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RSS breaks silence, seeks accountability in Ram Temple row

Calling the incident extraordinary, the RSS urges restraint among devotees, urging Hindus to remain united as investigations continue

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
 ■ New Delhi

RSS general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale on Friday expressed concern over the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, saying the incident has affected the faith of devotees and the wider society. In the organisation's first formal response to the controversy, Hosabale issued a detailed statement on X, describing the theft from the donation boxes as a serious act that calls for immediate corrective action and strict accountability.

"We are all pained and angered by this event," he said. Hosabale's words reflect the collective sentiment of millions of devotees who view the temple not merely as a place of worship but as a symbol of centuries-old faith, struggle and

sacrifice. He stressed that the incident has shaken the trust of ordinary Hindus who have contributed selflessly to the temple's construction and upkeep over the years. By highlighting the emotional impact on "the entire society and Ram devotees," he underscored that the issue goes beyond financial loss and touches the very core of religious sentiment.

The RSS second-in-command made it clear that the organisation expects the Hindu community to rise above anger and focus on preserving the sanctity of the temple rather than allowing external elements to create division. He cautioned that anti-Hindu and anti-national forces are actively seeking to exploit this unfortunate episode to malign Hinduism. In a clear call for unity, he urged all Hindus to display patience



RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale

and restraint so that such conspiracies can be effectively thwarted. Asserting that the entire Hindu society, including the

“unbroken and steadfast.” He welcomed the Uttar Pradesh Government's constitution of a Special Investigation Team (SIT), noting that it was done at the request of the trust. He emphasised that anyone found guilty after a thorough investigation must face “severe punishment.” The RSS leader stressed that the current state of confusion and uncertainty must end so devotees can once again offer their prayers with complete peace of mind.

Hosabale framed accountability as essential to the long-term credibility of the temple administration. He also highlighted the historical and emotional significance of the temple. “The grand temple constructed at the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi has become a centre of reverence, faith and devotion for all Hindus owing to the

struggles of generations and the dedication, sacrifice and martyrdom of crores of Ram devotees,” he said.

Concluding on a forward-looking note, Hosabale expressed confidence in the Trust's ability to move ahead. “We are confident that through proper financial management, flawless and transparent operational systems, and an atmosphere imbued with purity, sanctity and true dharmika, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust will continue to strengthen the faith and trust of Hindu society,” he said.

His statement combines criticism of lapses with a message of hope and expectation for systemic improvement. The RSS response has been viewed as measured yet firm, balancing concern for devotees' sentiments with a call for restraint and institutional reform.



PM TO BEGIN THREE-NATION TOUR ON JULY 6

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will embark on a six-day visit to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand from July 6 to 11, aimed at strengthening India's strategic, economic and cultural ties with the three Indo-Pacific partners.

On Friday, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Rudrendra Tandon said the Prime Minister's visit would focus on expanding cooperation in areas ranging from maritime security and critical minerals to emerging technologies and trade.

The first leg of the tour will take PM Modi to Indonesia from July 6 to 8. His principal



engagements will be held in Jakarta, while he will also visit the historic city of Yogyakarta, where he is scheduled to visit the iconic Prambanan Temple complex. India and Indonesia will collaborate on conservation work at the UNESCO World Heritage site, underscoring the shared cultural heritage between the two countries.

Tandon said the visit would build upon discussions initiated during Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's visit to India as the Chief Guest for the Republic Day celebrations earlier this year.

Beijing warns Delhi over Japan pact

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

China on Friday reacted cautiously to the newly announced strategic initiatives between India and Japan, warning that bilateral cooperation should not target third countries or deepen regional divisions.

The remarks came a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Sanae Takaichi unveiled a series of agreements covering critical minerals, defence cooperation, energy security and economic partnerships during summit talks in New Delhi.

Responding to questions on the India-Japan critical minerals initiative, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said that international cooperation should promote stability rather than create exclusive blocs.

"Such cooperation should not target any third party or harm the interests of any third party, still less be used as an excuse to patch up exclusive small groupings and stoke division and confrontation," Guo said at a regular media briefing.

Emphasising the importance of resilient global supply chains, Guo added, "It is the common responsibility of all countries to keep the global industrial and supply chains safe and stable. All parties should champion openness and cooperation and play a constructive role in the process."

Beijing's response came amid heightened regional attention over the evolving India-Japan partnership, which China views against the backdrop of shifting geopolitical alignments in the Indo-Pacific.

During Thursday's summit, India and Japan agreed to establish a new framework for economic cooperation, deepen collaboration in critical miner-



Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun

als to strengthen supply chain resilience, and co-develop military hardware under a fresh defence partnership. The two countries also agreed to expand energy cooperation to reduce vulnerabilities arising from future oil supply disruptions.

Maritime security figured prominently in the joint statement issued after the talks. India and Japan expressed "serious concern" over developments in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, reaffirming their commitment to freedom of navigation and overflight in accordance with international law. The two sides also opposed unilateral attempts to alter the status quo through force or coercion.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

ED flags ₹95 crore cash trail in Maoist-hit areas

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
 ■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) plans to ask the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to formally investigate claims that a US-based Christian evangelical group illegally sent and used about ₹95 crore in foreign funds in India. Some of these funds reportedly reached areas affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) using overseas debit cards.

Officials say this step comes after the ED's ongoing investigation under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA). The agency has



Representative image

already searched several places and found evidence that suggests Indian banking and regulatory channels were deliberately avoided. ED teams searched locations in Bengaluru and Mysuru in

Raleigh, North Carolina. Investigators found 25 foreign-issued debit cards, about ₹40 lakh in cash, digital devices, and documents during the raids. The debit cards were linked to Trust Bank in the United States.

The probe was triggered by a Suspicious Transaction Report (STR). The investigation began after the Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND) filed an STR. The report highlighted a method in which foreign funds were received and used in India via overseas bank debit cards, circumventing the usual banking and FCRA rules.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

SC pulls the plug on CAG audit of Delhi discoms

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday ordered a pause on the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) audit of Delhi's three private electricity distribution companies (discoms) and directed maintenance of status quo, holding that the legality of the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission's (DERC) decision to appoint the constitutional auditor raises an arguable question requiring judicial examinations.

"The present civil appeal concerns directly the issue whether the action of the DERC in initiating the process of audit of the distribution companies by CAG is legally permissible," the Bench of Justices KV Viswanathan and Shree Chandrashekar observed while issuing notice. The matter is now listed for further hearing on July 15.



Representative image

The matter relates to Regulatory Assets (RAs) amounting to nearly ₹38,552 crore, accumulated by BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, BSES Yamuna Power Limited, and Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited. RAs represent deferred costs arising from electricity tariffs remaining largely unchanged for

over a decade despite increasing supply costs. The amounts are ultimately recoverable from consumers through future tariff revisions.

