must be conducted, and all those involved in this act of theft must face severe punishment," she asserted.

All eight persons arrested over the alleged embezzlement of donations received at the Ram temple in Ayodhya were on Friday remanded in judicial custody till June 29 as the issue erupted into a full-blown political storm with the ruling BJP and the opposition trading charges and counter-charges while investigators reported recovering Rs 79.85 lakh.

States Focus



FCRA CHANGES NOT TARGETING ANY GROUP: KERALA BJP CHIEF

BJP Kerala president Rajeev Chandrasekhar on Friday defended the amendments to the FCRA, saying they were intended to prevent foreign contributions from being used for money laundering and were not aimed at targeting any particular community. Responding to reporters' questions about concerns raised by several Christian organisations over the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) amendments, Chandrasekhar said the issue had been politicised by the Congress during the elections. "The Congress made this a big political issue during the elections, and we lost a lot of Christian support because of that," he told reporters. He rejected allegations that the amendments targeted Christian institutions, noting that organisations from all religious communities receive foreign contributions under the FCRA. Chandrasekhar said there was nothing in the amendments that would be used to target any group. "This amendment is being used to prevent foreign contributions from being used for money laundering. That is what the Home Ministry has said. There is nothing in the bill that will be used to target anybody," he said. He said organisations with genuine concerns should engage with the Union Home Ministry rather than create apprehensions. "If somebody has a legitimate concern, they should sit down, understand the bill and talk to the Home Ministry. If necessary, I can facilitate that. If you are sincere about understanding the bill and the amendments, we are more than happy to have a conversation. The Government of India is also willing to have that conversation," he said. About the 51st anniversary of the Emergency, Chandrasekhar said the occasion should not be remembered merely as a chapter in history but as a reminder of the need to safeguard democracy and constitutional values. (PTI)

AI to speed up India's journey to developed nation: PM Modi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said responsible and inclusive adoption of artificial intelligence will play a vital role in accelerating India's journey to become a developed nation. Artificial Intelligence is reshaping industries and creating new avenues for productivity as well as innovation, he said.

In a message to the AI Innovation Summit organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), Modi said the accounting and financial professions are also witnessing rapid changes driven by technological advancements.

"When used responsibly and allied with human judgement, AI-powered tools can improve efficiency, strengthen compliance, enable better decision-making and help professionals deliver greater value," he said. The prime

minister's message was read out at the inaugural ceremony of the two-day summit that commenced on Friday in the national Capital.

As India advances towards becoming a developed nation, he said, responsible and inclusive adoption of AI will play a vital role in accelerating the journey. The Government is taking various initiatives as part of larger efforts to make India a developed nation by 2047. Modi also appreciated the invaluable contribution of the chartered accountants' fraternity to the country's progress. "As India embraces the opportunities of the AI era, I am confident that the CA fraternity will continue to uphold the highest standards of integrity, while leading innovation and excellence in the financial sector, contributing to the building of Viksit Bharat," he said. ICAI, set up under an Act of Parliament, has more than five lakh members.

Sanction delays hamper bank fraud probes: CBI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The CBI has highlighted delays in obtaining required sanctions to initiate investigations and file charges against bank officials in corruption and fraud cases, noting that these delays hinder both investigation and prosecution.

This issue was discussed at a meeting on Thursday attended by senior CBI officers, the Secretary of the Department of Financial Services, senior Finance Ministry officials, bank repre-



sentatives, and Chief Vigilance Officers. The CBI reported that in several

cases, banks have denied sanction to prosecute their officials. As a result, cases

lose approval under the Prevention of Corruption Act and are transferred from special courts to regular courts. The CBI must seek sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act before initiating a criminal investigation and under Section 19 of the Act before prosecution.

The CBI also raised concerns about banks' delays in providing documents in fraud cases, stating that these delays impede investigative progress.

"During the day-long meeting, participants dis-

ussed several topics, including prior approval under Section 17A of the PC Act, prosecution sanctions under Section 19, pending documents, bank fraud complaints, one-time settlement issues, recent court rulings, and mule account concerns. The agenda focused on improving interdepartmental cooperation and expediting bank fraud investigations," a CBI spokesperson said. Senior CBI officers held bank-specific discussions with CVOs to address pending issues, and the agency stated that most con-

cerns were resolved.

"Close coordination. The meeting acknowledged the importance of timely document sharing between banks and the CBI. Participants also emphasised streamlining procedures and ensuring proactive cooperation in obtaining approvals and sanctions for prosecution under Sections 17A and 19 of the Prevention of Corruption Act," the spokesperson said. The meeting concluded with a consensus to maintain the current momentum of cooperation between CBI and public sector banks, she said.

Opposition uses EVMs, ECI to justify electoral defeats: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The BJP on Friday accused Opposition parties of using electronic voting machines and the Election Commission as "excuses" to justify their electoral defeats, citing the low number of applications seeking verification of EVMs' burnt memory after the recent assembly elections.

Following the latest round of Assembly elections, reportedly no applications for EVM memory checking and verification were received from West Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry, while Tamil Nadu was the only state where the Election Commission received four such applications.

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla

alleged that Opposition parties raise questions over EVMs and the Election Commission only after losing elections. "EVMs are just an excuse. Elections are just an excuse. The real objective is to save themselves. That is why they target the Election Commission," he said.

Poonawalla further claimed that the opposition parties question the electoral process to create doubt in the minds of voters and use these allegations as an alibi to escape accountability. "They are only trying to create doubt in the minds of voters and use these allegations as an alibi to escape accountability. In reality, they also know that the EVMs are working perfectly well," he said. Poonawalla claimed the latest figures on EVM verification requests exposed the Opposition's



BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla

"hypocrisy". "They do not blame EVMs when they win in Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala or Tamil Nadu. They raise these alle-

gations only in the states where they lose. That is their hypocrisy," he said.

"In the last five Assembly elections in four states, there

were zero applications or complaints seeking EVM scrutiny, memory checking or verification filed by Opposition parties that lost

the elections. "In Tamil Nadu, the Election Commission received only four applications. Even the Opposition, despite losing elections, has effectively acknowledged this through its actions," he claimed. He alleged that opposition parties publicly question EVMs, the Election Commission and the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls but fail to substantiate their allegations.

"In the public domain, they blame EVMs, they blame the SIR and the Election Commission. But these are merely excuses. Whether it is the SIR, EVMs or the election process, they do not pursue these allegations in courts or file substantive complaints. "They only make these claims before television cameras. In reality, they have no evidence to support them," Poonawalla alleged.

Union Govt decriminalises minor food, drug violations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Centre has operationalised key reforms under the Jan Vishwas Act, 2026, in the health sector, decriminalising several minor and technical violations under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, and the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, while retaining stringent penalties for offences that threaten public health.

The Union health ministry on Friday said the reforms are aimed at promoting ease of doing business, reducing compliance burden on businesses and ensuring proportionate regulatory enforcement without compromising consumer safety. Under the amended



Representative image

framework, certain technical and procedural violations that earlier attracted criminal proceedings will now be dealt with through administrative penalties. Among key changes, Section 29 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, which prescribed a penalty up to Rs 1 lakh for using a Government analyst's report for advertis-

ing any drug or cosmetic, has been omitted.

Further, violations relating to the manufacture or sale of low-risk cosmetics have been brought under an administrative penalty framework.

These include cases where cosmetic products fail to comply with minor quality parameters or contain

labelling deficiencies and errors. However, offences involving spurious or adulterated cosmetics, which have a direct bearing on consumer safety, continue to attract strict penal provisions under the act, the ministry said in a statement.

However, offences involving spurious or adulterated cosmetics, which have a direct bearing on consumer safety, will continue to attract stringent penal provisions under the act, it said.

The amendments have also converted violations under Section 28A, relating to procedural compliance, such as maintenance of records and submission of information, into administrative penalties. To facilitate effective implementation of the

new framework, provisions relating to the appointment of adjudicating authorities and an appeal mechanism have been introduced, enabling the timely and transparent disposal of cases involving such contraventions. In the food safety sector, provisions under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, relating to the imposition of court fines in cases involving false complaints against food safety officers have been brought under an administrative penalty mechanism.

The punishment for interfering with seized items has been rationalised, with the term of imprisonment reduced from six months to three months, the statement said.

Imported drugs must have 12-month shelf life: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Union Health Ministry has published a draft notification proposing amendments to the drugs rules under which imported drugs should have a minimum residual shelf life of 12 months at the time of import.

The step would ensure that patients receive medicines with an adequate usable shelf life and improve the utilisation of pharmaceutical inventories across the supply chain. The draft amendment published for public consultation vide gazette notification on June 22 proposes to revise the existing requirement of a



Representative image

minimum residual shelf life of more than 60 per cent for imported drugs to a minimum residual shelf life of 12 months at the time of import.

However, in view of their specialised nature and public health considerations, the existing requirement of a minimum residual shelf life of more than 60 per cent shall

continue to apply to biological products and radiopharmaceuticals.

The proposed amendment seeks to facilitate greater efficiency in the pharmaceutical supply chain while maintaining the availability of quality medicines for patients, the ministry said.

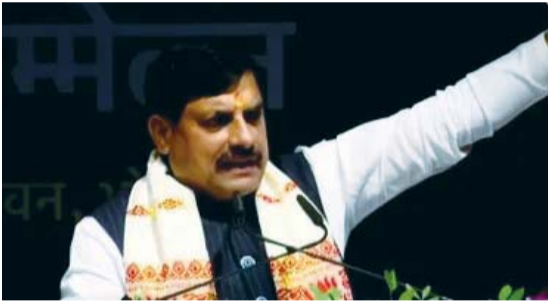
By ensuring that imported drugs have a minimum remaining shelf life of 12 months upon entry into the country, the proposal provides sufficient time for distribution and consumption before expiry, thereby ensuring that patients continue to receive medicines with adequate usable shelf life, officials said.

States Focus



BECOME JOB PROVIDERS, NOT SEEKERS: JHARKHAND GOVERNOR

Jharkhand Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar on Friday urged students to become job providers rather than job seekers, saying agriculture should be seen as the foundation of the country's prosperity. He was addressing the 46th Foundation Day ceremony of Birsra Agricultural University (BAU). "Agriculture is not only a livelihood but also the very basis of the country's prosperity. The road to Viksit Bharat passes through the farm sector. Therefore, I urge all of you to prepare yourselves to become job providers rather than job seekers," Gangwar said. He said the performance of BAU scientists should not be assessed by the number of research papers, seminars, workshops or training programmes, but by their impact on farm production and farmers' income. (PTI)



FREE MEDICAL TREATMENT FOR LOKTANTRA SENANIS IN MP

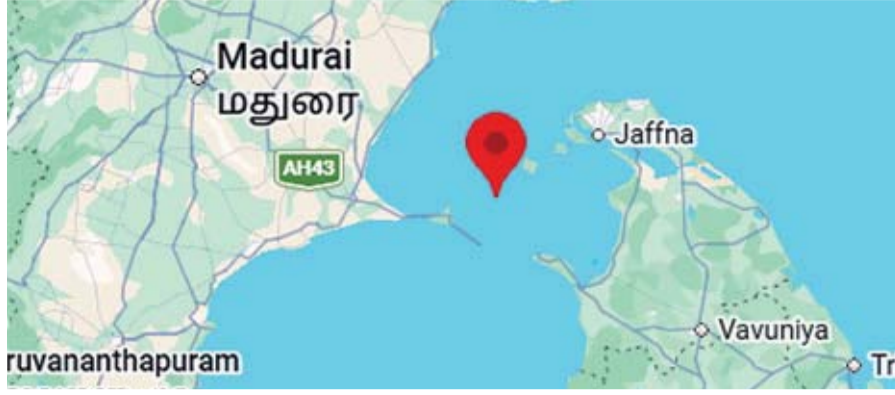
Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Friday announced welfare initiatives for 'Loktantra Senanis', who fought against the Emergency, including a dedicated pilgrimage train, free medical treatment, and emergency air ambulance services. Addressing the Loktantra Senani regional conference here, Yadav also announced that these veterans can avail of free two-day stays at state-run rest houses, and local parks, roads, and playgrounds will be named in honour of deceased fighters. "Plaques will be installed in villages and towns of deceased Loktantra Senani. Local parks, roads, and playgrounds will be named after them, and free medical treatment and air ambulance services will be provided to them in case of any exigencies," he said. A special pilgrimage train will be launched for Loktantra Senanis, he added. Loktantra Senani (democracy fighters) who have not received 'tamra patra' (copper plates) will soon receive them. It will be ensured that they get full honours and their suggestions for the welfare of the state will also be implemented, he said. During the event, chief minister felicitated nonagenarians Laxmi Narayan Patidar and Shanti Lal Sanghvi, and ex-minister Umashankar Gupta. (PTI)

BJP hits out at Congress over 1974 transfer of Katchatheevu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The BJP on Friday criticised the Congress over the transfer of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka in 1974, calling it another "historic dark chapter" of the Congress rule and alleged it compromised India's national interests. Katchatheevu is an uninhabited island in the Palk Strait. India recognised Sri Lanka's sovereignty over the island in 1974.

BJP national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi said the transfer of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka marked another day in the Congress party's "calendar of surrender". "Yesterday, we remembered the tragic chapter of the Emergency, and today marks another historic dark chapter in the Congress party's calendar of surrender. "It was on this day in 1974 that the then Congress Government ceded



Katchatheevu island (red dot)

Katchatheevu, located near Tamil Nadu, from India to Sri Lanka. As a result, fishermen from Tamil Nadu continue to face numerous difficulties," he told reporters. He also referred to the Saint Anthony shrine on the island and claimed that "even if people hoist the Indian national flag on their boats, they are not permitted to visit it." Trivedi alleged that the Congress has a long history

of "compromising" India's interests. "The Congress party's calendar of surrender began in 1947 with the partition of India and its surrender before the Muslim League. It was followed by the surrender of PoK to Pakistan in 1948, then the surrender of Aksai Chin to China in 1962. Assam too was almost surrendered, along with the surrender of Mansarovar," he said.

Referring to the transfer of Katchatheevu, he added, "That was followed by the surrender of Katchatheevu on June 26, 1974, and on June 28, it came under Sri Lanka's control." "This is a tragic chapter that today's generation should remember. The manner in which Congress compromised India's national interests is what this day reminds us of," Trivedi said.

CPI demands judicial probe into Ayodhya Temple scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Communist Party of India (CPI) on Friday demanded an independent judicial investigation and the registration of First Information Reports (FIRs) against senior functionaries in the alleged Ayodhya Ram Temple embezzlement case.

Termining the recent findings of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) as "only the tip of the iceberg," the party's National Secretariat asserted that the resignations of senior trust officials Champat Rai and Anil Mishra were inadequate to address the scale of the alleged irregularities.

In a statement issued in New Delhi, the CPI alleged that the current investigation is a "cover-up masquerading as accountability," claiming that the Government is shielding top Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) leadership by targeting only junior functionaries.

"An SIT reporting to the Ayodhya District Magistrate, who is himself an ex-officio member of the Trust, cannot inspire public confidence. Such an



arrangement is inherently compromised and incapable of uncovering the full truth," the party stated, adding that FIRs must be registered against senior Trust officials whose accountability "cannot end with resignations."

The left party further claimed that fresh reports are emerging daily regarding devotees donating large quantities of gold, silver, and cash without being

provided official receipts, suggesting the actual scale of the scam is far larger than what has surfaced so far.

"The faith of millions cannot be exploited, and their offerings cannot be looted with impunity," the CPI statement said, reiterating that the entire probe must be handed over to an independent judicial body to ensure a fair and uncompromised investigation.

Amend laws to make passport and Aadhaar citizenship proof: Tharoor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Amid the row over the passport-citizenship issue, senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Friday said the Government should amend the legal framework to make both the passport and the Aadhaar card valid and conclusive proofs of Indian citizenship unless they are explicitly cancelled or withdrawn by the State.

He said implementing this requires solving a critical administrative hurdle because Aadhaar is currently issued based on 182 days of local residence rather than nationality, and it is held by citizens and non-citizen residents alike.

"The solution is straightforward. The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) should introduce a visually distinct Aadhaar card (featuring, say, a visible diagonal red stripe across the front), specifically designated for non-citizens living in India," Tharoor said.

"The recent statement by the Ministry of External Affairs — on #PassportSevaDivas, no less! — clarifying that an Indian passport is primarily a 'travel document and not conclusive proof of citizenship' has triggered a predictable wave of public bewilderment and political sparring," the former minister of state for external affairs said on X.

While the Government defends this as a long-standing legal position rooted in Section 20 of the Passports Act of 1967, which technically allows the state to issue

passports to non-citizens under rare, public-interest circumstances, this is a distinction without a difference, meaningless to the average citizen, Tharoor argued.

"For decades, the passport has been considered the gold standard of identity. We navigate the gruelling bureaucratic maze of police verifications and document checks required to obtain one, precisely because the state demands concrete proof of citizenship before granting it. "To turn around and declare that the very document born from this rigorous vetting does not actually prove citizenship creates an absurd legal paradox," he said.

If a passport does not establish domestic citizenship, then what does, asked the MP from Thiruvananthapuram.

"The Supreme Court has already ruled that the Aadhaar card is merely a proof of identity and residence, not citizenship. This leaves millions of Indians in a bizarre administrative limbo where they possess world-class biometric and state-issued documents, yet none are legally deemed 'conclusive' proof of their nationality within their own borders," the Congress leader said.