The matter has been directed to be heard by the same Bench that delivered the SC's August 6, 2025 judgment concerning the phased liquidation of Delhi's RAs, subject to approval by the Chief Justice of India. At that time, a bench headed by Justice PS Narasimha had directed that the RAs, worth ₹27,200 crore, be paid within three years to Delhi's three private discoms. The bench then said that the RAs have risen sharply, reaching ₹12,993 crore for BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd (BRPL), ₹8,419 crore for BSES Yamuna Power Ltd (BYPL) and ₹5,787 crore for Tata Power Delhi Distribution Ltd (TPDDL) as on March 31, 2024, totalling ₹27,200 crore.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Pranks gone rogue: Govt pulls down apps that halt e-rickshaws

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

A free run for pranksters disabling e-rickshaws using Chinese apps has come to an end. Realising the seriousness of the hazard posed by these stunts, the Government cracked down, ordering the removal of several mobile applications - including BAT BMS, SMART BMS, LOSSIGY and Epoch Li-ion - from both the Android Play Store and Apple App Store.

The strict action came after several videos on social media, mainly in the national capital, went viral in which teenagers and youngsters are using a Chinese app to stop e-rickshaws from working.

The process is simple: open the mobile application, connect to the nearest battery



Representative image

via Bluetooth, and activate the discharge switch. A single tap switches off the vehicle. The driver is left confused and stranded. The driver can restart the e-rickshaw only when it is switched back on through the same application.

On the streets, though, this social media 'trend' has created a real hazard. Confirming that action has

been taken in the matter, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology of India (MEITY) MeitY Secretary S Krishnan said, "That is right...there are a couple of apps, which came to our notice yesterday and both of them have been taken down from the app stores." He was speaking on the sidelines of a CII Cybersecurity summit. He said the Government will take up this issue with the app stores to ensure potentially harmful applications do not come up in the public domain.

These videos sparked widespread concerns over the cybersecurity risks posed by such internet-connected vehicle management systems.

GOVT SUMMONS META OVER CSAM ADS

New Delhi: IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has directed officials in his Ministry to summon Meta over Instagram ads promoting child sexual abuse material. The IT Ministry will seek an explanation from Meta on the issue, they added. This is the second instance this week when the Government has turned up the heat on Meta.

On Wednesday, the Centre issued a notice to Meta questioning the planned username feature on WhatsApp, citing concerns that it could materially increase online fraud, phishing, digital arrest scams, and impersonation attacks. It directed the platform to pause the feature until consultations on the issue are completed "to the satisfaction of the Government".

The Centre had also asked Meta to explain why action shouldn't be initiated under the IT Act and rules over WhatsApp's new feature that may increase cybercrimes. The Government also reminded Meta that WhatsApp, as a significant social media intermediary, is bound by due diligence obligations under the IT Act and rules.

(PNS)

CONTINUED ON >> P4



MP to implement farmer welfare in mission mode

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has reiterated that the welfare of farmers remains the foremost responsibility of the Madhya Pradesh government, stressing that reducing the cost of cultivation and enhancing farm incomes should remain at the core of the state's agricultural policies.

To achieve these objectives, the government has declared 2026 as the 'Krishak Kalyan Varsh' and directed that all farmer-centric schemes and programmes be implemented in mission mode.

Chairing a review meeting on the initiatives planned under the year-long campaign, Yadav instructed officials to organise direct interaction programmes with farmers from the state capital to the village level. He said continuous engagement with farmers would help improve the implementation of government schemes while enabling authorities to better understand challenges faced at the grassroots.

Highlighting the importance of allied agricultural activities, the Chief Minister said dairy farming offers immense potential to supplement farmers' incomes. He directed officials to involve private institutions in supplying high-yielding breeds of cows and expand such centres across rural areas to promote scientific livestock development.

Yadav also called for encouraging farmers to shift towards crops requiring less water and shorter cultivation



periods, keeping in view changing climatic conditions and sustainable farming practices. He said the government should create a favourable environment for crop diversification while promoting natural and organic farming. Farmers should also be connected with agricultural extension activities through local agricultural fairs, traditional festivals and crop-cycle-based outreach programmes.

To improve transparency and ease of access, the Chief Minister directed that all processes related to cooperative societies be digitised. Officials informed the meeting that the Online Farmer Credit Card Portal and the e-Passbook facility for farmers would be launched later this month. A State-level Cooperative Conference is also scheduled to be organised as part of the Krishak Kalyan Varsh.

The meeting was informed that a State-level programme will be organised in Ujjain to honour outstanding field-level functionaries and progressive livestock farmers. Balram Krishi Mahotsavs will be organised in every district, while Food Festivals will be held at all divisional head-

quarters to promote agricultural diversity and value-added farm produce.

A series of specialised agricultural events has also been planned across the state. Khargone will host a State-level Farmers' Conference along with a Cotton and Chilli Festival, while Jabalpur will organise programmes on inland fisheries, aquaculture and a conference for poultry farmers and entrepreneurs.

Other proposed events include a Banana Festival in Burhanpur, a workshop on high-tech nurseries and protected cultivation in Ujjain, State-level conferences of Farmer Producer Organisations in Sagar and Ratlam, a workshop on modern horticulture technologies in Neemuch, a Vegetable Festival and Aquaculture Marketing Symposium in Indore, a crop residue management workshop in Bhopal and a State-level Farmers' Conference under the Sugarcane Festival in Narsinghpur.

Farmer Welfare and Agriculture Development Minister Edal Singh Kansana, Chief Secretary Anurag Jain and senior officials attended the review meeting.

Three held for arson at MP irrigation project plant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Balaghat

Police have arrested three persons, including a BJP leader and a village sarpanch, for allegedly demanding extortion and setting fire to a plant linked to a micro lift irrigation project in Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district, causing losses estimated at Rs 4-5 crore.

According to Lamta police, the incident took place on July 1 when Janpad Panchayat member Bhuvneshwar Rajak, Partapur sarpanch Rajesh Sirsam and Rakesh Damaha allegedly arrived at the project site in a car. Police said the accused demanded Rs 10 lakh from the plant management, seeking Rs 5 lakh each for Rajak and the sarpanch.

When the management refused to pay, the accused allegedly abused the staff and set the plant on fire. The blaze destroyed machinery, pipelines, OMS material stored in three iron containers, SCADA equipment, electrical panels, HDPE pipes and other project materials.

Lamta police station in-charge Chhatrapal Singh Bais said the three accused were arrested following a complaint and produced before a local court on Friday. Police are searching for other accused who remain absconding, while further investigation is underway. The micro lift irrigation project was approved during the tenure of former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan at an estimated cost of Rs 175 crore.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav with Chief Executive Officer of KFW Development Bank, Germany Christiane Liebeck, during a meeting at the State Mantralaya in Bhopal on Friday. Pioneer photo

Six coaching institutes sealed over fire safety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

The Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Friday sealed six coaching institutes for failing to comply with fire safety norms despite being served notices, intensifying its crackdown on institutions violating mandatory safety regulations.

The action was taken on the instructions of Municipal Commissioner Sanskriti Jain by a joint team of the Fire Brigade and Revenue Department. Among the institutions sealed was the Allen Career Institute operating from Building No. 89 at Lalghati, along with five coaching centres functioning from Goyal Tower in Indrapuri.

The civic body said notices had been issued to all the institutions on June 25, 2026, directing them to rectify the deficiencies within the stipulated period. However, the coaching centres failed to implement the required fire safety measures.

A follow-up inspection found that the violations remained unaddressed, prompting the municipal corporation to evacuate the premises and seal all six institutions. Officials said the action was taken to ensure the safety of students and staff and warned that strict action would continue against establishments failing to comply with prescribed fire safety standards.

The civic body said similar inspections will continue across the city to ensure strict compliance with fire safety norms.

Dewas excise seizes seven cartons of country liquor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Dewas

The Excise Department has seized seven cartons of illegally stored country liquor during a raid in Dewas as part of its ongoing drive against the illegal manufacture, storage and sale of liquor.

Acting on a tip-off, an excise team conducted a raid at a premises belonging to Kanhaiya in Revabagh on July 3. During the search, officials recovered four cartons of country liquor (Masala) and three cartons of country liquor (Plain), totalling 63 bulk litres, which had allegedly been stored illegally.

The accused fled the spot before the team arrived. A case has been registered against him under Sections 34(1)(a) and 34(2) of the Madhya Pradesh Excise Act, 1915, and further investigation is

underway. The seized liquor is estimated to be worth around Rs 33,400 in the market.

The operation was carried out under the direction of Dewas Collector Rituraj Singh and the guidance of District Excise Officer Basanti Bhuria. The raid was led by Excise Sub-Inspector Prem Yadav along with Excise Head Constable Deepak Dhuria and excise personnel Balakrishna Jaiswal, Surendra Varshi, Nihal Khatri, Ashish Gupta and Nikita Pamar.

The Excise Department said its enforcement drive against illegal liquor activities will continue across the district.

Officials said efforts are being intensified to curb the illegal liquor trade and ensure strict enforcement of the Excise Act across the district.



A view of a traffic congestion at Jahangirabad locality in Bhopal on Friday. Pioneer photo

CM orders biometric attendance for government staff

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has directed the implementation of a biometric attendance system in the State Secretariat, Vindhyachal and Satpura Bhawans to ensure punctuality among government officials and employees.

Expressing displeasure over officials not reporting to office on time, he said the prescribed office hours from 10 am to 6 pm on working days must be followed strictly and action should be taken against those violating the rules. He also asked senior officers to lead by example by maintaining punctuality and regularly monitoring the attendance of subordinate staff.

Chairing a review meeting with departmental officials, Yadav directed that biometric

attendance be introduced to record both the arrival and departure timings of employees. He said all priority schemes and development works of the state government should be completed within the stipulated timeframe through focused implementation.

The Chief Minister also instructed the creation of Home Guard posts at major temples across the state on the lines of the Mahakaleshwar Temple, with appointments to be made from the expenditure of the respective temple management committees. He further directed the Home Department to expedite the process of implementing 20 per cent reservation for Agniveers in recruitment to the constable posts in the Madhya Pradesh Police Special Armed Force.

Reviewing religious tourism projects, Yadav

asked officials to accelerate development works in Chitrakoot, including the early completion of the Sati Anusuya Temple complex, the Multi-Facility Centre and the Gupt Godavari temple complex. He said the Uttar Pradesh government has agreed to the proposed Mandakini river-link project and that a joint meeting between the two states would soon be held to finalise the project.

The Chief Minister also directed officials to promote the construction of dharamshalas, serais, community kitchens, drinking water facilities, hospitals and other public amenities at major religious centres, including Amarkantak, Chitrakoot, Omkareshwar, Maheshwar, Datia, Orchha and Maihar. He asked officials to explore concessions such as exemption in registration fees, grants and other incen-

tives for religious and social organisations willing to develop such facilities.

Yadav further instructed officials to coordinate with the Union Ministry of Heavy Industries to reclaim unused government land allotted to Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL). He also directed preparation of a comprehensive plan for developing a grand memorial at the site cleared of Union Carbide India Limited's chemical waste, with officials asked to study the museum at Bhuj in Gujarat before preparing the proposal.

The Chief Minister also called for expediting land availability for the development of Chitrakoot and Mamlahar, timely completion of the Ram Van Gaman Path and Shri Krishna Pathaya projects, and speeding up the construction of the proposed new airport in Ujjain.

MP Cong issues notices to two leaders over social media posts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh Congress has initiated disciplinary action against two party leaders over their social media posts, issuing separate show-cause notices to Nidhi Chaturvedi, daughter of senior Congress leader and former MP Satyavrat Chaturvedi, and Priyanka Kirar, state president of the party's Women Harassment Cell. Both have been asked to submit their replies within seven days, failing which disciplinary action may be initiated.

The notices, issued by Pradesh Congress Committee In-charge General Secretary Sanjay Kamle, stated that the social media posts made by the two leaders were found to be against the party's principles and discipline.

According to the notice issued to Nidhi Chaturvedi on July 3, her social media post targeting senior Congress leader and former Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh amounted to indiscipline. In her post, she said

that if Digvijaya Singh had differences with Pradesh Congress Committee chief Jitu Patwari, he should have raised them within the party instead of addressing a public press conference. She also alleged that publicly rejecting the state president's stand and using inappropriate language against him violated party discipline.

Nidhi further accused Digvijaya Singh of being driven by his desire to see his son, Jaivardhan Singh, become the state Congress president. She alleged that his public statements weakened the party at a time when Rahul Gandhi and Congress workers were fighting the BJP and RSS, and claimed such actions only benefited the BJP politically.

She also alleged that internal rivalries and personal ambitions had contributed to the fall of the Congress government in 2020, the party's defeats in the 2023 Assembly and 2024 Lok Sabha elections, as well as setbacks in the recent Rajya Sabha election. She demanded strict disciplinary action against Digvijaya Singh.

BoM recovers mortgaged asset

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jabalpur

The Asset Recovery Branch (ARB) of Bank of Maharashtra has successfully regained possession of a mortgaged property in Jabalpur with the assistance of the district administration. According to an official communication issued by the bank on July 3, the possession drive was carried out at Plot No. 785 in Teen Patti Madatal following the orders of the Jabalpur Collector.

The bank said the Tehsildar (Adhartal) and the revenue team removed the occupants from the building and handed over possession of the mortgaged asset to the Bank of Maharashtra's Asset Recovery Branch. Bank officials, including Area Manager Ashok Kumar, were present during the operation.