"To end this fatuous controversy once and for all, a common-sense legislative overhaul is urgently required. The Government should formally amend the legal framework to make both the passport and Aadhaar card valid, conclusive proofs of Indian citizenship unless they are explicitly cancelled or withdrawn by the State," he said.



Over 1.31 crore join anti-drug campaign: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

More than 1.31 crore people participated in awareness and community outreach activities during the 10-day 'Nasha Mukh Bharat Saptah 2026', which concluded on Friday with a national programme in Haridwar, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment said.

Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Virendra Kumar led the concluding event at Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya (DSVV), Haridwar, Uttarakhand, on 26 June, where around 4,000 people took part in a rally taken out against the drug menace.



The ministry said the campaign, observed to mark the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, included seminars, webinars, street plays, rallies, yoga sessions, e-pledges, competitions and awareness drives across the country.

"The Nasha Mukh Bharat Saptah, observed from June 17-26, witnessed the participation of more than 1.31 crore citizens through a series of awareness generation and community mobilisation activities including Nasha Mukh Mitra registration drives, seminars and webinars, training and awareness programmes for children and youth, street plays (Nukkad Natak), skits, slogan-writing competitions, e-pledges, rallies, yoga sessions, signature campaigns, essay-writing competitions, painting competitions," the ministry said in a statement.

Pune fort murder: CM Fadnavis assures justice to victim's family

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday assured the family of Ketan Agarwal, who was allegedly pushed to death from Lohagad Fort by his fiancée and her lover, that the Government would ensure strict punishment to those responsible and spare no effort in securing justice.

Fadnavis also accepted the Agarwal family's demand to try the case in a fast-track court.

Ketan's father, Vishal Agarwal, met the CM in Pune and sought justice for his son. Ketan's fiancée Siya Goyal (20) and her lover Chetan Chaudhary (22) are accused of pushing him (Ketan) off a cliff at Lohagad Fort, located in Maval taluka of Pune district, on June 18.

According to police, Siya and Ketan (25) were scheduled to get married in November, but she did not want to marry him. Siya and Chetan allegedly hatched a conspiracy to eliminate Ketan and executed the plan.



Devendra Fadnavis meets family members of Ketan, who was allegedly pushed to death from Lohagad Fort by his fiancée and her lover

During his meeting with Ketan's father, Fadnavis assured him that the Government was committed to ensuring that the accused in the case get stringent punishment and that every effort would be made to secure justice, an official statement from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said.

Fadnavis also accepted the family's demand to try the case in a fast-track court and approved the appointment of senior advocate Ujjwal Nikam as the special public prosecutor in the case.

The chief minister directed the secretary of the Law and Judiciary Department to initiate the necessary

process for the appointment, while Nikam has conveyed his consent to appear as the special public prosecutor, the statement said.

Meanwhile, talking to reporters in Pune, Fadnavis said the Lohagad Fort incident reflected a disturbing social trend that required deeper introspection.

"It is an extremely shocking and incomprehensible incident. As a society, we need to reflect on why educated young men and women from good families develop such criminal intent and a desire for revenge. This is not merely a criminal issue; it also has a social angle," he said.

Assam's growth story driven by vision, fiscal discipline, self-sufficiency: Jayanta Mallabaruah

TONY DAS
Guwahati

Assam Finance Minister Jayanta Mallabaruah on Tuesday said the State's economic transformation is being driven by a combination of fiscal discipline, efficient governance and the vision of making Assam a self-sufficient economy under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Addressing the Pre-Budget Discussion Session organised by BJP Assam Pradesh in the presence of State BJP President Dilip Saikia, Cabinet Ministers and representatives from various sectors, Baruah said the Government's focus has been on ensuring that budget allocations translate into tangible outcomes.

He noted that expenditure utilisation, which earlier remained around 40-50 per cent, has now increased to nearly 80 per cent, reflecting greater efficiency in public spending.

"The foundation of our Budget is the Sankalp Patra. Every policy is guided by our commitment to build a



Assam Finance Minister Jayanta Mallabaruah

self-sufficient Assam," the Minister added.

Highlighting the state's economic roadmap, Baruah reiterated the Government's vision of transforming Assam into a Rs 10 lakh crore economy by 2028 through industrialisation, renewable energy, infrastructure expansion and stronger internal revenue generation.

He said Assam has emerged as a preferred

investment destination, particularly in sectors such as semiconductors, while renewable energy initiatives, including solar power and pump-storage projects, are laying the foundation for sustainable growth.

Emphasising revenue reforms, the Finance Minister said technology is being deployed to improve GST compliance, widen the tax base and plug leakages

without imposing additional taxes. He also called for unlocking the economic potential of sectors like agarwood and strengthening agriculture, livestock and allied sectors to achieve long-term self-sufficiency.

Minister Baruah highlighted the State's progress in healthcare, citing the Assam Cancer Care initiative in partnership with the Tata Group, and stressed that peace and stability have significantly enhanced investor confidence and economic opportunities.

He also pointed to major infrastructure projects such as the Noonmati-Dighalipukhuri Flyover, Kaziranga Elevated Corridor and Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu as symbols of Assam's rapid development.

The Finance Minister concluded by acknowledging the growing contribution of Self Help Groups in promoting women's entrepreneurship and strengthening rural livelihoods, stating that they have emerged as important drivers of Assam's inclusive economic growth.

No forced land takeover for GBIT project: Karnataka Dy CM Parmeshwara

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Bengaluru

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister G Parmeshwara on Friday said the State Government would take farmers into confidence and acquire land only with their consent. The Chief Minister has already issued clear instructions to this effect," Parmeshwara said in response to a question about whether the CM's decision regarding the proposed Bidadi Township would change in favour of farmers.

Speaking to reporters, he said the Government was willing to revise the compensation if the farmers felt the amount offered was inadequate.

earlier, we will not evict farmers. There is no point in forcibly removing farmers to construct a township. We will take them into confidence and acquire land only with their consent. The Chief Minister has already issued clear instructions to this effect," Parmeshwara said in response to a question about whether the CM's decision regarding the proposed Bidadi Township would change in favour of farmers.

Speaking to reporters, he said the Government was willing to revise the compensation if the farmers felt the amount offered was inadequate.



Despite opposition from sections of farmers and villagers, a final notification was recently issued for acquisition of 499 acres across 3 villages in Ramanagara and Harohalli taluks for Greater Bengaluru Integrated Township, one of Shivakumar's ambitious projects, projected as India's "first AI-powered integrated township".

The project is expected to cover a total of 7,481 acres across nine villages in the region, sources said, adding that the notification issued recently is likely the first in a series of land acquisition notifications expected in the coming days.

The Government fixed the land price at ₹2.30 crore per acre. The payout also includes extra money depending on the types of crops growing on the land, sources added.

Asked whether the Government was planning the township with a long-term view of securing water resources for future AI hubs, Parmeshwara said, "At present, no one has complete clarity about all the requirements and parameters for establishing AI centres. Each one is saying different things. This project is not being undertaken specifically for AI hubs."

He explained that the primary objective of the township is to reduce the increasing pressure on Bengaluru, including severe traffic congestion.

"When the NICE project was conceived, there was a proposal to develop seven townships around Bengaluru. The idea was to reduce the burden on the city by developing nearby towns such as Kolar, Tumakuru, Ramanagara, Bidadi. If these surrounding areas are developed, it will ease the pressure on Bengaluru. We are hopeful that the Bidadi Township will contribute toward that objective," he added.

West Bengal Govt drops eggs from school meals; sparks row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kolkata

The battle over West Bengal's political future may have ended, but one of the Assembly poll campaign's most emotive themes has resurfaced in school kitchens. The BJP Government's decision to engage ISKCON to provide cooked mid-day meals in schools under the Kolkata Municipal Corporation area and replace eggs with vegetarian alternatives has reopened a wider debate over nutrition, culture and identity.

The move revived memories of the poll-season clash when fish became a political symbol, and the TMC accused the BJP of seeking to impose a vegetarian cultural template on West Bengal. Presenting the State's first Budget after the BJP's victory in the Assembly polls, Finance Minister Swapan Dasgupta announced that the material cost for primary school mid-day meals would be increased from ₹6.78 to ₹10 per student and that ISKCON would be entrusted with supplying cooked meals under a pilot project in the KMC area. The enhanced allocation was welcomed across the political spectrum. But the



spotlight shifted to one change: eggs, considered the most popular item in Bengal's school meal programme, would disappear from the plate. Students would be served protein-rich vegetarian alternatives such as paneer, rajma, soya products, pulses and milk-based items. The move has immediately acquired political overtones in a State where food habits frequently intersect with electoral narratives.

During the Assembly election campaign, the then ruling TMC repeatedly accused the BJP of seeking to reshape Bengal's food culture and portrayed fish consumption as an integral part of Bengali identity. BJP leaders

countered those charges by publicly eating fish and dismissing the allegations that they intended to alter local dietary practices.

The latest decision has allowed the Opposition to revive that argument. Leader of the Opposition and rebel TMC leader Ritabrata Banerjee alleged that the move reflected an attempt to influence long-established dietary habits.

"For generations, Bengali children have grown up consuming animal protein as part of their regular diet. Nutrition schemes should reflect local food culture and not move away from it," he said. TMC Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien linked the deci-

sion to a broader ideological agenda, accusing the BJP Government of "imposing vegetarianism" through a welfare programme. The BJP Government rejects such criticism. Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari defended the decision in the Assembly, saying the objective was to ensure quality and hygienic food for children.

"Nobody is imposing anyone's religious beliefs on anyone else. The focus is on providing good food to students," he said. School Education Minister Dipak Burman argued that vegetarian diets are fully capable of meeting nutritional requirements. "Millions of people across the world live healthy lives on vegetarian food. Nutrition should be judged by scientific standards, not by whether a meal contains eggs," he said.

BJP slams Kerala Govt over low-alcohol liquor tax cut

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The BJP on Friday slammed the Congress-led UDF Government in Kerala over its proposal to reduce the tax on low-alcohol beverages, alleging that the move is aimed at benefiting liquor businessmen at the cost of the State's revenue and the future of the youth.

The remarks came amid a controversy in Kerala over the Government's proposal in the 2026-27 Budget to reduce the tax on low-alcohol beverages.

The Budget proposed a reduction from 251 per cent to 120 per cent sales tax on beverages containing 0.5 per cent to 10 per cent alcohol by volume and 175 per cent on those containing more than 10 per cent and up to 20 per cent.

The State Budget announced a reduction in taxes from 251 per cent to 120 per cent on low-alcohol beverages. BJP national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi alleged that the Congress has become "intoxicated with power" and that the Kerala Government has taken a "very shameful decision". "The Congress-led UDF Government, along with its Muslim League ally, has recently come to power in Kerala. I think the Congress



BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi

has become so intoxicated with power that the Kerala Government has taken a very shameful decision. It has reduced the excise tax on low-alcohol liquor from 251 per cent to 121 per cent, effectively cutting it by more than half," he claimed.

Trivedi alleged that it will reduce Government revenue while benefiting liquor traders, while questioning the rationale behind the move. "I want to ask the Congress party: by reducing the excise and, consequently, Government revenue, who stands to benefit? The benefit will go to liquor businessmen. And if your argument is that consumption will increase, does that mean you want to entrap the entire young generation into liquor?" he asked.

He claimed the decision is particularly questionable at a time when Kerala home

revenue and play with Kerala's future?"

Trivedi said the Congress should remember that it is in power in Kerala and not merely in the Opposition.

"Is this the Congress model? Do you want to keep Kerala's youth engulfed in liquor? The BJP strongly protests this and wants to ask the Congress why it wants to play with the future of India's youth by making liquor cheaper," he said.

"The people know how to end that intoxication and will give their answer at the appropriate time," he added.

The BJP leader also alleged that the ruling UDF and the Opposition LDF were "two sides of the same coin" on liquor policy.

"The Left Government created the new category of low-alcohol liquor so that it could expand the business and benefit its associates. Now the Congress has reduced the excise on it and is trying to engulf the entire State, especially Kerala's youth, in liquor. So both the Left and the Congress are two sides of the same coin on liquor policy," he alleged. Kerala Revenue Minister AP Anil Kumar on Friday said any policy decision on tax cut for low-alcohol beverages will be taken only after discussions within the ruling UDF and with the Congress leadership.

Kolkata warehouse collapse: Death toll rises to 15; rescue on



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kolkata

The toll in the Taratala warehouse collapse in south Kolkata rose to 15 on Friday as teams of multiple agencies, including army personnel, retrieved two more bodies and two others succumbed to their injuries while undergoing treatment, an official said. The rescue teams continued intensive search operations through the rubble, two days after the warehouse roof caved in, he said.

Two bodies were recovered late on Thursday night, though their identities are yet to be established, he said. On Friday morning, two workers, Mannu Kumar and Sahil Sardar, succumbed to their injuries at the State-run SSKM Hospital, taking the toll to 15, the official said.

"Nineteen-year-old Mannu Kumar, a native of Munger district in Bihar, had been rescued from the debris on June 24 and had

undergone surgery on Thursday night. Despite sustained medical efforts, he died in the early hours of Friday," the official said.

His brother Ghi Kumar had died in the accident, while their father was undergoing treatment for injuries sustained in the warehouse collapse, he said.

Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari said personnel of the army and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) have been working and will continue until the debris is cleared.

"I spoke to the NDRF personnel. They have indicated that if the weather remains favourable, the rescue operation may be completed by tonight," he told reporters.

Targeting the previous Trinamool Congress Government, the chief minister alleged that it had promoted corruption and "parivarvad" (dynastic politics), and pushed West Bengal backwards.

Backdoor jobs row: Omar hits back at Mehbooba's charge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jammu

Arch-rivals, the National Conference and the People's Democratic Party, have once again locked horns over the contentious issue of alleged 'backdoor appointments' in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

A day after PDP Chief and former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti levelled allegations that the Omar Abdullah Government has made 25,000 backdoor appointments through corruption, the sitting Chief Minister rejected the "backdoor appointments" allegations, saying the Government will bring out the entire truth before the people within a day or two. Abdullah said Mehbooba's alle-

gations were akin to the pot calling the kettle black.

"There is a saying, the pot calling the kettle black. Those who made the most illegal and backdoor appointments, those whose backdoor appointments were cancelled by the courts, do we forget that?" Abdullah told reporters.

Omar claimed that when Mehbooba was the chief minister in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir, her maternal uncle Sartaj Madni's son was hired through a backdoor appointment and then removed as per the court's directions.

"(Can we forget) how many hundreds of backdoor appointments were made in the J&K Bank, in which investigative agencies are still running probes today. If I start



counting the backdoor appointments of PDP-BJP (rule), you would not have enough time to count them," he added.

Abdullah asserted he would answer if the PDP backed up its allegations with proof.

"Let them bring even one piece of evidence to back up that allegation, and I am ready to answer. Give just one name of any candidate who was hired under a backdoor appointment; we are ready to provide clarification. But, we will not give a full response to these baseless allegations here," he said.

The CM said the Government has gathered all the information, and God willing, in the next one or two days, "two of my senior ministers will address the press and present the entire truth before the people".

Massive security drills ahead of Amarnath Yatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jammu

Security agencies on Friday conducted extensive patrolling, area domination exercises and cordon and search operations as part of the security arrangements ahead of the annual Amarnath Yatra.

Officials said the operations were aimed at strengthening the security grid, maintaining peace and vigilance, and ensuring a safe and secure environment for pilgrims during the forthcoming yatra that is set to begin on July 3.

As part of the exercise, police in coordination with the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and Border



Representational image

Security Force (BSF), carried out a joint long-range patrolling exercise from Rathana to Salehar, Chak Jagtoo and adjoining areas in Arnia border belt, they said.

The patrolling was aimed at maintaining close surveillance along the border, preventing anti-social activities and ensuring a visible secu-

urity presence. Security personnel also interacted with local residents during the exercise, officials said.

They said the presence of police, CISF and BSF personnel instilled a sense of security among the locals.

In another operation, police conducted extensive area domination exercises in

RS Pura, Bishnah, Arnia and Miran Sahib to ensure a peaceful atmosphere ahead of the yatra.

The exercises covered sensitive locations, border-adjacent villages, crowded markets, bus stands and other strategic points. Security personnel carried out intensive patrolling, vehicle checking, verification of suspicious persons and enhanced surveillance in vulnerable areas.

Officials said the objective was to strengthen operational preparedness, gather ground-level intelligence, identify potential security concerns and ensure effective coordination among various security agencies deployed in the region.

Eight killed in truck-van collision in Jharkhand



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Ramgarh

Eight people were killed after a coal-laden truck hit a van carrying a band party in Jharkhand's Ramgarh district, triggering a protest by locals, police said on Friday.

The accident occurred in the Barlaung Budhbazar area under the Rajrappa Police Station limits around midnight when the truck struck the van, a senior officer said. "Initially, seven people died in the accident. The injured, who was referred to Ranchi's RIMS for treatment, succumbed to his injuries during treatment, taking the total toll to eight," Rajrappa Police Station in-charge Krishna Kumar said. Jharkhand Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar and Chief Minister Hemant Soren expressed grief over the deaths of people in the accident. "The news of the road accident near Lari-Barlong on the Ramgarh-Bokaro highway, in which many people have lost their lives, is extremely sad and painful. My deepest condolences to the grieving family members. May God grant them the strength to bear this hour of sorrow," Gangwar posted on X.

The CM wrote on the social media platform that he was "saddened by the tragic news of seven people dying in a road accident near Lari-Barlaung on the

Ramgarh-Bokaro road late last night". "May Marang Buru grant peace to the souls of the departed and give strength to the grieving family members to bear this hour of sorrow," he posted. Ramgarh Sub-Divisional Police Officer Alok Ranjan said that six people were killed on the spot, while one died while undergoing treatment at a Ramgarh hospital. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem examinations, the SDPO said. However, Ramgarh Civil Surgeon Dr Anil Kumar said eight people were brought to the sadar hospital, and seven of them were declared dead.

"The injured person was in critical condition and had been sent to Ranchi for advanced treatment. All the bodies have been kept at the post-mortem house for further procedure," he said earlier in the day.

The deceased were residents of Marangmarcha and Balsagra, and the accident occurred when they were going to take part in an event on Friday, another police officer said. He said the impact of the collision was so severe that the van was badly damaged.

Villagers blocked the Ramgarh-Bokaro road, alleging that at least 11 people were killed in accidents in the area in the past three days due to "negligence" of the district administration.

Four militants arrested in Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Imphal

Security forces arrested four militants from three districts of Manipur for their alleged involvement in extortion activities and recruitment in various proscribed outfits, police said on Friday.

A member of the banned Sorepa was apprehended from his locality of Khunou Umathak Mathak Leikai in Kakching district on Thursday, a police statement said. One active cadre of the outlawed KYKL was arrested



from Wangjing Sabal Leikai in Thoubal district on Thursday, it said.

One recruiter of the proscribed Prepak (Pro) was picked up from his locality at

Top Makha in Imphal East on Wednesday, the police said.

An active cadre of the banned NRFM was held from Yairipok in Thoubal district on Wednesday, the statement said, adding that a pistol and a magazine loaded with three rounds of bullets were recovered from his possession.

Meanwhile, security forces recovered a cache of arms and ammunition from a stretch between Phayeng and Kharang Koireng Tairenpokpi under the Lamsang Police Station limits in Imphal West district on Thursday, it said.

Goa to get ₹2,000 cr maritime projects, water metro: Sonowal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Panaji

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Friday announced that the Government plans to bring in projects worth ₹2,000 crore to boost Goa's maritime sector and launch a state-of-the-art water metro system.

The Union minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways was speaking to reporters after inaugurating the new Captain of



Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal

Ports building in the presence of Chief Minister Pramod Sawant.

"I would especially like to thank the Goa Government. From our ministry's side, we have decided to bring

projects worth ₹2,000 crore to promote the maritime sector in Goa in the coming days," he said.

Sonowal said the Government also plans to introduce a water metro system in Goa for the convenience of the people.

He said that the Captain of Ports building is a significant achievement because its design has been thoughtfully inspired by ships and reflects Goa's rich history and maritime legacy.

Jharkhand to launch pulse polio drive; 61 lakh kids to be covered

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Ranchi

The Jharkhand Government is set to launch a three-day pulse polio campaign from June 28, targeting to cover 61.26 lakh children in the State, an official said on Friday.

Under the campaign, children below five years of age will be administered two

drops of the oral polio vaccine, he said.

Additional Chief Secretary (Health) Ajoy Kumar Singh reviewed the preparations for the campaign on Thursday, according to an official release. Campaign preparedness, inter-departmental coordination and strategies to ensure that no eligible child is left out of the immunisation drive



Representational image

were discussed during the meeting, it added.

On the first day of the drive on June 28, vaccination will be carried out at 24,507 polio booths across the State.

This will be followed by door-to-door visits on June 29 and 30 by the Health Department teams to vaccinate children who could not visit the booths, it stated.

Singh directed the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, Education, and Information and Public Relations departments to ensure coordination and make the campaign a "people's movement".

He said Anganwadi workers, Sahiyas, panchayat representatives, self-help

groups, village-level organisations and Rural Development Department workers should play an active role in creating awareness among people.

"All departments concerned must ensure complete coordination and active cooperation to make the campaign a people's movement," Singh said.



Editor's TAKE

If a passport doesn't prove citizenship, what does?

The MEA's assertion that a passport is merely a travel document has opened a troubling question: what actually proves citizenship?

For most Indians, the passport has long stood as the gold standard of identity – a document issued only after police verification, address checks and a government attestation that its holder is a citizen. So when the MEA declared on Passport Seva Divas that the passport does not, by itself, establish citizenship, the reaction was less legal nuance and more public alarm. If a document obtained through months of scrutiny under the Passports Act, 1967 – which explicitly bars issuance to non-citizens – isn't proof enough, citizens are entitled to ask what is.

The trouble is, no one in government has been willing to answer that. The Union home ministry has twice declined in Parliament to specify which documents count as valid proof of citizenship, instead pointing vaguely to the Citizenship Act, 1955. The Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls – which has already led to the deletion of crores of names from voter lists – initially listed eleven documents for citizenship verification, excluding Aadhaar, voter ID, ration cards and PAN cards, before the Supreme Court forced Aadhaar's grudging inclusion as proof of identity alone.

The Supreme Court itself has said the EC cannot adjudicate citizenship, even as it allows the EC to set the very documentary bar by which citizenship gets tested. Into this already murky picture, the MEA has now placed the passport itself in doubt. This is not merely a semantic dispute. Opposition leaders, lawyers and ordinary citizens have a legitimate practical worry: in a country with no citizenship card and a growing machinery of exclusion-by-document, ambiguity is not a neutral, technical gap – it is a lever. A booth-level officer empowered to doubt a passport-holder's citizenship, with no clear standard to apply, is a recipe for arbitrary disenfranchisement, particularly for the poor, the rural, and those without the resources to fight a bureaucratic challenge. The legal point being made is not wrong: a passport, like Aadhaar or a ration card, is evidence that authorities once believed something about a person, not a permanent judicial finding.

India genuinely lacks a single, conclusive "citizenship certificate" for most of its 1.4 billion people, and the law was never designed to require one for daily life. But that is precisely why the way out cannot be more disclaimers. It requires the government to do three things it has so far avoided. First, define – in law, not in anonymous official remarks – a clear hierarchy of documents, with birth and parentage records treated as primary, and widely-held IDs like passports and long-held Aadhaar enrolment treated as strong corroborative evidence that shifts the burden of proof onto the state, not the citizen. Second, codify the principle several courts have already endorsed: that a person should be presumed a citizen unless the state proves otherwise, rather than the reverse. Third, build fast, accessible appeal mechanisms before any document-based exclusion – from voter rolls or anywhere else – takes effect, not after. The government is entitled to draw fine legal distinctions. It is not entitled to draw them and then walk away, leaving citizens to discover, document in hand, is no good to prove their citizenship.

Horse trading and the limits of anti-defection law

As political loyalties become more transactional and legislative arithmetic takes precedence over voter mandates, India faces an urgent challenge: reforming the rules governing defections to protect democratic stability and restore public trust in elected institutions.



KALYANI SHANKAR

The Indian Opposition is facing considerable political challenges due to ongoing conflicts within its parties. This complex political landscape, where party switching and defections have become common, is understandably worrying for many. Such actions can erode trust, weaken accountability, and put our democratic stability at risk. It's important for all of us to feel a sense of responsibility in safeguarding our democracy together during these uncertain times.

States such as Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu are experiencing political splits. There are claims of horse-trading to lure Members of Parliament. Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) is facing increased pressure amid reports that some members may join the Eknath Shinde faction. Significant rifts within Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) have intensified once again. Reports claim that around 16 MLAs and seven MPs from the Shiv Sena (UBT) are in communication with the Eknath Shinde faction.

Uddhav held a meeting with these lawmakers on Sunday. According to sources, during the meeting, Uddhav Thackeray delivered a clear message to the leaders.

He reportedly stated that anyone who wants to leave the party can do so. Another report claims he offered to step down. This is a developing story.

Meanwhile, the Aam Aadmi Party has seen 7 of its Rajya Sabha members defect to the BJP. The situation in Punjab is not good for the AAP.

In Bengal, which just saw the BJP forming its first government, 20 TMC Members of Parliament are joining a lesser-known political group from Tripura. They might be doing this to avoid the anti-defection law. The rebel group has asked the Lok Sabha Speaker for separate seating in Parliament. Meanwhile, loyal members of the original party argue that a proper merger should include the entire party, not just individual lawmakers.

Additionally, BJP ally OP Rajbhar claims that the Samajwadi Party might soon split, but the SP leadership strongly denies this. The DMK and the AIADMK may also face internal challenges.

The BJP-led NDA is working to secure a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha by attracting smaller regional parties. Currently, they hold 293 seats and aim to increase this with the support of rebels from the Trinamool Congress. If the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam aligns with them, the alliance could get even closer to their goal.



THE ANTI-DEFECTION LAW HAS SERIOUS FLAWS BECAUSE IT DOES NOT PREVENT THE POLITICAL CHANGES SEEN IN INDIA, SUCH AS PARTY SPLITS AND RESIGNATIONS, WHICH CONTINUE DESPITE THE LAW'S ENACTMENT, UNDERSCORING THE URGENT NEED FOR REFORMS TO SAFEGUARD DEMOCRATIC STABILITY EFFECTIVELY

The writer is a popular columnist

These internal conflicts and external political strategies raise questions about whether party instability stems from external influences or internal leadership issues.

The Opposition's strength in Parliament is changing more than it has since the Shiv Sena split in 2022 and the NCP in 2023, with defections weakening democratic representation and decision-making. There is an urgent need for accountability and reforms to protect democracy.

The anti-defection law has come in for sharp criticism over the years for weakening a critical aspect of democracy: the power of elected legislators. In effect, the law empowers parties over elected representatives.

But the law has been unable to achieve its stated aim of preventing defections. Since it was enacted, defections have gone unabated. All it has done, as we can see in the Trinamool's case, is make defections a bulk game.

Recognising these shifts underscores why it is crucial to protect our democracy. Understanding the impact of defections can inspire voters to see their role in safeguarding democratic processes and advocating for reforms. The consequences of these shifts are substantial, affecting legislative processes and voter confidence. When leaders prioritise personal interests over party loyalty, it can erode trust in our democratic system, making citizens uncertain about the reliability of their representatives and the political process as a whole.

Exploring how defections undermine democratic legitimacy can help the reader understand the urgent need for reforms to strengthen democracy.

This ongoing phenomenon underscores the importance of reforms, inspiring the audience to feel hopeful and motivated to work towards strengthening democratic accountability and trust.

The reasons for these changes are diverse and complex, including personal ambitions and dissatisfaction with existing party ideologies. Politicians often seek new opportunities with parties that offer greater influence or more appealing positions, leaving many constituents feeling overlooked and frustrated. The anti-defection law has serious flaws because it does not prevent the political changes seen in India, such as party splits and resignations, which continue despite the law's enactment, underscoring the urgent need for reforms to safeguard democratic stability effectively.

For this exodus in the party, while the legislator wins in the name of the charismatic leader, if they want to defect, they must resign their seats and contest again to become legislators.

Overall, Indian democracy is admired globally; however, flaws in the electoral process and issues in political party practices need to be addressed. It is the responsibility of lawmakers to improve the system. Parliament and political parties must carefully consider how to close these loopholes.

PICTALK



People take part in a "Tazia" procession on the occasion of Muharram, at Kadegaon village, in Sangli, Maharashtra. PHOTO: PTI



DEEBA SALIM IRFAN

2ND OPINION

There was a time when delay was not unusual enough to be noticed. A train running late did not become a conversation. A letter arriving after several days did not feel like inefficiency. A decision taking weeks was not interpreted as hesitation. It was simply how things moved. Life, in that sense, had a natural lag built into it. Nothing arrived fully formed. Everything required a passage.

That rhythm has quietly disappeared. Today, delay is treated as failure. A message unanswered within minutes raises questions. Complaints can be raised just because a delivery did not reach on time. Even a brief pause in a system, raises brows and creates frowns.

Speed has stopped being a feature. It has become an

expectation. This is where the shift has happened - not in technology alone, but in behavior. Time is no longer experienced as duration. It is experienced as a response. The moment something is initiated, the expectation is completion. Anything in between feels friction. Workplaces are a clear example. Though a quick output is confused with efficiency, in reality, they may not be the same. Speed, at times, may mask poor thinking, just as easily as it can signal competence. Even in personal communication a same pattern exists. Silence is no longer neutral. It is interpreted. A delayed response is read as avoidance, absence is assumed to be intentional.

The result is a constant state of overreading and under waiting. What is often missed is that many essential processes were never designed for acceleration. Learning does not compress neatly. Neither does recovery. Neither does trust. These are cumulative processes built through repetition, distance and time. When forced into urgency, they do not improve. They weaken. The larger cultural change is not just that things are faster. It is that waiting has become uncomfortable. That discomfort is relatively new. Earlier systems had built-in pauses. Information arrived late. Decisions were revisited overtime. Even boredom had structure - it was a gap between inputs, not a condition to be eliminated. That gap mattered. It allowed thinking without interruption. It allowed ideas to settle instead of reacting immediately to the next stimulus. That space is now almost gone. Every pause is filled. Every silence is corrected. Every

delay is monitored. What remains is continuous activity without equivalent depth. That is where the imbalance sits. This is not a discussion against technological progress. The gains are undeniable. Healthcare is faster. Communication is instant. Information is accessible. Logistics are efficient in ways previously unimaginable. The problem is not speed itself. The problem is the extension of speed into every category of life. The issue lies elsewhere. Not everything is meant to be immediate. Some systems are not broken because they are slow. Perhaps things are getting restored in real time and that perhaps may take time. What is being eroded is not efficiency. It is tolerance. The ability to remain steady when outcomes are not immediate is weakening. And that has implications beyond convenience. It affects judgment, attention, and even the way problems are understood.

A fast world is not automatically a right one. The question, then, is not whether speed will continue to define the age. It will. The more relevant question is whether patience can still coexist alongside it - not as nostalgia, but as a necessity. Because, at some point, the line must be drawn. Speed belongs to systems. Patience belongs to people. Confusing the two is where the problem lies.

Deeba Salim Irfan is an award-winning, Dubai based author exploring themes of memory, identity, and emotional truth through storytelling and founder of The Writer

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PASSPORT AND CITIZENSHIP: CLARITY NEEDED, NOT CONFUSION

The Centre's clarification that an Indian passport is not conclusive proof of citizenship has reignited an important public debate.

While many citizens regard a passport as the highest form of government-issued identity, the government has rightly pointed out that citizenship in India is determined under the Citizenship Act, 1955, and not by any single document alone.

Legally, a passport is primarily a travel document. Courts have also observed that possession of a passport does not automatically settle citizenship disputes in every circumstance.

Yet, for ordinary citizens, such distinctions can be difficult to understand. When documents such as Aadhaar, voter identity cards and passports are

repeatedly described as insufficient proof of citizenship, uncertainty naturally follows.

The government insists that no new policy has been introduced and that the legal position has existed for decades. Nevertheless,

it is important that authorities clearly communicate what documents can be relied upon if citizenship is questioned.

Citizens should not be left confused about their legal status. In a country of over a billion people, transparency and consistency are essential.

The law may distinguish between identity, nationality and citizenship, but public confidence requires that these distinctions be explained clearly and applied fairly.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Britain's leadership revolving door

The reported departure of Keir Starmer and the emergence of Andy Burnham as a potential successor once again highlight the persistent instability in British politics. Over the past decade, the United Kingdom has witnessed an unusually high turnover of prime ministers, raising questions about political continuity and governance. Starmer faced mounting criticism following electoral setbacks and dissatisfaction within his own party. Many Labour members reportedly questioned his leadership, citing policy reversals and a perceived inability to address pressing issues such as immigration, the cost-of-living crisis and strained public services.

Britain's recent history reflects this challenge. From the aftermath of Brexit to economic uncertainty and internal party divisions, successive prime ministers have struggled to complete their agendas. Frequent leadership changes may satisfy short-term political pressures, but they can also undermine long-term policymaking and public confidence. Andy Burnham, if he assumes the leadership role, will inherit a demanding task. More than winning elections, he will need to restore stability and demonstrate effective governance. Britain requires not just a new leader but a durable political direction capable of addressing the concerns of both Parliament and the public.

SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

Standing with victims of torture

Torture, regardless of where it occurs or who commits it, remains one of the gravest violations of human dignity. As conflicts continue to rage across different parts of the world, countless individuals suffer physical and psychological trauma that often lasts a lifetime. Their families, too, bear scars that are difficult to heal. The observance of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on June 26 serves as a reminder that protecting human rights requires constant vigilance. Beyond condemning torture, governments and international organisations must invest in the rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors.

Recovery is not merely a medical process but a social and moral responsibility. With nearly a hundred armed conflicts ongoing globally, the risk of torture remains alarmingly high. History has shown that victims of violence can sometimes become perpetrators themselves, making rehabilitation and reconciliation essential components of peace-building efforts.

The United Nations and member nations must continue working to ensure truth, justice and accountability. Every victim deserves recognition, support and dignity. A society cannot remain unaffected by the suffering of its members. By standing with victims, humanity moves closer to a more compassionate and just world.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Pakistan's credibility problem

Pakistan's claim that it shot down an Indian Rafale fighter jet during Operation Sindoor continues to face serious credibility challenges. Recent government documents relating to the maintenance and logistics of India's fleet of 36 Rafale aircraft indicate that all aircraft remain accounted for. Had a jet been lost, evidence of replacement, write-off or official acknowledgment would likely have emerged.