The communication also acknowledged the role of Gudluck Recovery Agency, stating that its Rajasthan team played an important part in the possession proceedings. The bank described the operation as being carried out in coordination with the district administration and revenue authorities to recover the secured asset.

Ex-IDBI cashier gets 10 years for Rs 1.21 crore bank fraud

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ratlam

A court in Ratlam has sentenced a former cashier of IDBI Bank to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment for embezzling Rs 1.21 crore from the bank's Ratlam branch. The Seventh Additional Sessions Court convicted Suresh Meena under Section 409 of the Indian Penal Code for criminal breach of trust by a banker. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 50,000.

According to Additional Public Prosecutor Samarth Patidar, the fraud came to light on August 12, 2023, after Branch Manager Kishore Kumar Tanwar lodged a complaint at Manak Chowk Police Station. Meena had been serving as cashier since January 17, 2022.

The investigation revealed Meena linked his mobile number to his sister Nirmala Meena's State Bank of India account and used PhonePe and Paytm to transfer money to his own accounts. Police found Rs 79.79 lakh of the embezzled amount was spent on online betting applications. CCTV footage showed him concealing bundles of cash in his bag. Investigators also found he transferred money to relatives, claiming it was from a land sale before asking them to return it.

The fraud surfaced after the District Cooperative Bank sought Rs 70 lakh in cash. A Regional Office verification confirmed the shortage, following which police registered the case, arrested Meena on August 15, 2023, and filed a chargesheet. He has remained in judicial custody since then. The prosecution was conducted by Additional Public Prosecutor Samarth Patidar during police investigation.

"The court held that the prosecution had proved the charges beyond reasonable doubt on the basis of documentary evidence, financial records and CCTV footage."

Firing over Rs 9,000 dispute in Gwalior

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gwalior

A dispute over Rs 9,000 allegedly escalated into a violent clash involving firing and assault with sticks in Kheriyamodi village under Bijoli police station limits, leaving three people seriously injured. Among the injured is an elderly man who sustained a bullet injury. All the injured have been admitted to the trauma centre of Jayarogya Hospital for treatment.

Police said the incident occurred late on Thursday night after a long-standing dispute over money lent nearly a year ago resurfaced. According to the complaint, the accused allegedly reached Rajesh Pal's house armed with sticks and illegal firearms, abused the family and opened fire.

The rival group, however, claimed that the complainant's side also resorted to firing and assaulted them with sticks. Bijoli police have registered cross cases against the named accused and launched an investigation into the incident.

Police said the exact sequence of events and the role of each accused are being verified as part of the ongoing investigation.

12-hour tree-top drama ends in fall, man critically injured

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

A dramatic 12-hour rescue operation in Bhopal's Arif Nagar area ended in an accident on Friday afternoon when a man perched atop a tree for several hours slipped and fell nearly 25 feet, sustaining serious head injuries. He was rushed to hospital, where he is undergoing treatment.

The incident began around midnight on Thursday when the man suddenly climbed a tree in Arif Nagar under Nishatpura police station limits. After receiving information, police reached the spot and repeatedly appealed to him to come down safely. However, he refused to cooperate and threatened anyone who approached him with a wooden stick.

As efforts to persuade him failed, the police sought assistance from the Bhopal Municipal Corporation's rescue team. Using a crane, rescuers made several attempts to reach the man, but each time he waved the stick aggressively, forcing the team to retreat. The

rescue operation continued through the night and into Friday morning, drawing the attention of local residents.

During the prolonged operation, the man attempted to move from one branch to another. While shifting, he lost his balance and fell from a height of about 25 feet. He suffered severe head injuries and was immediately taken to hospital for treatment.

Nishatpura police station in-charge Mahendra Singh Thakur said the injured man has identified himself only as "Sonare". Preliminary information suggests that he is a resident of Nagpur. However, due to his injuries, he is not in a condition to provide detailed information about his identity or the circumstances that led him to climb the tree.

Police are trying to trace his family members and ascertain how he reached Bhopal. The exact reason behind his unusual act remains unclear. Videos of the dramatic rescue operation and the fall have surfaced on social media and are being widely shared.



Monsoon intensifies, rain wreaks havoc across MP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

The southwest monsoon has become fully active across Madhya Pradesh, bringing widespread rainfall to more than 26 districts on Friday and disrupting normal life in several parts of the state. Rivers overflowed, roads were submerged, villages lost connectivity and rain-related incidents were reported from multiple districts as the weather system gained strength.

Harda was among the worst-affected districts, where the swollen Machak river cut off road connectivity between the district headquarters and more than 12 villages. In Narmadapuram, heavy rain lasting nearly an hour inundated major roads, leading to severe waterlogging and traffic disruptions.

In Barwani district, the Goi river and the adjoining barrage overflowed in Sindhwa following continuous rainfall. A house collapsed in Maihar due to the downpour, while Keshu Anjana was swept away along with his motorcycle while attempting to cross a flooded culvert. Search efforts were underway till the last reports.

In Indore, the body of Mahesh Chauhan, who was washed away in Ahirkhedhi during heavy rain on Wednesday night, was recovered from Sirpur Lake nearly 36 hours later. In Pandhurna, five kutcha houses built along a riverbank collapsed after the river swelled. Three goats and household belongings were also washed away in the strong current.

Khargone's Kasrawad area witnessed nearly two hours

of intense rainfall on Friday morning, resulting in waterlogging on roads and agricultural fields. More than a dozen wards in Balaghat also reported waterlogging, affecting daily life and vehicular movement.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Indore recorded the highest rainfall on Friday at over 2.25 inches, followed by Mandla with around 1.75 inches, Bhopal with 1.5 inches and Balaghat with 1.25 inches. Heavy rainfall was also recorded in Harda, Narmadapuram, Dhar, Barwani, Maihar, Betul, Datia and Ratlam. Widespread showers were reported from Shivpuri, Damoh, Chhindwara, Jabalpur, Narsinghpur, Sagar, Satna, Seoni, Tikamgarh, Umaria, Guna, Gwalior and Raisen.

The state has recorded 113.1 mm (4.5 inches) of rainfall so far this monsoon season, which is about 23 per cent below the normal average of 147.7 mm (5.9 inches). Rainfall in eastern Madhya Pradesh remains 48 per cent below normal, while western Madhya Pradesh has recorded only a one per cent deficit.

Despite the shortfall in June, the weather department is optimistic about July, which traditionally contributes nearly one-third of the state's seasonal rainfall. Around 40 per cent of the annual monsoon rainfall is usually recorded during the month.

The state's average annual rainfall is 37.3 inches, while Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Gwalior normally receive between 38 and 39 inches. Among the districts, Dewas has recorded the highest rainfall so far this season at

around 10.5 inches. Bhopal and Indore have each received more than eight inches of rainfall.