In modern warfare, extraordinary claims require verifiable proof. Such proof would include wreckage, satellite imagery, telemetry data or independent confirmation. To date, none has been publicly produced. In the absence of evidence, assertions of a Rafale shoot-down remain unsubstantiated. The episode also reflects a broader issue within Pakistan's political and military narrative. For decades, official claims about conflicts with India have often differed sharply from historical records and international assessments.

As a result, many Pakistanis have grown up with interpretations of wars and military engagements that are contested outside their country. National morale is important, but it cannot be built on misinformation. Credibility is strengthened by transparency and facts, not by narratives that fail scrutiny.

ARVIND TAPKIRE | MUMBAI



FIFA 2026: The rise of a new Football world

FIFA 2026 is not merely another edition of the World Cup; it is a statement on the changing geography of global football. It has shown that the sport is no longer confined to a few historic power centres, but is being shaped by new nations, new audiences, new markets and new aspirations



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

Football as a sport has undergone a strategic shift. This shift is exemplified through the upsets, victories and tenacity that audiences are witnessing globally. Football today has moved beyond being a traditional bastion of favored nations to becoming a global sporting festival. The performance of Cape Verde has created a football tsunami for pundits and strategists analyzing the emergence of a new brigade in the football fraternity. It has stunned viewers through its spectacular performance against Spain and Uruguay. DR Congo has emerged with a new killer instinct.

Other nations such as Egypt, Haiti, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Iraq and Canada have also given us a whiff of professionalism that has been unprecedented and unparalleled. All this proves that the experiment to expand FIFA to 48 nations has met with success, giving new hope and aspiration to countries across the world. In the past, we witnessed the "Mexican Wave", which became a natural sporting symbol at global events. FIFA 2026 has not been left behind. The tagline and narrative have echoed ideas such as "Global Audiences Pick", "Underdogs Spectacle" and "David Vs Goliath Contest."

Every edition of the FIFA World Cup has given us a splash of unusual excitement, dogged performances, underrated displays and the emergence of unrecognizable dark horses. The current edition has been no exception. FIFA 2026 has so far had several defining moments, particularly through the rise of teams that were earlier seen as peripheral to the football imagination. These teams have given traditional showstoppers a run for their money.

With expanded participation, football branding has also scaled new heights. Each participating nation has given audiences a fresh taste of professionalism, along with new dynamics of skill, speed and strategy. Established superpowers have witnessed bouts of struggle and underperformance, while newer entrants have used the platform to announce their arrival with confidence. Football has transcended boundaries, leaving a lasting legacy among admirers, supporters and audiences. FIFA 2026 has shown to the world a bold new experiment, showcasing the "Democratization of Football" with renewed confidence, vigor and vitality.

The recent implications of FIFA 2026 have gone beyond the field of play. The enlarged format has not merely increased the number of teams; it has expanded the emotional, commercial and geopolitical footprint of football itself. With 12 groups, a new round of 32 and the possibility of third-placed teams progressing, every match has acquired greater tactical meaning and every goal has begun to carry qualification consequences. This has made FIFA 2026 refreshing because the tournament is no longer being viewed only through the lens of traditional football powers. The entry and performance of countries such as Cape Verde, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Haiti, DR Congo and others has been received with curiosity, admiration and surprise. Their inclusion has reinforced the belief that football's future lies in wider participation, not closed dominance.

The eastern part of the world is also emerging as an important zone to watch. Asian and Middle Eastern teams are bringing discipline, speed, compact defending and fearless counter-attacking football into the tournament's mainstream imagination. Japan, South Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan and Uzbekistan have shown that the football map is gradually shifting eastward. FIFA 2026, therefore, is refreshing not only because it is bigger, but because it is more representative, unpredictable and truly global.

Communication, outreach and narrative building have created new frontiers at FIFA 2026. It has been a rare symphony of diverse stakeholders leading to "Communication Convergence." Global conversation across multiple platforms has unleashed the power of soft power in the narrative-building process. An unusual diplomacy has emerged across stadiums, where the dynamics of sport, identity and national pride are visible in real time. We have witnessed an



FIFA 2026 HAS ALSO PROVED TO BE A NEW 'BRANDING VEHICLE,' CREATING A MULTI-LAYERED BRAND PLATFORM THROUGH VISUAL VISIBILITY, THEMATIC POSITIONING, FIFA LOGOS, SLOGANEERING, THEME SONG PLACEMENT AND CORPORATE PARTICIPATION

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interconnect unprecedented in scale and volume across stadiums, players, fan communities and digital platforms. This has brought to light the importance of using sport as a medium for building a cohesive communication environment between fans, brand identity, real-time dissemination and response. All this has led to a new phase of strategic global communication, influencing national networks, global visibility and soft power connectivity. Strategic communication through FIFA platforms is reinventing narrative discourse through different tools, platforms and engagement protocols.

FIFA 2026 has shown the importance of people-centric communication and narrative building in creating a perception where sport is not limited only to playing time. It is being utilized to build bonhomie through innovative storytelling and conversations that touch the heart and emotions, rather than relying on pure statecraft alone. Audience investment has been one of the critical pillars of FIFA 2026. The emotional journey of audiences has been relayed on a real-time basis to create an impact resting on authenticity, values, aspirations and hope. Technology, value systems and emotions have together shaped the benchmarks of audience engagement and excitement. FIFA 2026 has seen a Unified Voice across stadiums, where sports lovers have chanted triumph in unison or expressed disappointment with the resolve to fight back once again. It has created "Emotional Bonding" among people through common voices, shared memories and collective sporting imagination.

FIFA 2026 has also proved to be a new "Branding Vehicle", creating a multi-layered brand platform through visual visibility, thematic positioning, FIFA logos, sloganeering, theme song placement and corporate participation. Coupled with this is the presence of iconic players such as Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Kylian Mbappé.

FIFA has created new parameters and benchmarks for endorsements, consumer engagement and fan experiences. Loyalty, emotional participation and cultural association have become the new mantras of branding principles. Fan experiences have added to the color of branding, where the "product" is no longer just the match, but the complete universe of emotion, identity, visibility and audience acceptance created around it.

FIFA 2026 is not merely another edition of the World Cup; it is a statement on the changing geography of global football. It has shown that the sport is no longer confined to a few historic power centres, but is being shaped by new nations, new audiences, new markets and new aspirations. The expanded format has opened the gates for wider participation, while the performances of emerging football nations have given the tournament a new emotional and competitive pulse. As the world moves towards the knockout rounds, FIFA 2026 stands as a celebration of unpredictability, inclusion and global sporting democracy. It has reaffirmed that football's greatest strength lies not only in goals scored or trophies lifted, but in its power to unite identities, ignite hope and create a shared global imagination. This is the real legacy of FIFA 2026.

Gita as casteist and misogynist? Strawmanning at its worst



ACHARYA PRASHANT

Last week, I sat through a mock trial of my own making. Three young people played prosecutors and a bailiff, charging the Bhagavad Gita with crimes against caste and gender. I played the accused. The charges were not invented for the occasion. They are the same charges that circulate constantly now, in reels and comment threads, and the kind of confident paragraph that gets forwarded without anyone checking the verse it claims to summarise. Two accusations dominate that circulation more than any other: that the Gita is a casteist text, and that it is a misogynist one. Both charges, when placed next to the verses they claim to be reading, turn out to be built on a method rather than on evidence, the method being to lift a line, strip its grammar, and hand the remainder to an audience that has no reason to check the original.

I want to walk through how each of these charges was built in that room, because the building is more instructive than the verdict. A strawman needs raw material, and the raw material here was always real, a real verse, a real word, sometimes a real silence. What got added to that material, every single time, was an inference the verse itself does not support.

Arjuna, early in the first chapter, panics at the thought of the coming war and offers Krishna a list of reasons not to fight. Among them is a fear that the killing will cause what he calls varnasankar, the corruption of women leading to mixed, impure offspring. Krishna spends seventeen more chapters correcting nearly every fear Arjuna raises, yet never specifically refutes this one, and a teacher who corrects everything except a single prejudice has, by that silence, endorsed the prejudice.

That standard collapses the moment you apply it consistently. Krishna also never specifically refutes Arjuna's fear about ancestral rites going unperformed. Nobody is building a case that the Gita therefore endorses ancestor worship. What Krishna does instead is dismantle the centre from which every one of Arjuna's fears was generated: the conviction that Arjuna is the one who acts. Once that centre is shown to be unreal, the fears stacked on top of it do not need individual rebuttal; they fall together.

The harder charge was that the Gita makes caste a matter of birth and then commands obedience to it, with the line "death in one's own dharma is preferable to a foreign dharma" read as a divine endorsement of dying in service to whatever varna a person was born into. The eighteenth chapter does list out the work associated with each varna, and that list was read as proof. But four chapters earlier, the Gita had already defined how a varna is determined, and it says guna and karma, disposition and chosen action, with no mention of the household a person is born into. Disposition is only half the definition. The other half, karma, is choice, and choice can run against disposition as easily as with it. What actually fixes the varna, by the Gita's own definition, is the choice, not the womb it was made from.

This also means the category the Gita is describing was never meant to sit still. The Gita's varna, on its own definition, is volitional and it is fluid, neither of which describes the caste system that calcified later in its name. Somewhere between the text and the centuries that followed it, this fluid, chosen category hardened into a fixed, inherited one, and walls went up where the text had only described a choice.

The misogyny charge sat almost entirely on one verse from the ninth chapter, the line about women, vaishyas, and shudras attaining the highest goal even though born of papa-yoni, a sinful womb. Read fast and stripped of its grammar, this sounds like Krishna is calling womanhood itself a sin. The actual sentence has two parts joined by the word api, which means even. The first part is complete on its own: even those of sinful birth who take refuge in Krishna find liberation. Only then does the second part add that even women, vaishyas, and shudras attain the highest goal this way. The list of who is included is not the definition of the sinful womb; it is the next example in an expanding circle of people the verse insists are not excluded.

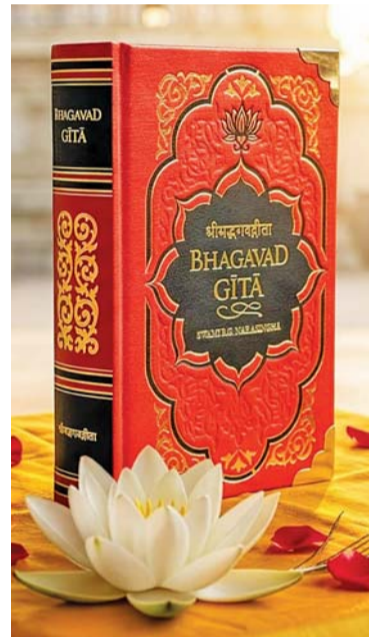
Papa-yoni itself is being misread as a slur when it is closer to a diagnosis. Yoni means origin, source, the conditions a person is handed before they have had any say in the matter. A child raised inside cruelty and superstition has, in this sense, been born into papa-yoni, regardless of caste and regardless of sex. What the verse is actually doing is declaring that not even the worst possible start disqualifies a person from the highest end, and that those society had already pushed to its margins, women very much among them, were being told that no door was closed to them.

The case for caste cruelty being a corruption of scripture rather than a teaching within it is not new, and not mine alone to make. Dr. Ambedkar, no friendly witness to organised Hinduism, gave an entire chapter of Riddles in Hinduism to the argument that the Upanishads stood opposed to the very Vedic hierarchies later generations claimed scriptural cover from.

Every one of these charges depended on stopping a sentence early, or assuming a silence does the work of a verdict. The accusation that the Gita is casteist and the accusation that it is misogynist both rest on roughly the same move: take a verse out of the sentence it lives in, and the sentence out of the chapter it lives in, and the chapter out of the text's own stated definitions, and almost anything can be made to say almost anything.

None of this means every traditional reading of these verses has been faithful to them either. Custom has, in places, claimed scriptural cover for cruelty the scripture itself does not supply, and that is a separate failure. But a separate failure is not the same failure as the one being charged here. The discipline this calls for is not loyalty to a text. It is the discipline owed to any sentence before judgment is passed on it: read it whole, in its own sequence, before deciding what it was made to confess.

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



The echo chamber against Modi: When ideology outpaces evidence



PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH

Narendra Modi has won three national elections in a row, in 2014, 2019, and 2024, each time growing or strengthening the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. Alongside his continued popularity in polls, India has seen major improvements in infrastructure and digital systems. For instance, national highways have almost doubled since 2014, and digital tools like the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) now handle trillions of rupees in transactions every month. Internet connections have jumped from about 250 million to nearly 970 million. The government has also taken a more active role in foreign policy by joining the Quad, building closer ties with Gulf countries, and leading vaccine diplomacy.

Even with these changes, many Indian left-leaning writers, the Delhi-based 'Lutyens' English media, and much of the Western media still describe Modi's time in office as authoritarian and anti-democratic. This article argues that their criticism often reflects their own beliefs more than policy results, and that the pattern is less about careful analysis than a self-reinforcing echo chamber that uses selective standards and old narratives. Modi's ascent, originating from a non-dynastic,

RSS-linked background in Gujarat, bypassed the usual power structures. Because he reached out to people directly through rallies, his 'Mann Ki Baat' radio show, and social media, he did not have to rely on traditional media. Many established English-language media outlets, which used to follow Congress-era views, have seen changes in their audiences and owners. As TV news has become more divided, some channels have backed the current government and focused on Hindi and regional-language viewers.

Critics call these channels 'Godi media' (lapdog media), but earlier media often did not question Congress scandals or dynastic politics and rarely faced criticism for that. (BJP) policies challenge the traditional Nehruvian paradigm, which equates progress with Western-style secularism and stated redistribution. Policy initiatives such as the abrogation of Jammu & Kashmir's special status (Article 370), the Citizenship Amendment Act (which expedites citizenship for persecuted non-Muslim refugees), and proposals for a uniform civil code are frequently described as 'anti-minority.'

Proponents argue that these measures aim to correct historical imbalances or address security concerns. However, the article argues that the available data indicate a more nuanced reality. These international rankings deserve a closer look because they rely heavily on experts' opinions on issues like 'freedom of expression' and 'civil society.' On the other hand, clear facts, such as regular multiparty elections, voting rights for all, and peaceful changes in government, are presented as evidence of India's strong democratic



record. Indian government reviews, including those from the Economic Advisory Council, have found problems with these rankings. They cite unclear expert selection, reliance on outdated polling data, and comparisons that may not fit each country's unique circumstances.

The Indian populace after 2014 seems to align with the BJP's rise in culture and politics more than with any real decline in election fairness. Similar rankings have been criticised for favouring liberal-internationalist ideas over local ways of governing in diverse, developing countries. The article says double standards are clear. Western media often closely examines how India handles dissent or communal issues, but gives softer or less coverage to similar problems in countries like China (with Uyghurs), Pakistan (blasphemy laws and minority migration), or even Western countries when it suits their politics. For example, India was criticised for buying cheaper Russian oil during the Ukraine war for 'values,' while European countries

making similar choices faced less criticism.

Media stories about the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and farm law protests often focus on 'minority rights' or 'farmer distress' but don't always provide sufficient legal, economic, or historical context. This is part of a broader trend: when non-Western countries, especially India with its Hindu majority in a mostly Muslim region, show national or cultural pride, they are often described as illiberal. Since 2014, India's path of economic reform, infrastructure building, modernising defence, and pursuing a more independent foreign policy has challenged the idea that every country should follow a Western liberal model.

As China's influence has grown, India has also taken a more practical approach, but major Western media still give critical coverage.

They often mention issues like control of institutions, mistreatment of minorities, and economic problems, usually linking them to investigations by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against opposition leaders, even though these actions happened before 2014, too. Opposition-led state governments also employ comparable strategies, and the judiciary continues to function as a check on executive authority. When media members are arrested, it is usually for charges under current laws about incitement or other offences, not because of broad censorship. Critical digital and print media are still active. The situation for minorities is complex and involves different trade-offs. Hate speech and occasional violence do happen and are tracked by the NCRB and civil society groups.

What is needed is the well-being of marginalised groups across numerous communities. Assertions of widespread 'othering' frequently emphasise perceived intent rather than measurable outcomes and may neglect the policy context of illegal migration and security challenges following partition. The introduction and the early rollout of GST caused problems, and issues such as unemployment and inequality persist. Still, India has experienced steady, strong growth among the world's major economies, increased foreign investment, rapid expansion of digital infrastructure, and a push for manufacturing and services through PLI schemes.

There are real criticisms, such as gaps in policy implementation, increased polarisation, some government overreach, and uneven welfare delivery, all of which deserve fair review. But ongoing outrage often goes beyond the facts and shows more about existing biases than about what is actually happening in India.

Indian voters have chosen continuity again and again, no matter what international rankings or the media say. The changes seen under Modi, even with their flaws, force established institutions to adjust to a world where Western views are no longer the only ones that matter. In this changing situation, countries in the Global South are placing greater emphasis on sovereignty, development, cultural identity, and democracy. The ongoing echo chamber shows how hard it is to change deep-rooted opinions, rather than pointing to any one feature of Modi's government.

The writer is Resident Editor with The Pioneer



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BJP councillor, aide get 5 years in 2016 MLA attack case

A court in Maharashtra's Gondia district has sentenced a BJP councillor and his aide to five years of imprisonment for manhandling a former MLA during a press conference in 2016.

District and Additional Sessions Judge AS Pratinidhi on Thursday found Shiv Sharma, a councillor in the Gondia Municipal Council, and his aide, Rahul Shrivastava, guilty of charges under section 325 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The court sentenced the duo to five years' imprisonment and slapped a fine of ₹50,000 each.