The IMD said July has historically been the wettest month for Madhya Pradesh, with several cities recording exceptional rainfall in the past. Authorities have advised residents in low-lying and flood-prone areas to remain alert as widespread rainfall is expected to continue over the coming days.

The weather department has forecast continued heavy rainfall in several parts of the state over the next few days under the influence of an active monsoon system. Authorities have advised residents living near rivers and low-lying areas to remain alert and avoid crossing flooded roads and culverts during heavy rain.



Senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh with a poster outside his residence to announce the entry of such persons that looted offerings made to Ayodhya's Lord Ram Temple is prohibited, at his residence in Bhopal on Friday. Pioneer photo



Madhya Pradesh Mahila Congress party activists stage a protest over the alleged donation embezzlement at the revered Ayodhya's Ram Temple, in Bhopal, Friday. Pioneer photo

MP minister Bagri to appear before caste scrutiny panel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bhopal

The inquiry into the alleged Scheduled Caste (SC) certificate of Madhya Pradesh Minister of State for Urban Development Pratima Bagri has gathered pace, with the State-Level Caste Scrutiny Committee initiating a public evidence collection process in Satna district.

Acting on the committee's directions, the district administration on Friday made a public announcement by beating drums in Vasudha village of Nagod tehsil, informing residents that anyone possessing information, documents or evidence related to the minister's caste could submit it before the committee. Similar announcements are scheduled to be made in Hardua and Majhol villages on Saturday.

The committee has also issued a notice to Bagri, directing her to appear before the Commissioner, Scheduled Caste Development Office, on July 6 to present her case. The Satna Collector was instructed to ensure service of the notice.

As part of the inquiry, copies of the public notice have been displayed at the Nagod tehsil office, Janpad Panchayat office and the notice boards of the concerned gram panchayats. The announcement made in Vasudha village was also videographed, while revenue officials have been directed to submit a panchnama report after carrying out similar public notifications in the identified villages.

Bagri was elected from the reserved Raigaon Assembly constituency in Satna district on the basis of her Scheduled Caste certificate and was later inducted into the state cabinet as Minister of State for Urban Development.

The controversy arose after Pradesh Congress Scheduled Caste Department president Pradeep Ahirwar challenged the validity of her caste certificate by filing a petition before the High Court. The petition alleged that the Bagri community in the region is not included in the Scheduled Caste list and claimed that Bagri belongs to the Rajput/Thakur community, rendering her SC certificate invalid.

Joint drive to clear encroachments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bhopal

In a bid to improve traffic flow and enhance road safety, the Bhopal administration on Friday carried out a joint inspection of major roads and intersections across the city. Collector Priyank Mishra and Police Commissioner Sanjay Kumar reviewed traffic arrangements at Polytechnic Square, Depot Square, the Smart City road and Bagsewania Square, directing officials to implement immediate corrective measures.

During the inspection, the Collector instructed officials to ensure that left turns at all major intersections are made completely obstruction-free. He said encroachments, poorly placed barricades and other obstacles at left-turn lanes often lead to traffic congestion and should be removed without delay. He also directed officials to undertake necessary engineering improvements to ensure smooth vehicular movement even during peak hours. Mishra

further instructed the concerned departments to improve zebra crossings, road markings, directional signages and other traffic management infrastructure. Stressing the need to prioritise road safety, he said facilities for pedestrians should be strengthened alongside measures aimed

Bhopal to remove bottlenecks at key junctions to ease traffic

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bhopal

at improving traffic flow for motorists. The joint team paid special attention to the Smart City area and Depot Square, identifying traffic congestion points and accident-prone locations. Officials were directed to initiate improvement works at these hotspots at the earliest to reduce bottlenecks and enhance commuter safety.

During the inspection, the officials reiterated that there would be no compromise on road safety. They said the Public Works Department, Bhopal Municipal Corporation and Traffic Police would work in close coordination to implement the required improvements at identified locations on priority.

CM plans grand Sandipani School launches

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Friday reviewed the progress of all Sandipani Schools across Madhya Pradesh that are ready for inauguration and directed officials to ensure that the events are celebrated as a public festival rather than remaining mere formal ceremonies. He said the inaugurations, to be held during the ongoing School Chalen Abhiyan, should promote education, culture and community participation with the active involvement of students, parents, public representatives and local citizens.

Chairing a review meeting, Yadav said the inauguration of Sandipani Schools should mark the beginning of a new chapter in quality education and a brighter future for children. He instructed officials to organise cultural performances by students, competitions and other creative activities to make the events memorable. He also directed that refreshments and sweets be distributed to all students during the celebrations. The Chief Minister ordered

a model institution offering quality, value-based and modern education. He also directed that the schools be inaugurated by district in-charge ministers in the presence of public representatives.

Guru Purnima, to be observed on July 29, will be celebrated in one Sandipani School in every district under the chairmanship of the district in-charge minister. The celebrations will feature science exhibitions, teacher felicitation ceremonies, presentations on innovations by students and teachers, demonstrations of digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence, and the honouring of meritorious students.

School Education Secretary Sanjay Goyal informed the meeting that construction of 70 Sandipani School buildings has been completed, including 46 under the School Education Department and 24 under the Tribal Welfare Department. Tribal Welfare Minister Kunwar Vijay Shah, School Education Minister Uday Pratap Singh, Chief Secretary Anurag Jain and senior officials attended the review meeting.

M3M Foundation feted for healthcare efforts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurugram

M3M Foundation was honoured by the Gurugram Health Department on National Doctors' Day for its contribution to strengthening public healthcare through its flagship 'Kartavya' initiative. The Foundation received an Appreciation Letter at a programme held at the Sub Health Centre in Kadarpur in recognition of its efforts to improve healthcare infrastructure and support government health services.

The programme was attended by Gurugram MLA Tejpal Tanwar, Chief Medical Officer Lokveer Singh, Councillor Narayan Bhadana, doctors, healthcare professionals, frontline health workers, community members and representatives of the Foundation. As part of its recent initiatives, M3M Foundation renovated the Sub Health Centre to create a better-equipped and patient-friendly facility. It also distributed nutritional dry ration kits to 90 tuberculosis patients to support their treatment and contribute to the goal of a TB-free India.

The Foundation further strengthened healthcare services by providing essential medical equipment, including a haemoglobin analyser, blood pressure monitor, glucometer, height-weight machine, freezer, washing machine,

almirah, water cooler and other diagnostic devices. Implemented under the Kartavya programme, the Foundation's healthcare interventions have reached over 2 lakh people. During 2025-26 alone, it organised 102 health camps, benefiting more than 14,280 people through medical consultations, health screening, medicines and preventive healthcare awareness. Speaking at the event, Tejpal Tanwar praised the Foundation's contribution to strengthening community healthcare and highlighted the importance of partnerships between the govt and responsible institutions in improving public health services.