The court also acquitted four others in the case for want of sufficient evidence against them.

As per the details, on April 9, 2016, the then Congress MLA Gopaldas Agrawal was briefing reporters at a local hotel when Sharma, who was the former vice-president of the Gondia Municipal Council at the time, and Shrivastava entered the venue and slapped him. Shrivastava also manhandled Agrawal and his son, who tried to shield his father during the altercation.

Based on a complaint, a case was registered against Sharma, Shrivastava and four others, who allegedly helped the duo flee. (PTI)



Delhi court acquits four men in 2019 murder case

A Delhi court has acquitted four men accused of murdering a man in West Delhi's Vikas Puri in 2019, saying the prosecution had "miserably failed" to prove its case after all the key public witnesses, including the complainant and alleged eyewitnesses, failed to identify the accused during trial.

Additional Sessions Judge Vandana Jain was hearing the case against Lokesh alias Surya, Pradeep alias Dhilla, Rahul alias Makkhi and Neeraj alias Sanju of offences under IPC Sections 302 (murder)/34 (common intention) and Section 27 (general use of arms) of the Arms Act and acquitted them.

In an order dated June 6, the court said, "Apart from the report of Ballistic, there is no other surrounding or supporting evidence in order to establish that the accused persons were present at the spot at the time of incident or they had killed Amit Kochhar."

The case pertained to the murder of Amit Kochhar, who was shot dead outside his residence in Vikas Puri on the night of June 13, 2019.

According to the prosecution, Kochhar was allegedly shot multiple times by armed assailants outside his residence. His friends rushed him to a nearby nursing home where he was declared brought dead. (PTI)



RG Kar case: Calcutta HC expresses displeasure at CBI probe

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kolkata

The Calcutta High Court expressed displeasure at the progress of investigation by the CBI in the alleged conspiracy in the rape and murder of an on-duty doctor at State-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in 2024.

The court said that the probe it had directed to be conducted by the Special Investigation Team (SIT), upon relieving the earlier investigating officer, should have been taken to its



logical conclusion. The CBI submitted a status report before the court on the probe conducted by it as per its direction on May 21.

"We are not satisfied with the report filed before us,"



UP *pradhans* can't stay as administrators: HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Prayagraj

Holding that gram *pradhans* or village heads cannot be permitted to continue as administrators, the Allahabad High Court has asked the Uttar Pradesh Government to specify a time frame for holding panchayat polls in the State.

Justice Siddhartha Nandan on a petition filed by Arbind Rathor passed the order. Rathor moved the court challenging order dated May 25 as well as consequential order the next day.

According to the May 25

Government order, existing gram *pradhans* were appointed as administrators following the completion of their five-year term. A further prayer was made seeking direction to the State election commission to place on record a detailed and time-bound schedule for completion of the entire three-tier panchayat election process in the mandatory compliance of Article 243E and 243K of the Constitution.

It was submitted on behalf of petitioner that the impugned orders have been passed under Section 12(3-A) of the Panchayat Raj Act, 1947 which was subject matter of



Allahabad High Court

challenge in *Pram Lal Patel vs. State of UP* in 2000 wherein a division bench of the high court found this provision

to be in violation of Section 243E and 243K.

Calling State authorities to file counter affidavit, the

court observed that under Article 243E, the term of the panchayat is of a fixed tenure, ie, five years from its first meeting and no longer.

Additional Chief Standing Counsel submitted that similar controversy is engaging the attention in a PIL filed by Ashish Kumar Singh.

In that matter, the Uttar Pradesh Government's stand was that since it has appointed an OBC Commission for determining the reservation aspects relating to the OBC category, panchayat elections cannot be held until the panel's exercise is completed as decision on the reserva-

tions would be part of the polls. Till date, the OBC Commission has not been submitted its report.

On other hand, the counsel appearing on behalf of the State Election Commission submitted that the electoral roll has already been published on June 10 and as such they are in a position to hold the elections and the State Government has to provide the necessary logistics for holding the elections.

But due to the aforesaid stand of the State Government, there is an impediment in holding the elections, the counsel said.

Delhi tribunal awards ₹1.06 crore compensation to MCD peon rendered unemployable in truck accident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

A Delhi Motor Accident Claims Tribunal has awarded more than ₹1.06 crore compensation to a former Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) peon who suffered severe crush injuries in a 2021 truck accident, holding that the injuries left him incapable of earning a livelihood.

Presiding Officer Dharmender Singh was hearing a claim petition filed by Bishan Dutt Sharma, who was 57 years old at the time



of the accident. In an order dated June 9, the tribunal said, "It has been proved that the vehicle ie truck was being driven by Noor Ali in rash and

negligent manner and while driving said vehicle in said manner collided with the motorcycle, which was being driven by claimant Bishan

Dutt Sharma and who because of said collision suffered grievous hurt".

According to the tribunal, the accident occurred on June 30, 2021, at Dhulirias Chowk in Dwarka when Sharma's motorcycle was hit from behind by a truck being driven in a rash and negligent manner by Noor Ali.

The tribunal noted that Sharma sustained grievous crush injuries to both lower limbs and suffered 77 per cent permanent physical disability in relation to both lower limbs.

Court rejects minor's plea in 2018 HDFC executive murder

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Mumbai

A court here dismissed a plea filed by the accused in the 2018 murder of a senior executive of HDFC Bank claiming that he was a minor at the time of the crime.

Additional Sessions Judge Anil Salunkhe held that Sarfaraz Shaikh, the accused, had submitted a falsified school record.

The court relied upon a bone-age (ossification) test conducted at JJ Hospital which concluded that he was between 25 to 28 years old.

Siddharth Sanghvi (38), a vice president at HDFC Bank, disappeared after leaving for work on September 5, 2018.



His car was found in Kopar Khairane, Navi Mumbai, with bloodstains and a sharp-edged knife.

Following technical analysis of Call Detail Records (CDR), police arrested Sarfaraz Shaheed Shaikh who allegedly confessed to killing the victim during a robbery, and dumping his body near

the Haji Malang Road. Police subsequently recovered the body. Shaikh was booked under multiple sections of the Indian Penal Code, including 302 (murder), 397 (robbery) and 201 (destroying evidence).

Shaikh claim that he was born on July 20, 2001 and submitted a school leaving certificate from a school in Uttar Pradesh. Being a minor at the time of the crime, he should not be tried before a regular court, he contended.

However, the court noted that the transfer certificate used to secure his admission actually belonged to a different student named Satishkumar Kallu Masih.

MP High Court orders airlifting influencer injured in Indore blast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Indore

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on Thursday directed that a 27-year-old social media influencer who suffered severe burns in a gas pipeline explosion in Indore be airlifted to Ahmedabad for specialised treatment.

The State Government shall bear the entire cost of the woman's treatment, said Justices Subodh Abhyankar and Jai Kumar Pillai of the Indore bench, hearing a public interest litigation filed by local lawyer Ritesh Inani.

During the hearing of the PIL, Yashveer Jhala, brother of social media influencer Jini Jhala (27), filed an application seeking to intervene.

Though a surgery was performed on Jini Jhala on Wednesday, specialised treatment for such extensive burn injuries was available only at Ahmedabad's Zydus Hospital, and therefore the family wanted to shift her there, said Yashveer's lawyer.

"On due consideration of the submissions and upon a perusal of the photographs of the victim, this court is inclined to accept the said



prayer," said the bench.

Jhala should be airlifted to Ahmedabad as expeditiously as possible, the court said,

directing the Commissioner of Health Department, Indore District Magistrate and the Chief Medical and Health

Officer (CMHO) to make necessary arrangements.

A compliance report should be submitted by June 30, said the HC.

The division bench also noted that on June 24, it had directed the state government's counsel to seek instructions on the petitioner's complaint that the explosion victims were being charged for the expenses at Indore's Bombay Hospital.

Advocate Rishi Tiwari, representing the Indore Municipal Corporation, informed that the private

hospital has been asked not to charge the patients for any expenses.

The explosion occurred on June 23 in Indore's Vijay Nagar area after a drilling machine struck an underground piped natural gas (PNG) line during excavation work. Four people, including Jini Jhala, were injured and two vehicles were damaged.

Locals claimed that an illegal tubewell was being dug at the site, while the municipal corporation stated that a pit was being dug for groundwater recharge.

Jharkhand HC sets 6-month deadline for filling up vacant posts in prisons

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Ranchi

The Jharkhand High Court set a deadline of six months for the State's Public Service Commission and the Staff Selection Commission to fill up vacant posts in jails.

A division bench of Chief Justice MS Sonak and Justice Rajesh Shankar, while hearing a public interest litigation initiated suo motu, directed the Government to ensure filling up of all vacan-



cies in jails across Jharkhand. The State has 31 correctional facilities including central jails, district jails and sub-jails.

The bench directed the home secretary and the sec-

retaries of both the commissions to furnish a status report of compliance of the order to fill up the vacancies within the deadline.

The Jharkhand Government informed the court that the process for filling up vacancies in jails is underway.

The Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission has already issued advertisement for appointment of assistant jailers, jail warders, medical nursing staff, and other posts in jails.

NGT ASKS UP WATER DEPT TO CONSIDER ILLEGAL GROUNDWATER EXTRACTION

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The National Green Tribunal has asked the Uttar Pradesh Ground Water Department to consider a complaint regarding the alleged illegal extraction of groundwater in Noida and Greater Noida, and take appropriate action.

A bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert member Afroz Ahmad was hearing a petition by environmental conservationist Vikrant Tongad, which claimed private builders, industries and individuals were illegally extracting groundwater in Noida and Greater Noida, especially in Sectors 145 and 153 of Noida and Sectors 94 and 150 in the Tech Zone area of Greater Noida.

Advocate Akash Vashishtha, who appeared on behalf of the applicant, submitted, "We have been continuously writing to the Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) and other concerned authorities seeking action to prevent illegal groundwater extraction, but to no avail."

Delhi HC denies bail to father accused of sexually assaulting daughter

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi High Court has refused bail to a man accused of repeatedly sexually assaulting his own daughter for ten years.

The 17-year-old survivor, who was diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder, alleged that the assault began when she was about 6.

She approached the police in January after an incident, which led to an FIR under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma rejected the father's contention that the minor's claims were

unreliable on account of her psychological condition, saying that such a condition was associated with prolonged trauma and there was no reason to disbelieve her.

"Prima facie, therefore, this (the diagnosis) cannot be treated as a ground to discredit the allegations; rather, it may provide some context to the victim's version," the court stated in its judgement on May 5.

The court observed that the father allegedly threatened the girl not to disclose the assaults and therefore, her "silence" over a prolonged period cannot be termed unnatural or treated as a circumstance to doubt her



version at this stage. "In this court's view, the same appears to be a consequence of fear, psychological trauma, and her vulnerability as a minor, particularly when the allegations are against her own father, who was in a position of dominance and control," the court said.

Considering the seriousness of the allegations, the relationship between the parties and the possibility of the accused influencing the victim or other witnesses, the court opined that it was not inclined to grant him bail at this stage.

Seeking bail, the accused, on the other hand, claimed that he

was innocent and had been falsely implicated due to strained matrimonial relations and long-standing disputes between him and the victim's mother. The court refused to accept accused's defence of matrimonial discord.

It said the minor's allegations disclose a continuing course of conduct over the years, and not merely a single incident.

"At this stage, there is no reason to prima facie disbelieve her version, and it cannot be rejected merely for want of independent corroboration or on account of prior family disputes," it observed. "The bail application is, therefore, dismissed," the court concluded.



FROM THE WORLD

RUSSIA Ex-defence minister dies

Sergei Ivanov, a former Russian defence minister once seen as a possible successor to President Vladimir Putin, has died. He was 73. The Kremlin said Ivanov died on Friday without providing the cause of death or giving other details. Putin sent his condolences to Ivanov's family. In 2001, Putin appointed Ivanov, a fellow KGB veteran, to serve as his defence minister, the job he held until 2007, overseeing the second war in Chechnya that crushed the region's separatist bid. When Putin decided to step down due to term limits and shift into the prime minister's seat in 2008, Ivanov was widely viewed as his most likely successor. However, Putin picked another longtime associate, Dmitry Medvedev, to serve as his placeholder until reclaiming the presidency in 2012. Some observers argued that Putin ditched Ivanov's candidacy because he saw Ivanov as overly ambitious and feared that he could try to hold onto the presidential seat. (AP)

PAKISTAN

4 bodies found inside ambulance

Four bodies bearing bullet wounds were found inside an ambulance in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in northwest Pakistan, police said Friday. The ambulance was found at the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) circular road in Bannu district of the province. Officials estimate that the attack was carried out on Thursday night. A case has been registered against unidentified assailants under the Anti-Terrorism Act, and an investigation is underway to trace and apprehend those responsible, police said. Bannu district has witnessed repeated security incidents in recent months, with both civilians and local security forces coming under attack amid a broader surge in militant violence. (AP)

Venezuela: Search for survivors intensifies after quakes

MEGAN JANETSKY/ANDRY RINCON/JUAN PABLO ARRAEZ
■ La Guaira

In cities across northern Venezuela, neighbours helped each other dig through rubble to search for loved ones after back-to-back earthquakes killed at least 589 people and left thousands injured.

Acting President Delcy Rodriguez announced the new toll early Friday, surrounded by government and military officials as she welcomed the arrival of rescue crews from all over the world.

"We are going to rescue the people who are trapped," she said. "We are working tirelessly on this task." She said the state of La Guaira has been hardest hit by the 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes that struck Wednesday evening, noting that it has been militarized as crews search for survivors and distribute food and water. The number of casualties is expected to climb with thousands reported missing and frantic rescue efforts continuing.

The International Organisation for Migration said that up to 6.76 million people in Venezuela could be affected by the quakes, some 2 million of them in Caracas alone. Loyce Pace, the International Red Cross' regional director for the Americas, said "people are still terrified to reenter what were their homes."

The injured were pulled out in injured in dust and blood, among them children. Venezuelan state TV showed dramatic images of rescues, including a woman who was trapped under a cement slab with only a bare foot poking



Police carry a body from a building that collapsed after earthquakes struck La Guaira, Venezuela. AP

dramatic images of rescues, including a woman who was trapped under a cement slab with only a bare foot poking

out before rescuers slid her out alive. But few government search teams were initially seen outside Caracas.

Venezuelans reeling from quakes
Many were stunned Thursday morning as they

saw buildings reduced to skeletons, furniture hanging out of windows and helicopters circling overhead. Buildings were flattened and streets cracked open.

Families posted missing-person flyers with photos of loved ones while others shared handwritten lists of names as they searched. Venezuelans abroad struggled to make contact with relatives due to interrupted phone service in the country.

In downtown Caracas, hundreds spent the night huddled in parks, parking lots and other open spaces. Mother of three Dayana Delgado asked where the heavy machinery was that government officials had promised and said residents were the ones digging through crumpled buildings.

"I want to know where my child is, if he's trapped or in a shelter," she said of her missing 8-year-old son.

One mother sobbed and collapsed in grief as the bodies of her 3- and 10-year-old children were wrapped in blankets and carried away. Others screamed the names of the missing. Some stood in silent shock.

Venezuelan authorities said they were diverting rescue teams from other parts of the country to La Guaira, which is no stranger to natural disasters: A 1999 mudslide killed thousands and is considered one of the country's worst natural disasters.

In La Guaira, Cristian Carreno stared at his charred apartment building tilting precariously to one side. (AP)

Ukraine launches massive drone attack on Russia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Kyiv

Ukraine launched a major nighttime attack on a dozen Russian regions, Russian-held Crimea and the surrounding seas, Moscow's Defence Ministry said on Friday, in what appeared to be one of Kyiv's biggest drone assaults since the Kremlin's full-scale invasion more than four years ago.

Russian air defences intercepted 660 Ukrainian drones, Russia's Defence Ministry said. The previous biggest Ukrainian attack over the past year, as Ukraine has accelerated its drone development, involved 556 drones on May 17.

In an effort to turn the tables on Russia's grinding war of attrition, Ukrainian long-range drones have been battering oil production and energy facilities behind the front line and deep inside Russia.

The campaign has choked Russian fuel supplies and military deliveries, stalling Moscow's efforts on the battlefield, Western officials and analysts say, and has heaped pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A Russian chemical plant is reportedly hit

Initial damage reports from Russia after the overnight attack provided scant information. Russia's Defence Ministry usually doesn't say what was targeted in Ukraine's drone attacks, nor does it detail any



damage. Russian independent online outlet Astra reported that a chemical plant and a hydroelectric plant in Novomoskovsk were attacked and caught fire. The Associated Press couldn't independently verify the report, and there was no official confirmation.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin reported that 47 Ukrainian drones were downed as they flew toward the Russian capital. He did not report any casualties or damage. Ukraine's Security Service said it used drones to strike Russian navy ships and air defence radars in Kerch, an important port city in Crimea.

The targets were two reconnaissance and minelaying ships, the Volga and the Vyatka, and the cargo-passenger ferry Petropavlovsk, the agency said, claiming that the strikes started a large fire. The claim could not be independently verified.

The major attack came hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on X that he had ordered "a 40-day influence operation," believed to mean an escalation of attacks, aimed at "compelling (Russia) to end the war" after U.S. peace efforts over the past year yielded no breakthrough.

Ukraine has racked up a list of successful strikes, including hitting targets in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Zelenskyy said he got further promises of foreign support when he attended a recent summit of G7 leaders, including from U.S. President Donald Trump, and that the promised aid will help Ukraine step up its effort to force Putin to the negotiating table.