India-UK CETA Agreement to supercharge MP's development

SARMAN NAGELE ■ London

With zero-duty access to the UK market taking effect on 15 July 2026, Madhya Pradesh's development is set to experience a major boost, scripting a brand-new chapter in trade with London. With the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the accompanying Double Contribution Convention (DCC) entering into force on 15 July 2026, the Govt of Madhya Pradesh and the industrial sector stand fully prepared to seize these highly consequential trade opportunities.

From day one, the United Kingdom will eliminate customs duties (tariffs) on 99% of India's tariff lines, granting immediate and duty-free access to MP's textile, pharmaceutical, engineering, auto-component, and food-processing exporters in one of the world's premier consumer markets. To accelerate MP's development and script a new chapter in trade with Britain, Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav should intensify efforts to formulate and implement

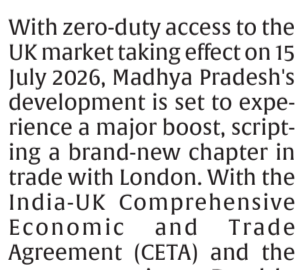
chapters to connect as many people of MP origin as possible across nearly every nation. The Friends of Madhya Pradesh (FOMP) UK Chapter is a key part of this initiative. Its Patron is MP Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, while London-based businessman and former Deputy Mayor of Bhopal Rajesh Agrawal serves as Patron, alongside Rohit Dixit as Founder.

Friends of Madhya Pradesh (FOMP) UK, in concert with FICCI Europe, is issuing a major call to action to MP's exporters, the government, and the UK-MP diaspora to convert this tariff advantage into lasting trade. A tariff cut is an opportunity, not a direct payment. It can only benefit exporters who are completely ready. FOMP UK is urging MP industry leaders to take proactive action on four distinct fronts, both before and immediately after 15 July. The state's textile and garment sectors in Indore, Ujjain, Burhanpur, and Bhopal are built on a solid cotton base and backed by the state's Textile Policy incentives. Additionally, the PM MITRA mega-park at Dhar is actively advancing MP's core

vision of "farm to fibre to fabric to fashion to foreign." FOMP UK Patron & Founder Rajesh Agrawal (former Deputy Mayor of London) and Founder Rohit Dixit stated: "CETA gives Madhya Pradesh a genuinely level playing field in the UK from 15 July. Our message to MP's exporters is simple: the tariff has been eliminated; we are now fully geared up to help you find buyers." "Working through FICCI Europe, FOMP UK aims to execute the UK-side operations that turn a trade pact into actual business, such as matchmaking, validation, and mobilization." (FOMP) It is dedicated to strengthening trade, investment, and cultural ties between Madhya Pradesh and the United Kingdom. In partnership with FICCI Europe, FOMP UK connects MP's exporters and MSMEs with UK buyers and investors while facilitating matchmaking in priority sectors. The organization is actively mobilizing UK-based Madhya Pradesh diaspora members ahead of the landmark Bhopal Global Investors Summit 2027.

India-UK CETA Agreement to supercharge MP's development

A NEW CHAPTER IN MP'S TRADE WITH THE UK



Dr. Mohan Yadav
Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh

comprehensive and effective policies. CETA removes long-standing UK tariff walls across precisely the sectors where Madhya Pradesh competes. From the date the agreement enters into force, UK import duties will drop to zero across major sectors:

- * Textiles and clothing - previously up to 12%
- * Processed food products - previously up to 70%
- * Engineering goods and auto components - previously up to 18%
- * Leather and footwear - previously up to 16%
- * Chemicals and pharmaceuticals - previously up to 8%
- * Marine products - previously up to 21.5%

Alongside goods, CETA opens all 12 major UK services sectors and 137 sub-sectors to



Indian service providers, including IT and IT-enabled services, professional and financial services, engineering, and consultancy. Furthermore, under the DCC, Indian professionals on temporary assignments to the UK are exempt from paying dual social-security contributions, with the exemption period extended from three years to five. This is expected to benefit more than 75,000 professionals and over 900 companies. The NRI Department of the Government of Madhya Pradesh is held by Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, who is actively working to bring Indian diaspora members from different parts of the world together. The department has initiated the creation of country-specific

to formulate and implement

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Commuters wade through a waterlogged street after heavy rain in Bhopal on Friday. Pioneer photo

केनरा बैंक Canara Bank **Canara Bank, Specialised ARM Branch, Plot no. 4, PSP Area, Near AIIMS, Saket Nagar Bhopal Tel.: 8989014648** **E-AUCTION (SALE NOTICE)**

Appendix-IV-A (See web portal to rule 8(6) & 6(2))
SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF MOVABLE & IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-auction Sale Notice For Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provision to Rules 8(6) & 6(2) of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) & Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable properties mortgaged / charged to the secured creditor, the Possession of which has been taken by the authorised officer of the **Canara Bank (secured creditor)** will be sold on "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS, AS IS WHAT IS BASIS" & WHAT EVER THERE IS" on **22/07/2026** for recovery of bank dues to the **Canara Bank (secured creditor)**

Name and address of the Borrower & Guarantors	Description of Property	Demand Notice Dt. Possession Dt. Outstanding Amt.	Reserve Price EMD Amt. Bid Increment Amt.
Borrower/ Mortgageor: Mr. Param Jeet Singh S/o Mr. Govind Singh, P. No.16/A Sainik Colony Bairagarh Bhopal MP 462030	All that part and parcel of property consisting of Flat no.302 on 3rd floor, Kamaladevi Complex Plot no.339, Jharneshwar Griha Nirman Sahkari Samiti Maryadi Vill Bhaipur Hoshangabad Road built up area measuring 496.82 sq.ft. Boundaries- East: Flat no.301, West: Road, North: House of Mr Om Prakash Chouhan on Plot no.340, South: Vacant Plot PROPERTY ID: CNR89513092502 COORDINATES: 23.146723, 77.478519	12/08/2024 11/10/2024 as on 01/07/2026	₹ 8,31,000/- ₹ 83,100/- ₹ 10000/-
		21,24,901.17	+ Intl. & other charges

Physical Possession

Last date for submission of online bids is on or before 21/07/2026 upto 5.00 p.m.
Date and Time of e-auction : 22/07/2026, 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM (With unlimited extension of 5 minutes duration each)