A NATO summit next month could be another key moment in beefing up Ukraine's military. Ukraine says 3 civilians killed and 20 wounded in Russian attacks.

Shiite Muslims mark Ashura across the world

FADI TAWIL/ABBY SEWELL
■ Nabatiyeh

Shiite Muslims marked one of the most important days on their calendar Friday with large gatherings in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and other parts of the world to remember the seventh-century killing of Hussein, the grandson of Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

The annual commemoration, known as Ashoura, is marked on the 10th day of the month of Muharram in the lunar-based Islamic calendar. Ashoura is the culmination of a 10-day mourning period and marks the day Hussein was killed alongside members of his family and companions as he fought against the army of Caliph Yazid, to whom Hussein had



Lebanese Shiite men pass buildings destroyed by Israeli strikes during an Ashoura procession, when Shiites commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad in Nabatiyeh, Lebanon.

refused to pledge allegiance. Hussein's killing cemented the schism between Sunni and Shiite Islam and remains a powerful symbol of resistance against oppression and injustice.

Ashoura this year comes

after a war between predominantly Shiite Iran and the United States and Israel, who launched strikes on the country on Feb. 28, killing senior officials, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The 86-year-old

Khamenei was not just Iran's top political leader but also had a final say on all religious matters and was revered by millions of Shiites worldwide.

A funeral procession for Khamenei is scheduled to take place in early July.

On Friday, large crowds of people gathered in the Iraqi Shiite holy city of Karbala to mark Ashoura. Hussein is buried in the city where he was killed in the battle that took place in 680, and his shrine is visited by millions of Shiites from around the world every year. In Baghdad, thousands marched through the streets, including some who slashed their heads with razors and performed other forms of self-flagellation in a show of grief to mark the occasion. (AP)

Australia eyes stronger social media ban for children

ROD MCGUIRK
■ Melbourne

The Australian government plans to strengthen laws that ban children younger than 16 from social media platforms, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said.

Observers said on Friday the government was responding to evidence that the ban on young children holding accounts on platforms including Facebook, Instagram and YouTube had failed since it came into force on December 10 last year. Australia was the first country in the world to pass legislation keeping youth off social media, but others have since followed.



Anthony Albanese

Albanese told Parliament on Thursday this government was considering options to strengthen the ban.

"We're working on that as a priority because this is something that other gener-

ations didn't have to deal with, which is why it's complex," Albanese told Parliament.

He told the Australian Broadcasting Corp on Friday the government was asking

"are the laws as strong as possible?" and did eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant, Australia's online safety watchdog, "have every power at her disposal?"

Britain announced last week plans to ban children under 16 from a range of platforms to protect them from harmful content and excessive screen time.

Canada, Brazil and Indonesia have introduced legislation or announced age-based restrictions or requirements for children's access to social media. France, Spain, Denmark, Thailand and South Korea are among others studying or developing similar approaches. (AP)

Europe battling record breaking heatwave



ANDREW B WATKINS
■ Melbourne

Sweltering temperatures are shattering records across Europe, as the continent battles a deadly heatwave.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, France endured its hottest days in history, with western regions reaching highs of between 39°C and 43°C. Wednesday was the United Kingdom's warmest June day on record, with the mercury climbing to 36.1°C. And according to early data, Spain, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Switzerland have all broken June temperature records at several sites. And the event is not over yet.

Tragically, lives have already been lost, including dozens of people who have drowned in France in the past week, while trying to cool down in the punishing heat.

weather bureau has declared El Nino active, making a hotter, drier year in Australia, Asia and the South Pacific much more likely. And since April, India and Pakistan have been battling a sustained and ultimately deadly heatwave. So what's driving this latest heatwave? And why is it so severe?

An unusual heatwave
A heatwave occurs when the average temperature is unusually hot for three or more days in a row. That's compared to past weather data taken from the same location.

But scientists are losing sleep over the current European heatwave, for two main reasons.

In Europe, the hottest time of year comes in mid- to late July, about a month after the summer solstice. However, recent research suggests days of intense heat stress are now starting to arrive in June. Since 1950, only one other major heatwave has arrived earlier than the current heatwave, which is unfolding weeks before the peak of the European summer. (AP)

NATO summit should display unity, deputy NATO chief

EMMA BURROWSAP
■ London

NATO's deputy commander told *The Associated Press* that he wants a summit in Turkey to spur member countries to spend more on defence, reaffirm support for Ukraine and underline the unity of the alliance.

Air Chief Marshal Sir John Stringer, NATO's deputy supreme allied commander in Europe, spoke to AP in London less than two weeks before the crucial Ankara summit on July 7-8 tests the cohesion of the 77-year-old alliance.

US President Donald Trump has sent conflicting signals over America's force posture in Europe, at times threatening to leave and at other times unnerving European leaders with his push to annex Greenland or his flattery of NATO ad-



Air Chief Marshal Sir John Stringer

sary Russian President Vladimir Putin.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth lambasted NATO allies last week for not allowing use of their bases to attack Iran, as he announced a surprise six-month review of American forces in Europe.

Meanwhile, government ministers in the UK have quit over what they say are military spending plans that

fail to keep Britain safe.

Summits are "highly political events and they are a demonstration of any organisation's unity," said Stringer, a senior British air force officer. It would be strange if over decades of NATO expanding there weren't moments of turbulence, he said.

"Are we in one of those moments at the moment? Yes, we are," Stringer said in

an interview at a military conference in London where AP also interviewed other senior European military officials about their hopes — and fears — for the summit.

NATO's European members step up on defence

Trump has long urged European allies to take more responsibility for their own defence, and with the notable exception of Spain they have largely heeded with an unprecedented effort to spend more on their armed forces.

Russia is increasingly threatening Europe, so allies should boost their own militaries while also helping Ukraine degrade Russia's fighting power, said Maj Gen Indrek Sirel, a commander in Estonia's armed forces.

"Europe as a whole has a lot to do in order to be credible against Russia," said

Brig Gen Jyri Raitasalo of Finland, which shares NATO's longest border with Russia.

Stringer said European nations are investing to generate a "really credible force," citing as an example how some countries are quadrupling production of 155 mm artillery shells. The summit will discuss ramping up production in ways the alliance has not had to do in decades, Stringer said.

European military chiefs wait for clarity on US plans

The outcome of Hegseth's six-month review of forces will determine how fast Europeans must take responsibility for their own security. The US military in Europe had said earlier in the month that Washington would be withdrawing some capabilities from Europe and expecting other allies to fill the gaps. (AP)

EU unveils plan to help bloc's overlooked islands, coastal communities

MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS
■ Paphos (Cyprus)

Improving transportation links, ending energy isolation and building more homes are some of the key initiatives the European Union's executive arm is looking to enact under a pair of first-ever strategies designed to help the bloc's islands and coastal communities flourish, EU officials said Friday.

Some 17 million people live in more than 4,000 islands across the EU, including three island members –

Ireland, Malta and Cyprus. Another 95 million live along the coasts of 22 member states.

"Islands have been overlooked in the past, but now that comes to an end," European Parliament Vice President Younous Omarjee told a conference on strengthening EU islands and coastal communities.

The strategies aim to do away with piecemeal approaches to overcoming the unique challenges that islands and coastal communities face, offering a compre-



hensive approach, said Raffaele Fitto, European Commission executive vice president for cohesion and

reforms. Given their distance from mainland markets and dependence on air and mar-

itime connections, the costs for transport, housing and public services are much higher on islands than on the mainland. "This is what we call the cost of insularity - a cost that millions of EU citizens and businesses pay every day, simply because of where they live and work," Fitto said.

The strategy on islands is built around four pillars that aim to improve transportation links and digital infrastructure, tackle the effects of climate change and energy needs, address shrinking

populations and housing shortages, and bolster security and crisis preparedness. "From the Baltic to the Mediterranean, islands are on the front line of geopolitical challenges," said Fitto.

There are currently no details on specific projects that will receive funding. That will come from member states themselves, who will forward proposals once the bloc's new budget is unveiled. Fitto said projects such as desalination plants and housing will be among the priorities. (AP)

Xi backs Bangladesh in upholding sovereignty

KJM VARMA
■ Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday expressed Beijing's backing for Bangladesh in upholding its sovereignty and "rejecting foreign interference", as he met visiting Prime Minister Tarique Rahman here.

Xi also voiced Beijing's backing for Rahman's government, which took charge in February, and that it stands ready to work with Bangladesh to carry out high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and further align development strategies, a press release by the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative aims to connect Asia, Africa and Europe through a vast

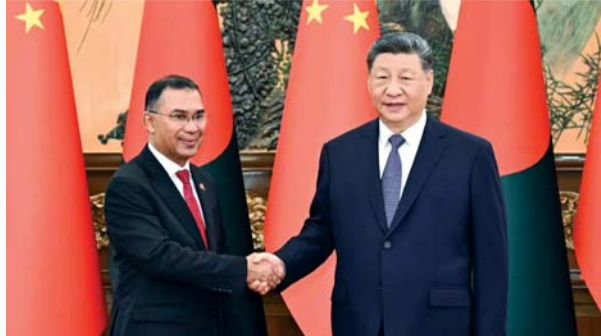
network of railways, ports, highways and energy pipelines, essentially reviving an ancient trade route.

"China supports Bangladesh in upholding national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and rejecting foreign interference," Xi told Rahman, who wrapped up his five-day China visit on Friday.

"No matter how the world changes, China will not waver in its commitment to the overall direction of China-Bangladesh friendly relations", he said.

Xi also proposed the establishment of an economic corridor linking Bangladesh, Myanmar and China, aimed at further deepening regional connectivity and trade.

China supports the China-Myanmar-Bangladesh



Economic Corridor for greater regional connectivity, Xi said.

The new corridor is a condensed version of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor, proposed by Beijing in 2013, which failed to take off.

Rahman chose to visit Malaysia for his first trip abroad after assuming office.

From Kuala Lumpur, he went to the Chinese city of Dalian on Jun 22. In the port city, he took part in a World Economic Forum event, where he made a strong pitch for Chinese investments.

He arrived in Beijing — the last leg of this tour — on Wednesday.

In Beijing, he held a series of meetings with senior

Chinese officials, including Premier Li Qiang, over two days. Rahman on Thursday was accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Great Hall of the People by Premier Li, after which the two sides held delegation-level talks and signed 13 memoranda of understanding - covering a range of areas including trade, investment and education.

Rahman also held talks with Chinese Water Resources Minister Li Guoying, earlier on Thursday, during which the two countries agreed to strengthen cooperation on the Teesta river management and other river projects.

China's involvement in the Teesta river management can potentially complicate Dhaka-New Delhi ties for its strategic significance.

The Teesta river flows from the eastern Himalayas through Sikkim and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh, where it is a key source of irrigation and livelihoods for millions of people.

The Teesta river basin is located near India's sensitive Siliguri Corridor, a 22-km narrow strip of land that connects the mainland with the northeastern states. However, Beijing on Friday chose to play down such concerns.

"The comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation of the Teesta River is a livelihood project the Bangladesh side attaches high importance to", Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing here, responding to a question on New Delhi's potential concerns. (PTI)

United Nations agency pauses evacuation of ships through Strait of Hormuz



JON GAMBRELL/MATTHEW LEE/KONSTANTIN TOROPIN
■ Dubai

A United Nations agency paused the evacuation of ships through the Strait of Hormuz on Thursday after the British military said a vessel was hit by a projectile off the coast of Oman following the passage of several tankers that used a route backed by the UN.

The head of the International Maritime Organisation said the plan to move stranded ships out of the Persian Gulf through the strait will be on hold until the agency can confirm safety guarantees for the ships on the evacuation list and in the region.

The report of a strike came hours after Iran threatened vessels to stop using the route through the strait without Tehran's permission. The vessel that was attacked was not part of the evacuation effort, said Arsenio Dominguez, the UN agency's secretary-general.

A US official told The Associated Press that the vessel was hit by an Iranian drone. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive situation, said the merchant vessel Ever Loved was attacked by a drone being flown by the Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Following reports of the attack, Iran's Persian Gulf Strait Authority — a new government agency established to control shipping in the strait — wrote on X that transit outside its own designated routes "will not be covered by the guarantee of safe passage."

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said the vessel sustained damage, but it reported no injuries or environmental effects from the attack off the coast of Oman.

The opening of an alternative passage through the vital waterway would relieve pressure on the world economy and remove Iran's main source of leverage in ongoing peace talks with the United States. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, on a visit to the Gulf to reassure American allies, said Washington was committed to the new route and ensuring that ships are able to transit the strait.

"If that stops, then we're going to have a problem," Rubio said Thursday before the report of the strike on the ship. Traffic through the strait increased in recent days but was still well below pre-war levels. Oil on Thursday briefly dipped below its last pre-war price of just under USD 73 per barrel, a sign that the market believes the situation is improving. (AP)

Myanmar burns \$600 million in seized drugs



Firefighters spray water for illegal narcotics being burnt during a destruction ceremony marking the UN's International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, on the outskirts of Yangon, Myanmar

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Yangon

Thick clouds of black smoke billowed into the sky on the outskirts of Myanmar's largest city Friday as authorities burned more than 50 tons of heroin, opium, ketamine, methamphetamine, marijuana and crystal meth - some USD 600 million of confiscated illegal drugs destroyed nationwide.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, has a long history of drug production linked to political and economic insecurity caused by decades of armed conflict.

It has been a major source of illegal drugs destined for East and Southeast Asia, despite repeated efforts to crack down, and has long been one of the world's largest producers of heroin and methamphetamine.

Violent political unrest in Myanmar following the military takeover in 2021 - which has led into a civil war between the military government and its pro-democracy opponents, as well as ethnic armed groups - has caused an increase in drug production, according to experts.

In January, the military government claimed the country's largest-ever seizures of illicit drugs and

drug-manufacturing equipment, taken from a total of 12 drug production sites during a series of raids in the northern part of Shan state.

This year, the street value of drugs destroyed was more than double last year's total, Police Lt Col Aung Myat Soe, of Yangon's Anti-Narcotics Police Force, told reporters at a bus station compound on the edge of the city where drugs were being burned.

In Yangon alone, some USD 321 million worth of 31 different types of drugs were set ablaze, Aung Myat Soe said.

Events were also held in Mandalay, and in Taunggyi, the capital of eastern Myanmar's Shan state - areas closer to where the drugs are produced - to mark the United Nations' International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

Many areas of Myanmar are controlled by long-established militias organized by the country's various ethnic groups, many of which are involved in fighting against the military-run government in a bloody civil war, alongside pro-democracy groups that sprang up after the military seized control of the country from democratically-elected Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021.

Those who target schools, children with impunity must be held into account: India tells UNSC

YOSHITA SINGH
■ United Nations

India has called for bringing to account those who target schools and children with impunity, underscoring that protection of children without accountability is incomplete.

"Education is a right that should endure in times of conflict. It is a right whose fulfilment is among the most powerful contributions to lasting peace. India remains unwavering in its commitment to protecting children in armed conflict and to upholding their right to learn, to grow, and to realise their full potential," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Harish Parvathaneni said.

He was addressing the UN Security Council open debate on "Strengthening the Prevention of and Protection of Education for



Harish Parvathaneni

Children Affected by Armed Conflict: From Normative Commitments to Effective Implementation" here Wednesday.

Parvathaneni stressed that "protection without accountability is incomplete. Those who target schools and children with impunity must be held to account."

The UN Secretary General's latest report on "Children and armed con-

beginning of the mandate. The number of children subjected to multiple grave violations continued to rise from 3,137 in 2024 to 3,176 in 2025.

"Parties to conflict failed to uphold or proactively undermined their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and continued to commit grave violations with near-total impunity, resulting in excessive humanitarian consequences for civilians and civilian objects, disproportionately affecting children and the facilities and services they rely on," the report said, adding that government forces were responsible for a majority of grave violations and were the main perpetrators of the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access. (PTI)

Justice Samuel Alito also brushed aside arguments that derogatory comments from Trump about Haitians showed the decision was unlawfully tinged by prejudice. He called the statements "insufficient to show that the termination of Haiti's TPS designation was based on the race of the Haitian people."

Justice Elena Kagan forcefully disagreed, calling Trump's comments "so repellent and racially inflected that the majority declines to put them in print." She pointed out that Trump had said Haitians in the US "probably have AIDS," and he also amplified false rumours during the 2024 campaign that Haitian immigrants in Ohio were abducting and eating dogs and cats. (AP)

Supreme Court lets Trump administration end legal protections for Haitians, Syrians

LINDSAY WHITEHURST
■ Washington

The Supreme Court on Thursday allowed the Trump administration to end legal protections for migrants fleeing violence and natural disaster in Haiti and Syria, exposing hundreds of thousands more people to potential deportation.

The 6-3 decision overturns lower court orders and allows the Department of Homeland Security to swiftly end temporary protected status, a programme that protects a total of 1.3 million people from 17 countries.

It marked another victory at the high court for Republican President Donald Trump's sweeping crackdown on immigration. Though the conservative-



dominated court has put the brakes on some of Trump's immigration policies, it handed him a second win Thursday in a decision clearing the way for the revival of a policy restricting immigrants seeking asylum.

The court's conservative majority found that immigration authorities have sole authority over the programme, and the law does not allow judges to intervene.

The majority opinion from

Singapore labour body to launch job placement for abandoned workers

GURDIP SINGH
■ Singapore

Job placements for more than 400 migrant workers, mostly from India and Bangladesh, linked to a case of alleged abandonment by companies owned by an Indian national, will begin next week, Singapore's main labour organisation said on Friday.

The workers were hired by three firms with a common director who is believed to have fled the country without paying them for several months.

"On jobs, we have received interest from over 80 companies with close to 400 vacancies, and our unions are sending in more referrals," the Secretary General of the National Trades Union Congress



(NTUC), Ng Chee Meng, said in a social media post.

He further said that the organisation, along with an NGO, Migrant Workers' Centre (MWC), will be relocating the migrant workers to a single lodging facility by this weekend.

Ng added that the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) was at Tuas View Dormitory, where the migrant workers are currently accommodated, to help the remaining workers file their claims directly.

The TADM is a joint effort by the Ministry of Manpower, NTUC and the Singapore National Employers Federation to help employees and employers with services to resolve employment disputes.

"Job placement kicks off next week. We will make sure no one is left behind in this process," The Straits Times quoted Ng as saying.

On Wednesday, the workers were given SGD 100 in cash and SGD 100 in supermarket vouchers by NTUC and MWC to help meet daily expenses.

These migrant workers were not paid by their employers for three to four months, following which they approached the Ministry of Manpower earlier this week to recover their salaries. (PTI)

North Korea's Kim calls for destructive military posture

HYUNG-JIN KIM/KIM TONG-HYUNG
■ Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observed major weapons tests and called for the military's "deadly and destructive offensive posture" to be bolstered, state media reported Friday, as South Korea announced it would drastically boost its drone warfare capabilities.

The development comes as tensions remain high on the Korean Peninsula, with Kim pushing to strengthen both nuclear and conventional military capabilities while refusing to return to talks with South Korea and the United States.

The tests watched by Kim on Thursday were meant to evaluate the power of a "special mission" warhead for a tactical ballistic missile, an upgraded multiple rocket launch system and the hit accuracy of shells with an extended firing range of a self-propelled gun-howitzer, the official Korean Central News Agency said.



KCNA cited Kim as saying results of the tests proved the technological progress achieved in a push to bring about a change in the fire posture on southern border areas, implying the tested weapons systems target sites in South Korea including US military bases there.

Kim said North Korea's self-defence policy includes an objective to strengthen "the deadly and destructive offensive posture to make no enemy dare to confront," KCNA said. "To make the enemies feel constant uneasiness and fear is just an important aspect of the exercise of war deterrent." KCNA said the special

mission warhead tested is aimed at "inflicting fatal damage on major targets including airfields, ports and power facilities of the enemy."

Later Friday, South Korea's Defense Ministry announced plans to beef up its drone forces, citing growing military threats by North Korea which allegedly received technology assistance from Russia.

The plans include developing long-range exploding drones, acquiring more than 20,000 low-cost reconnaissance and attack drones and training the country's entire 500,000 troops as "drone warriors." (AP)

35 nations sign statement on AI opportunity at Pax Silica Summit

SAGAR KULKARNI
■ Washington

Thirty-five nations, including India, have signed on to the US initiative to build trusted and resilient supply chains to power artificial intelligence (AI) technologies.

At the second Pax Silica Summit held in Washington on Thursday, 35 nations signed the Joint Statement on AI Opportunity, aligning behind a pro-growth, pro-innovation regulatory approach for the AI era, said



Jacob Helberg, US Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs.

"A commitment to trusted

supply chains, to mobilising the private sector, and the infrastructure that will power the next century," he said.

Argentina, Germany, the Netherlands, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Kazakhstan, Panama, and the European Union joined the Pax Silica initiative on the sidelines of the Summit.

India is represented at the Summit by S Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Nagraj Naidu, Additional Secretary (Americas) in the Ministry of External Affairs, and representatives of the Indian industry.

The Indian delegation

engaged with other governments and industry on advancing collaboration in semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and resilient technology supply chains.

"The future of AI will not be determined by who regulates first. It will be determined by who builds first and builds the most capacity. More energy. More compute. More chips. More talent. More builders. A future where we accelerate innovation and private investment is welcomed," Helberg said. (AP)

Small aircraft crashes into Beijing's tallest skyscraper

KJM VARMA
■ Beijing

A light sport aircraft crashed into Beijing's tallest skyscraper, the Citic Tower, on Friday, prompting evacuations. It was not immediately clear whether the crash caused any casualties or the number of people on board the aircraft — debris of which were scattered across Beijing's central business district.

The origin of the plane and the circumstances leading to the crash are not known yet.

Officials have not yet commented on the incident.

Posts about the crash were quickly removed from Chinese social media. Videos posted on social media showed the aircraft striking the upper floors of the 528-metre (1,732 foot) tower, with chunks of wreckage falling onto the surrounding pavement and green space.

Additional footage showed occupants being evacuated from the building, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. A woman, identified by her

surname Lin, told the Post she had been urgently evacuated from the building at 6pm. "I ran out without my ID card or bag," she said.

A bystander who works in a nearby building said he heard a loud noise around 5.40 pm, had not seen the crash.

Police cordoned off the roads surrounding the site of the incident and dispersed the crowd.

Heavy police presence can be seen around the skyscraper and several ambulances were also seen parked near the building. (PTI)

The surface of the Citic Tower also known as Zun Tower is damaged in Beijing, China



The surface of the Citic Tower also known as Zun Tower is damaged in Beijing, China



BRIEFLY

New Zealand a win away from its first knockout berth



There are several World Cup teams ranked higher than New Zealand entering their final group-stage matches without any hope of advancing to the round of 32.

"That's not us," New Zealand coach Darren Bazeley said Thursday ahead of his team's match against Belgium on Friday. "We're now in a game where we win, we go through."

That scenario seemed unthinkable when the All Whites, among the lowest-ranked teams in the this year's World Cup, were drawn into Group G with Belgium, Egypt and Iran.

But thanks to the expanded 48-team format and a group that has veered off script, New Zealand is one win away from advancing out of the group stage for the first time.

"It never works out like you expect it to," Bazeley said. "Football doesn't."

A win against Belgium could push New Zealand into second place in Group G — and therefore the knockout rounds — if Egypt and Iran play to a draw in a match that will be played simultaneously on Friday.

Anything less than a win for New Zealand against Belgium would strip the All Whites of a shot at advancing out of the group stage.

"It's pretty black and white for us now, which is quite a nice thing," Bazeley said.

New Zealand, currently 84th in FIFA rankings, has one point from its opening draw against No 21 Iran. The All Whites led No 27 Egypt 1-0 at halftime before losing 3-1.

"What we did with Egypt in the first half," Bazeley said, "I think has shown some people that maybe the rankings don't necessarily count."

Japan, Sweden draw as both advance to knockouts



Daizen Maeda gave Japan the lead and Anthony Elanga took it away six minutes later, helping Sweden to a 1-1 draw Thursday night that sent both teams to the knockout round of the World Cup.

Elanga's impressive left-footed strike from just outside the right corner of the box in the 62nd minute was his second goal of this year's tournament. Elanga has scored only three goals in 49 games for Newcastle, but zero in 32 Premier League matches. Six minutes earlier, Maeda settled a nifty pass from Ritsu Doan with his left foot in the penalty area and easily beat Jacob Widell Zetterstrom with his right foot.

It was Japan's seventh goal of the tournament, the country's most for an entire World Cup. That topped the six the Japanese scored while reaching the round of 16 in Russia eight years ago. Japan is advancing out of the group stage for the third consecutive World Cup and fifth time in seven tries since first reaching the round of 16 as co-hosts in 2002. The Japanese team finished second in Group F behind the Netherlands and will play Brazil in Houston on Monday. The Swedes have advanced to the knockout round the past four times they have qualified for the World Cup going back to 1994, when they reached the semifinals the last time the US hosted soccer's biggest event.

Brian, Dutch roll in rain to win over Tunisia

DAVE SKRETTAAP ■ Kansas City

Brian Brobbey scored his third goal of the World Cup, the Netherlands got a pair of goals that deflected off Tunisia into its own net, and the Dutch rolled in the rain to a 3-1 victory Thursday night to advance to the knockout stage as the winners of Group F.

The Netherlands began the day tied atop the group with Japan. But when the Samurai Blue could only manage a 1-1 draw with Sweden in Arlington, Texas, it left Virgil van Dijk and his teammates looking forward to a matchup with Group C runner-up Morocco on Monday — and Japan with the heavy task of playing powerhouse Brazil in the Round of 32.

Tunisia, which sacked its coach after a loss to open the World Cup, had already been eliminated from the tournament.

The opening minutes summed up the last couple of weeks for the Eagles of Carthage: Denzel Dumfries sent a ball across the front of the goal, Tunisian captain Elly Skhiri slapped at with his foot in an attempt to clear, and he found the back of his own net instead.

Brobbey made it 2-0 in the seventh minute, after the Dutch had earned a free kick from about 25 yards. The 6-foot-5 van Dijk expertly



headed it across the box, and Brobbey was in perfect position to chip the ball past Tunisian goalkeeper Aymen Dahmen. Tunisia finally scored in the 54th minute, when Hazem Mastouri redirected a corner kick into the net, but the Netherlands answered in the 62nd, when Jan Paul van Hecke's

header off a corner glanced off Anis Slimane's head and into his own net.

The Netherlands controlled the game from there as a first-half drizzle turned into a second-half downpour.

The threat of thunderstorms had persisted all the week, and lightning briefly delayed the completion of the "Oranje fanwalk" to the game. But once they were given the all-clear, the Dutch fans clad in their highlighter-orange shirts poured down the aisles and into Arrowhead Stadium,



making it look like deer hunting season in the Midwest.

The Netherlands is certainly big-game hunting in this World Cup.

The nation of Johan Cruyff and Marco van Basten has long held the moniker of best never to have won the tournament. Three times the Dutch have advanced to the finals and each time they have lost, most recently to Spain in extra time in 2010.

They got off to a lackluster start this go-round, too, tying Japan 2-2 in their opener. But with two goals apiece from Brobbey and Cody Gakpo, the Netherlands routed Sweden 5-1, and it now has some momentum heading into the knockout stage.

Tunisia seemed quite content just to finish a disastrous World Cup. The Eagles of Carthage opened with a 5-1 loss to Sweden, which led to coach Sabri Lamouchi's firing. French coach Herve Renard took over amid reports of tension and infighting within the team, and little seemed to have changed in a 4-0 loss to Japan last week.

Thursday's loss ran Tunisia's winless streak to six matches.

Ecuador advances to World Cup knockout rounds, beats Germany

RONALD BLUMAP ■ East Rutherford (US)

A little flick of Gonzalo Plata's big toe helped Ecuador make a great escape.

Plata poked the ball past Manuel Neuer in the 77th minute and lifted Ecuador to a come-from-behind 2-1 win over Germany on Thursday and into the knockout round of the World Cup for the first time since 2006.

"Life is different now. We suffered a lot," said Plata, a 25-year-old winger who scored his ninth international goal. "We suffered too much in the first two matches. We would have liked to secure qualification much earlier, but now we're going forward more hungry, knowing we have to give it our all."

Ecuador, which has lost only one of its last 22 games, finished third in Group E with four points and advanced past the group stage for the second time, headed to a possible matchup with Mexico on Tuesday in Mexico City.

A four-time champion already assured of advancement by winning its first two games, Germany will play its round of 32 game Monday at Foxborough, Massachusetts, most likely against



Paraguay, Australia or Sweden. "On Monday it's important that we start well," Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann said through a translator.

Germany's winning streak was stopped at 11 games, one shy of the team record set in 1979-

80. "The difference was today that the opponent wanted to win more than us, and you could really feel it, especially in the second half," Germany midfielder Joshua Kimmich said.

Germany went ahead on Leroy Sane's second-minute goal. Aleksandar Pavlovic chested the ball and ended up kicking Pedro Vite in the head following Nathaniel Brown's throw-in, but American referee Tori Penso didn't whistle a foul. Pavlovic passed to Florian Wirtz, who centred to Sane just inside the penalty area to beat goalkeeper Hernan Galindez.



Australia clinches knockout round spot; Paraguay also likely to advance



JOSH DUBOWAP ■ Santa Clara (US)

Australia and Paraguay played to a 0-0 draw Thursday night in a result that clinched a spot in the knockout round of the World Cup for the Socceroos and will likely be enough for the Paraguayans to advance.

The expanded tournament to 48 teams that provides a spot in the knockout round for eight of the 12 third-place teams in the group stage led to the cautious approach for both teams in their final Group D match after they each entered with three points thanks to wins over Turkey. The winner of this

game was assured second place behind the United States in the group with Australia also clinching that spot with a draw thanks to a better goal differential than Paraguay. But the draw that gave Paraguay four points in the group also was likely to be enough barring a string of bad results in the final two days of group play.

"We tried to win the game," Australia coach Tony Popovic said. "In the end, a draw was enough for both nations. Congratulations to Paraguay as well. ... I'm sure as we are feeling euphoria and joy as a nation, I'm sure Paraguay is as well." This marks the third time that

Australia has advanced to the knockout round after losing in the round of 16 in 2006 and 2022. The Socceroos will play in the round of 32 on July 3 in Arlington, Texas, against the second-place finisher from Group G that will be determined Friday night.

"We really did work hard for this moment and I think we should enjoy it," midfielder Ajdin Hrustic said. Paraguay must wait to learn its fate, but is in good position to advance to the knockout round for the fifth time. "Now we have to wait," coach Gustavo Alfaro said. "I am optimistic that we will be able to move on to the next phase."

Ivory Coast in World Cup knockout round for 1st time

DAN GELSTONAP ■ Philadelphia

Ivory Coast rejoiced as players dropped to their knees on the pitch for a team photo — peerless in national team history — and they all pointed one finger toward the sky. One, for the West African team's first-ever trip to the World Cup knockout round. Why stop there?

"We aren't setting any limits for ourselves," star forward Nicolas Pepe said. "I think we have huge potential." Les Elephants have crashed the party and made it out of their group for the first time in four World Cup appearances. Pepe scored in each half and Ivory Coast advanced with a 2-0 victory over Curacao on Thursday.

Players stripped off their jerseys and danced and partied in the locker room for the well-earned and overdue celebration. Ivory Coast beat Ecuador 1-0 in its tournament opener — at the same Philadelphia stadium as Thursday's game — and lost to Germany in its Group E second game. Ivory Coast



will play June 30 against either France or Norway — whichever is the runner-up in Group I. "If we aim to go all the way, it doesn't matter who we play," Pepe said.

Curacao needed to win and instead failed to become the smallest nation to qualify for the knockout stages.

Pepe, who plays for the Spanish club Villarreal, wiped out all the suspense in this one early, scoring in just the seventh minute and the lead held the rest of the game in front of an enthusiastic crowd that made Les Elephants feel at home. Ivory Coast held its training base

in nearby Delaware and practised at the Philadelphia suburban home of Major League Soccer's Philadelphia Union. Throw in a friendly (against the Union's second team), and the thrilling win in the 90th minute against Ecuador, and Les Elephants found their adoptive fans among the crowd of 68,324 — about 40 per cent of the population of Curacao — at the home of the NFL's Eagles. The fans in Ivory Coast orange went wild when Pepe scored again on a left-footed shot from the far corner in the 64th minute to seal the win. He was subbed

out three minutes later to earn just a bit more rest for the June 30 game that will serve as the biggest one for the national team in World Cup history. Here's one more rivalry reason why new Philly fans might keep an eye on Les



Elephants — the next game is in Dallas. "It's a little difficult to have to leave Philadelphia," Ivory Coast head coach Emere Fae said. Ivory Coast needed only a draw to advance yet played with a competitive fire and never let Curacao seem close to getting even in this one.

Senegal and Ivory Coast were added in December by President Donald Trump's administration to the list of countries with partial restrictions on entry to the United States, upending World Cup travel plans. Les Elephants still had a loud and proud turnout in Philadelphia and boasted the home-field edge on Thursday. Ivory Coast fans hugged, danced and chanted in the stands as the final seconds ticked down and the celebration kicked into another festive gear. "We know not everyone could make the trip, and we can see there were quite a few Ivorian fans in the stadium," Pepe said. "So, I think this victory is for them too, and they richly deserve it."

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 Branch Office: 1st Floor, 13-A, Ward No.5, Parakh Colony, Kolidas Marg, Station Road, Above Yes Bank, Mandasaur, Madhya Pradesh - 458001, Branch Office: 3rd Floor, Dhan Trident, Office No. 322-323, DPC Estate Pvt Ltd, Scheme No. 54, Vijaynagar, Indore, Madhya Pradesh - 452010.