1) The intending bidders shall deposit above mentioned Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) being 10% of the Reserve Price in E- Wallet of M/s PSB Alliance Private Limited (baanknet.com) portal directly or by generating the Challan therein to deposit the EMD through RTGS/NEFT in the account details as mentioned in the said challan, on above mentioned date of bid submission.
2) The successful bidder shall deposit 25% of the sale price (inclusive of EMD already paid), immediately on the sale being knocked down in his/her favour and the balance within 15 days from the date of confirmation of sale. If the successful bidder fails to pay the sale price as stated above, the deposit made by him shall be forfeited.
3) All charges for conveyances, stamp duty/GST registration charges etc, as applicable and any taxes, revenue/dues to any local authority etc shall be borne by the successful bidder only.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale please refer web portal: <http://BAANKNET.COM> or may contact - Chief Manager, SPLSD ARM Bhopal, Canara Bank, Plot no. 4, PSP Area, Near AIIMS, Saket Nagar Bhopal. Contact no. 8989014648, 8057766078, 9691096410, 9123403299 (BHOPAL), 7905027805 (JABALPUR AND BILASPUR), 7683068902 (RAIPUR), 9140476074 (GWALIOR), 9830130770 (INDORE), 8073562754 (BHOPAL) during office hours on any working day.
Date: 01-07-2026, Place: Bhopal

AUTHORISED OFFICER, CANARA BANK



IN FOCUS

Gujarat ATS nabs 8 Jaish-e-Mohammed members

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ahmedabad

Gujarat's Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) has arrested eight alleged members of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), who were conspiring to establish a network of the Pakistan-based banned terror outfit in the state, officials said on Friday.

The ATS nabbed the individuals, two of them aged 18 and 19, from various districts of the state as well as adjoining Madhya Pradesh, on Thursday, they said, adding Gujarati translation of a book written by JeM founder Masood Azhar was among the materials seized from them.

Police said the accused were working to establish an active terror network of JeM in Gujarat, which shares land and sea border with Pakistan, and had formed an organisation in the western state to carry out their activities.

Seven of them were arrested from Gujarat and one from Madhya Pradesh. They were produced in a court in Kadi town of Mehsana district and remanded to ATS custody for 14 days, Assistant Public Prosecutor B H Prajapati said. "Eight members of JeM were arrested from different places. The accused had formed a JeM-linked organisation in Gujarat under the name Darul Islam Gujarat Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)," ATS Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Sunil Joshi told reporters. Acting on a tip-off, five special ATS teams, in coordination with police in Banaskantha, Mehsana, Navsari and Patan districts of Gujarat and Dewas in Madhya Pradesh, conducted simultaneous raids across multiple locations. The ATS alleged that the accused were encouraging people in their respective areas to join JeM and remained in contact with two Pakistani handlers identified as Abdullah and Mohammad Umar.



The arrested men were identified by the ATS as Ahmed Abdullah Gajiwala (19), Mudassir Abdullah Ghaziwala (22) and Ibrahim Mohammad Husen Ghagha (30), all residents of Banaskantha district; Zakariya Durani Mohammad Ammar Ghagha (21), Mufti Faujan Ismail Dauwa (40) and Mohammad Amin Shera (21), all residents of Patan district; Mohammad Abdul Rahman Savdi (22), a resident of Navsari district; and Bilal Durani Mohammad Ammar Ghagha (18), a resident of Dewas in Madhya Pradesh. "Ahmed and Ibrahim were initially detained near a highway on the Mehsana-Banaskantha. Based on the information provided by them, the remaining accused, who were already identified, were subse-

quently arrested," Joshi said. "The accused received Rs 3 lakh in funding from JeM, a portion of which was allegedly used to purchase a second-hand car that had not yet been transferred into any member's name," the IPS officer stated. Investigators also noted that the group was translating JeM literature into Gujarati to facilitate the spread of the outfit's jihadi ideology, the DIG Joshi maintained. "Gujarati translation of Masood Azhar's book 'Dars-e-Jihad', allegedly prepared by Ibrahim and Zakariya, was among the seized materials," Joshi said. According to an official release, the NordLocker application found on Ibrahim's mobile phone contained around 255 files, including books, speeches, audio recordings, videos, photographs and JeM flags related to jihad. The ATS also recovered two books authored by Azhar and printed in Pakistan, along with several other publications related to jihad, said the release. According to the officials,

the ATS teams seized eight typed letters in Urdu addressed to the JeM chief, in which the accused allegedly expressed their intention to join the terrorist organisation. Photographs of handwritten Urdu pages were also recovered. The accused allegedly met a Kashmiri individual two to three months ago, the ATS said. Police have registered a case against the eight accused under sections 13 (punishment for unlawful activities), 17 (raising funds for terrorist acts), 18 (conspiracy), 38 (membership of a terrorist organisation) and 39 (support to a terrorist organisation) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, an anti-terror law. The accused have also been booked under sections 148 (conspiracy to commit offences punishable under Section 147) and 61 (criminal conspiracy) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). Section 147 of the BNS pertains to waging war, attempting to wage war, or abetting the waging of war against the Government of India, officials said.



Artisans working on the construction of chariots ahead of the Gundicha Yatra in Puri, Odisha

Rains lash north, three dead in Himachal Pradesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Southwest monsoon advanced further over the northern states on Friday, resulting in blocked roads, waterlogged streets and rain-related deaths.

Rajasthan witnessed widespread rainfall, while moderate rains lashed Himachal Pradesh, and it was uneven across Uttar Pradesh.

Cloudy skies shrouded the national capital Delhi a day after the monsoon arrived in the city, leading to muggy and humid conditions. Meanwhile, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said the Centre is continuously monitoring the situation arising out of below-normal rainfall and "potential drought conditions" in certain parts of the country due to the 'El Nino' effect. He has directed the agriculture and other ministries concerned to remain "vigilant", according to a Government statement. Three rain-related deaths were reported in Himachal Pradesh in the 24 hours from 4 pm on Thursday. Two people were reportedly electrocuted in Kangra and Shimla districts, while another individual died after slipping from a height in Mandi district.



Delhi Power minister Ashish Sood called a Supreme Court order staying an order of his department for CAG audit of power discoms in the city as "procedural" in nature and not a "clean chit" to the power distribution companies. The Delhi Government had ordered a CAG audit of power discoms against the backdrop of a staggering Rs 38,500 crore accumulated over the years as Regulatory Assets (RA) that are to be recovered from consumers. The Court, while passing the order, said that the legality of the power regulator Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission's (DERC) decision to appoint the CAG gives rise to questions for a judicial determination. "The interim order passed by the Supreme Court is a proce-

SC stay procedural, not clean chit to discoms: Sood

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Power minister Ashish Sood called a Supreme Court order staying an order of his department for CAG audit of power discoms in the city as "procedural" in nature and not a "clean chit" to the power distribution companies.

The Delhi Government had ordered a CAG audit of power discoms against the backdrop of a staggering Rs 38,500 crore accumulated over the years as Regulatory Assets (RA) that are to be recovered from consumers. The Court, while passing the order, said that the legality of the power regulator Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission's (DERC) decision to appoint the CAG gives rise to questions for a judicial determination. "The interim order passed by the Supreme Court is a proce-



dural order intended to preserve the status quo until the legal issues are examined in detail," Sood said in a statement.