Whereas
 The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the demand notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited. The Panchnama for refusal of possession of the said mortgaged property by the aforesaid borrower / co-borrowers is filed by duly appointed authorized officer. The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of property/ Date of Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Dhiraj (Borrower), Keshar Bai (Co-Borrower), Mangila, (Co-Borrower), Vishnu, (Co-Borrower), Kolwa Kolwa Kolwa Piplia Karadia Madhya Pradesh, Mandasaur Mandasaur - 458995 Madhya Pradesh LHMSR000011551075.	House No. 102, Ward No. 06, Phn No 38, Gram Kolwa, District Mandasaur- 458895 Madhya Pradesh. Bounded By- North By: Kashiram, South By: Road, East By: Hariom, West By: Open Land/ Date of Possession- 23-Jun-26	28-01-2026 Rs. 5,74,100/-	Mandasaur
2.	Dhiraj (Borrower), Keshar Bai (Co-Borrower), Mangila, (Co-Borrower), Vishnu, (Co-Borrower), Kolwa Kolwa Kolwa Piplia Karadia Madhya Pradesh, Mandasaur Mandasaur 458995 Madhya Pradesh LHMSR000011551076.	House No. 102, Ward No 06, Phn No 38, Gram Kolwa, District Mandasaur- 458895 Madhya Pradesh. Bounded By- North By: Kashiram, South By: Road, East By: Hariom, West By: Open Land/ Date of Possession- 23-Jun-26	28-01-2026 Rs. 5,743/-	Mandasaur
3.	Jagdish Kala (Borrower), Sheetal Kala (Co-Borrower), Sheetal Kala, 155 Ward No. 06 Main Road Bajkhedi Mandasaur Mandasaur-458558 Madhya Pradesh, LHMSR000011616396	Property Situated at House No.155, Ward No.06, P.H. No.18, Gram Bajkhedi, Tehsil Sitamau, District, Mandasaur, M.P. Na Na Bounded By- North By: House of Mr. Kanching, South By: Self House, East By: House of Mrs. Nyalibai, West By: Road/ Date of Possession- 23-Jun-26	11-03-2026 Rs. 15,14,570/-	Mandasaur
4.	Rajendra Bhati (Borrower), Babita Bai (Co-Borrower), Post Sonkachh Teh Sonkachh Gram Rolupipliya Rolupipliya Sonkachh Dewas Madhya Pradesh, LHMSR00001623310	House No. 43, Situated At Ph. No. 38, Saral No. 2360, Gram Rolupipliya, Tehsil Sonkatch, District Dewas, Madhya Pradesh Bounded By- North By: House of Maan Singh, South By: House of Sugan Bai, East By: Road, West By: Baada of Narendra, Date of Possession- 23-Jun-26	16-03-2026 Rs. 4,54,660.56/-	Indore-Vijaynagar
5.	Rajendra Bhati (Borrower), Babita Bai (Co-Borrower), Post Sonkachh Teh Sonkachh Gram Rolupipliya Rolupipliya Sonkachh Dewas Madhya Pradesh, LHMSR00001623373	House No. 43, Situated At Ph. No. 38, Saral No. 2360, Gram Rolupipliya, Tehsil Sonkatch, District Dewas, Madhya Pradesh Bounded By- North By: House of Maan Singh, South By: House of Sugan Bai, East By: Road, West By: Baada of Narendra, Date of Possession- 23-Jun-26	16-03-2026 Rs. 24,211/-	Indore-Vijaynagar

The above-mentioned borrower(s)/ co-borrower(s)/ guarantor(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.
 Date: June 27, 2026
 Authorized Officer,
 Place: Mandasaur, Dewas
 ICICI Home Finance Company Limited



Ireland stun India to claim first win over T20 champions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Belfast

Immaculate Ireland bowlers gnawed on Indian batters' impatience on a rather pacy pitch with exemplary lengths, etching a historic 34-run victory in the first T20I match on Friday.

It was Ireland's first-ever victory over reigning T20 world champions India in any format, and the hosts have now taken a 1-0 lead in the two-match series. Chasing 183 on a pitch that had enough assistance for quick bowlers was not improbable, but it needed a different, pragmatic approach after the power play.

But none of them had the patience, as India ended up at 148 all out, despite Abhishek Sharma making a 20-ball 50.

Debutant pacer Jai Moondra (2/26) inflicted the first blow on his country of origin, eliciting an inside on to the stumps from Sanju Samson.

The Irish bowlers continued to pull the length back as Indians perished with alarming regularity.

Ishan Kishan went for a trademark hack to leg-side off Matt Holland (3/28), and Lorcan Tucker completed a simple



catch inside the circle. In his first match as India's full-time T20 skipper, Shreyas Iyer attempted a flick off Holland but could not impart force or distance to the pace-off delivery, getting caught in the deep by George Dockrell.

India scored 68 in the power play but lost three wickets.

However, Abhishek played a gem, a 20-ball fifty, as wickets tumbled around him, and punished pacer Liam McCarthy for four boundaries in the third over as India breezed ahead.

But the left-hander found Ben Calitz with surgical precision through a pull off McCarthy, bringing a smile to the Ireland

players' faces. Those smiles only widened once Tilak Varma and Shivam Dube went without making much of an impact. The final

nail was thudded on India's coffin when Arshdeep Singh fell to Matthew Humphreys, leaving the Irish camp in a joyous huddle.

No debut for Sooryavanshi

Earlier, Indian pacers stuck to hard lengths and preyed on the aggressive tendencies of Ireland batters, limiting them to 182 for nine.

The much-anticipated international debut for teenage sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi did not happen, but the full house at Stormont ground had enough to cheer for as India, led by Harshit Rana (3/24) dominated from ball one.

Ireland skipper Tucker made a half-century (50, 36 balls), but it was largely a lone hand.

The Indian quicks did not try to pitch the ball up and search for swing, as many would expect in

these conditions. But they placed their belief in the back of the long deliveries and were rewarded handsomely.

In the power play segment, the wickets of Tim Tector, Harry Tector and Ross Adair reduced the home side to 30 for three, and Ireland could only score 36 in the first six overs.

Tim and Adair went for pull shots and gave catches to Iyer and Samson, respectively. Both fell to Rana, and his intensity in the first match after recovering from a four-month injury lay-off might have pleased the team management. Harry went for a drive when Arshdeep (2/28) offered a rare fuller delivery, resulting in a simple catch to Samson.



India lose on penalties to England in FIH Pro League match



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

The Indian men's hockey team went down 1-4 to England in a penalty shootout after the two teams were locked 2-2 in regulation time of their FIH Pro League match.

At the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre on Thursday night, Dilpreet Singh (10th minute and 58th minute) scored an impressive brace for India while David Goodfield (29th minute) and Nicholas Bandurak (56th minute) were on the score-sheet for England.

Later in the shootout, Thomas Sorsby, James Albery and captain

Zachary Wallace converted their attempts in the shootout for the hosts, besides one attempt that led to a penalty stroke, which was also scored off by Wallace. Captain Harmanpreet Singh was India's lone scorer in the shootout.

India will next face Pakistan late on Friday night.

Earlier, during regulation play, the first half was edgy as both teams found the net and created a few chances.

India made a bright start to the first quarter, claiming an early penalty corner. However, captain Harmanpreet Singh's dragflick was saved by English goalkeeper James Mazarelo.

England too secured a penalty corner at the other end in the fifth minute but Bandurak's attempt was stopped by the Indian defence. The opening goal came in the 10th minute as Mandep Singh dribbled along the baseline and set the perfect pass for Dilpreet who slotted the ball into the goal with a diving finish to put India ahead.

In the second quarter, India came close to extending their lead as Amandeep Lakra's dragflick from a penalty corner was heroically saved by Sorsby on the goal line. In the 29th minute, England got back on level terms courtesy of a field goal by Goodfield.

Rounak shocks Tien Chen to make quarters at US Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Fullerton (US)

Young Indian shuttler Rounak Chouhan packed off world number six and top seed Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei in straight games to create a big upset at the US Open here.

World Number 80, Chouhan, who was part of India's bronze medal winning world junior campaign, defeated Chou 21-17 26-24 on Thursday to set up a quarterfinal clash against Misha Zilberman of Israel.

The 18-year-old India kept the pressure on his more experienced opponent from the start and though Chou kept his nose ahead till 17-15, Chouhan won six straight points thereafter to pocket the opening game.

Chou was the dominant player for most part of the second game as he commanded a 17-11 lead before Chouhan once again bagged six straight points to draw level.



It was a neck-and-neck battle thereafter as Chouhan saved four game points before converting his second match point to clinch victory in 49 minutes.

Also advancing to the last-eight stage were world junior

silver medallist Tanvi Sharma, Rakshitha Sree and Devika Sihag in the women's singles.

Fifth seed Tanvi defeated Tung Ciou-Tong of Chinese Taipei 21-12, 21-19, Rakshitha got the better of Tung's compatriot Chen Su Yu 21-

4, 21-19 while sixth seed Devika beat Tonrug Saeheng of Thailand 21-17, 21-19. The experienced Kidambi Srikanth then capped off a fruitful day for India with a 21-14, 21-13 win over Lee Zii Jia of Malaysia.

Hamilton faces Mercedes in Austria hoping to turn F1 win into title shot



JAMES ELLINGWORTHAP ■ Spielberg (Austria)

The Formula 1 title race is turning into the ultimate battle of youth against experience. On one side, Lewis Hamilton, who at 41 just became F1's oldest race winner since 1970. An eighth world title would make him the oldest champion since 1957.

On the other, Kimi Antonelli, the 19-year-old Italian who leads the standings, on course to be the youngest-ever to take the title.

"I've been here before. I know what I have to do, and there's a long way to go," Hamilton said Thursday ahead of this weekend's Austrian Grand Prix, set to take place as a "heat hazard" race as hot weather bakes Europe.

"We have a real battle on our hands, and it's going to take everyone for the rest of the year to even come close to competing with (Mercedes), but I don't think it's impossible."

Hamilton's win at Barcelona two weeks ago, his first with Ferrari after a year and a half of frustration, brought together smart strategy, Mercedes' reliability issues and innovation at Ferrari with key car parts that rivals have rushed to copy. Ferrari's bringing an upgraded engine to Austria, too.

Antonelli's teammate George Russell said he was surprised how fast Ferrari is developing its

car under F1's strict spending rules, but "at the end of the day, we're still the team to beat. So this will be another good weekend to see if Ferrari are still on that good form or if that was a one-off."

Hamilton's win just showed that anyone "writing him off" was wrong, said Russell, his teammate at Mercedes in 2024. "For sure, he is a big threat. Ferrari are a huge threat. Kimi is still very much the driver out front and is performing really incredibly and consistently," Russell said. "Ferrari feel like they're coming and Lewis is at forefront of that."

How Austria shows Antonelli's growth: What a difference a year makes.

Three corners into last year's Austrian Grand Prix, Antonelli smashed into Max Verstappen, ending the race for both. Verstappen accepted Antonelli's apology, saying "every driver has made a mistake like that" — though the points he lost that day arguably ended up costing him the title.

It was part of a disastrous run of summer results at European tracks for Antonelli, who admitted he felt overwhelmed by frustration. After Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff repeatedly called Antonelli's performance "underwhelming" at his home Italian Grand Prix, it prompted speculation about his future.

Then came the turnaround. Antonelli used Wolff's criticism as "fuel to do even better" and he did, scoring more points in the final eight rounds of the season than he had in the previous 16. That laid the foundations for his championship-leading breakout season in 2026.

Verstappen's future: For the third year running, Verstappen arrives at Red Bull's home race with his future unclear.

The four-time champion's Red Bull deal runs through 2028 but could allow an earlier exit under certain conditions. The speculation is fueled by long-running interest from Mercedes and Verstappen's remarks about quitting F1 out of frustration with the 2026 cars.

In 2024 and 2025, Verstappen eventually committed to staying with the team which has overseen his entire F1 career.

Monaco dispute rumbles on It's three weeks since the Monaco Grand Prix and the results still aren't final. McLaren and Red Bull are protesting the ruling which handed Pierre Gasly back third place after canceling a time penalty.

Multiple drivers were penalized under a wrongly set-up timing system, but only Gasly's was overturned. If the decision's reversed, Red Bull's Isack Hadjar would be third and McLaren's Oscar Piastri fourth. (AP)

Toor targets elusive 22m mark following CWG qualification



HIMANK NEGI ■ New Delhi

A bout of food poisoning threatened to derail Tajinderpal Singh Toor's bid to qualify for the 2026 Commonwealth Games, but the seasoned shot putter refused to let the setback define his season. Weeks after a disappointing outing in Ranchi, where illness robbed him of the chance to compete at his best, the 31-year-old bounced back by clearing the Commonwealth Games 2026 qualification standard with a 20.72m throw at the Indian Athletics Series-9 in Ludhiana.

For Toor, India's most accomplished shot putter, the throw was more than just another qualification mark. It marked a return to rhythm after two injury-plagued years and reinforced his belief that the long-awaited 22-metre barrier is finally within reach.

A two-time Asian Games champion and a two-time Olympian, Toor has dominated Indian shot put for nearly a decade. The national record holder with a personal best of 21.77m also owns the Asian Games record and had briefly held the Asian record before it was surpassed. Yet, despite a glittering resume, the Punjab thrower believes his best may still be ahead.

"Before Ranchi, I was throwing well in training. But when I reached Ranchi, I suffered food poisoning after eating chicken from the hotel. I was vomiting, had low energy, and my whole body was affected. Because of that, I couldn't throw my best there," Toor told PTI.

The setback was particularly frustrating because he had already achieved the qualifying distance multiple times in training.

"I requested the officials for another opportunity because I knew I was throwing well. I had already crossed the qualification mark two or three times in training, throwing around 20.51m and 21.05m. Eventually, I qualified in Ludhiana," he said. (PTI)

Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd.

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 Sagar Branch: 1st Floor, Sakhi Baba Matrix, Makronia Road, Sagar-470004 (M.P.)

POSSESSION NOTICE Appendix IV (for immovable property)

Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of Aadhar Housing Finance Limited (AHFL) under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, Demand Notice(s) issued by the Authorised Officer of the company to the Borrower(s) / Guarantor(s) mentioned herein below to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower(s) / Guarantor(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under Sub-Section (4) of the Section 13 of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement rules, 2002. The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets. The borrower in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of AHFL for an amount as mentioned herein under with interest thereon.

S. No.	Name of the Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s) (Name of the Branch)	Description of Secured Asset (Immovable Property)	Demand Notice Date & Amount	Date of Possession
1	(Loan Code No. 14510000423 & 14510000625 / Ashok Nagar Branch) Bhagwaandas Ahirwar (Borrower) Vinit Bai Ahirwar (Co-Borrower)	All that piece and parcel of the property bearing, House No. 03/1568, Shankar Colony, Ward No. 07, Old Ward No. 03, Patwari Halka No. 27, Tehsil Ashok Nagar, Dist. Ashok Nagar, M.P. Boundaries: East: Ankit Convent School, West: Road, North: House of Lakhani Ahirwar, South: Land of Mahendra Ahirwar	14-04-2026 & ₹ 15,89,964/-	25-06-2026
2	(Loan Code No. 02310000324 / Sagar Branch) Mariya Shakespeare Nathaniel (Borrower) Vinish Shakespeare Nathaniel (Co-Borrower)	All that piece and parcel of the property bearing, Residential House situated on Khasra No. 475/72/1/1/1/1, Patwari Halka No. 51, Rajeev Ward, Ward No. 20, Village Itawa, Tehsil Bina, Dist. Sagar, M.P. Boundaries: East: House of Rajesh Kumar, West: Other'S Plot, North: Way, South: Way	14-04-2026 & ₹ 14,82,462/-	25-06-2026

Place : Madhya Pradesh
 Date : 27.06.2026

Authorised Officer
 Aadhar Housing Finance Limited

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Registered Office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai- 400051

Corporate Office: ICICI HFC Tower, JB Nagar, Andheri Kurla Road, Andheri East, Mumbai- 400059
 Branch Office: Yadav Complex, Shop No. 82/A, Besides Axisbank, 10 civil lines, Sagar, M.P.- 470001
 Branch Office: Upper Ground Floor 13, Dwarka Ji Complex, Civil line Gopalganj, Sagar, M.P.- 470002.

Whereas
 The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the demand notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.
 As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited. The Panchnama for refusal of possession of the said mortgaged property by the aforesaid borrower / co-borrowers is filed by duly appointed authorized officer.
 The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of property/ Date of Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Vijay. (Borrower), Malti Balmiki (Co-Borrower), Murni Lal Mehtar (Co-Borrower), 107 East Railway Colony Bina Station Bina- 470113 Madhya Pradesh .LHSA00001404606	Property Situated At Kasra, No 483/34, PH. No. 51, Tehsil And District Bina 470112 Madhya Pradesh. Bounded By- North By: Road, South By: Road, East By: Road, West By: House of Mr. Pandey Ji./ Date of Possession- 23-06-2026	15-01-2026 Rs. 4,41,446.82/-	Sagar
2.	Vijay. (Borrower), Malti Balmiki (Co-Borrower), Murni Lal Mehtar (Co-Borrower), 107 East Railway Colony Bina Station Bina- 470113 Madhya Pradesh .LHSA00001404609	Property Situated At Kasra, No 483/34, PH. No. 51, Tehsil And District Bina 470112 Madhya Pradesh. Bounded By- North By: Road, South By: Road, East By: Road, West By: House of Mr. Pandey Ji./ Date of Possession- 23-06-2026	15-01-2026 Rs. 45,727.48/-	Sagar
3.	Ravikant Ralkwar (Borrower), House Number V/6 Poddar Colony Shivaji Sagar Madhya Pradesh Sagar- 470001 Madhya Pradesh, LHSA00001617978	Plot No. 77, P.H. No.53/07, Old Khasra No. 109/3, 110/3, 110/4 & 111/2, New Khasra No. 109/3/1, 109/3/2, 110/3/1, 110/3/2, 110/4/1, 110/4/2, 111/2/1, 111/2/2, RNM Sagar-3, Tehsil And District, Sagar Madhya Pradesh Bounded By- North By: Plot No. 76, South By: Stadium Wall, East By: 20 Ft Road, West By: Plot No. 70./ Date of Possession- 23-06-2026	16-03-2026 Rs. 9,63,741/-	Sagar

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ co-borrower(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Act, 2002.
 Date : June 27, 2026, Place: Sagar (MP) Authorised Officer, ICICI Home Finance Company Limited