It is neither a final verdict on the merits of the case nor a clean chit to the private power distribution companies, he stated. The Court has fixed the matter for hearing on July 15, where the legal framework governing

the audit mechanism will be examined. The Delhi Government has proceeded throughout this matter with complete honesty, transparency and in accordance with law, Sood said.

"We are fully prepared to place our case before the Supreme Court on 15 July and demonstrate why an independent and rigorous CAG audit is necessary to

safeguard the interests of Delhi's electricity consumers and taxpayers," he said.

The power minister said that the Supreme Court has "recognised" that important legal questions concerning transparency and accountability in Delhi's power sector deserve detailed consideration. An interim stay is not a victory for the discoms. The Court has not held that the CAG audit is illegal and has simply preserved the existing position while examining the legal framework.

"Significantly, the Court has also directed that liquidation of the Regulatory Assets will remain stayed until further orders. We welcome this protection extended by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in public interest," Sood said. This is a "major relief" for the people of Delhi because it prevents immediate imple-

mentation of a mechanism that could have ultimately translated into a massive financial burden on electricity consumers, he said.

The "resistance" to the audit raises serious questions, Sood said and added that the urgency with which discoms have attempted to prevent the CAG audit raises obvious questions. "If there is nothing to hide, there should be no objection to an independent public audit conducted under constitutional supervision," he said.

Delhi Government is fighting to protect Delhi's consumers, said the minister and added it can not allow a potential burden of nearly Rs 38,500 crore to be transferred onto the people of Delhi through higher tariffs and surcharges without strict and independent financial scrutiny.

Delhi Govt to launch single digital platform for medical tourism services

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

From hospital selection and treatment bookings to live patient tracking, translation services and post-treatment support, Delhi Government is planning to bring medical tourism services under a single digital platform.

The Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation (DTTDC), the nodal agency for the initiative, has floated a Request for Proposal (RFP) on Friday to appoint a strategic partner that will design, develop, operate and manage the Delhi



Medical and Wellness Tourism (DMWT) Platform and the broader medical tourism ecosystem across the National Capital Territory. According to the RFP, the selected

partner will be responsible for setting up and operating an end-to-end ecosystem at its own cost, including the development of a web portal, mobile applications for patients and healthcare providers and an administrative dashboard for Government authorities and empanelled stakeholders. The DMWT platform is envisioned as a single-window system for interstate and international medical travellers seeking treatment in Delhi, it said.

It will facilitate patient registration, verification of passports and medical visas, hospital selection, treatment package booking,

payments, patient tracking, multilingual support, grievance redressal and post-treatment follow-up services. Under the implementation schedule, the selected agency will have to establish a project office in Delhi within 30 days of the contract becoming effective and submit a detailed project report and implementation plan within 60 days and the initial version of the DMWT platform is expected to be launched within 120 days, it said.

The first phase of empanelment, targeted for completion within 180 days, will include at least five Joint Commission International-accredited hospi-

tals, 25 National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers-accredited or equivalent hospitals, 15 AYUSH centres and 30 ground service providers covering transport, hospitality, language assistance and concierge services, it said.

The project also aims to integrate hospitals, doctors, AYUSH centres, diagnostic laboratories, accommodation providers and transport operators on a common digital platform. It will include standardised treatment packages with transparent pricing, enabling patients to compare healthcare options before making bookings, it said. The

strategic partner will also provide end-to-end concierge services covering medical opinion coordination, visa assistance, travel planning, airport transfers, accommodation, language interpretation, hospital admission support, discharge coordination and tele-consultation after treatment, it said, adding a dedicated multilingual contact centre will operate round the clock to assist patients throughout their treatment journey. To promote Delhi as a global healthcare destination, the selected agency will undertake branding and marketing campaigns aligned with the national "Heal in India" initiative.

FROM PAGE - 1

ED flags ₹95 crore cash trail in Maoist-hit areas

The amount of money involved was large. According to the ED, nearly ₹95 was channelled into India through this mechanism. A significant portion of cash withdrawals occurred in LWE-affected areas, particularly in Chhattisgarh's Dhamtari and Bastar regions, where around ₹6.5 crore was withdrawn. Officials described the emergence of a "parallel cash-based economy" in Naxal violence-hit zones as a serious threat to national security and financial integrity.

Such networks, they noted, could facilitate the movement of illicit funds for unlawful activities.

TTI is not registered under the FCRA, so it cannot legally receive or use foreign contributions in India. The group is accused of using foreign debit cards to withdraw cash from ATMs in different states, without using approved Indian banks or obtaining the required permissions. The ED pointed out that these repeated large cash withdrawals were especially concerning in tribal and Maoist-affected areas.

Investigators believe these actions created an unregulated financial system outside the control of the Reserve Bank of India and the Ministry of Home Affairs. The ED's findings led to the registration of criminal cases. Police later filed FIRs under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) against TTI and six people after the ED's complaint.

These issues have national security implications. By contacting the CBI, the ED wants a focused investigation under the FCRA. This would look at the entire chain of foreign funding, the possible use of shell companies or operatives in India, any destruction of digital evidence, and exactly how funds were used in LWE areas, an official said.

The penalties include imprisonment, fines, and cancellation of permissions for organisations. In cases involving national security or LWE regions, the stakes are considerably higher. The Timothy Initiative describes itself as a global evangelical ministry focused on church planting and leadership development.

The ED probe, however, centres purely on the financial and regulatory violations, not on the organisation's religious objectives. India has also

tightened scrutiny of foreign funding to prevent misuse, money laundering, and activities detrimental to the national interest. The FCRA requires anyone who wants to accept foreign contributions to register or get permission first. The reported use of debit cards to set up a parallel funding network in insurgency-affected areas has made enforcement more challenging. Officials said this case shows why strong monitoring of cross-border money flows that avoid official systems is needed.

The ED's investigation is still ongoing. More information is expected once the case is officially sent to the CBI and as experts examine the seized devices and records. As attention to unregulated foreign money entering sensitive areas remains high, security agencies and regulators will keep a close watch on developments in the CBI probe, officials added.

SC pulls the plug on CAG audit of Delhi discoms

The SC was hearing the DERC's plea against an April ruling of the APTEL, which had held that entrusting the audit to the CAG was contrary to the statutory framework and directed the regulator to appoint an independent chartered accountant for the audit. The 2025 verdict came on the petitions filed by three power distribution companies against the DERC's tariff orders that led to the ballooning of RAs.

The SC on Friday, however, stayed both APTEL's direction requiring the appointment of an independent chartered accountant for conducting the audit and the fresh CAG audit initiated by the Delhi Government. "Till further orders, there shall be a stay of the APTEL direction on appointing any chartered accountant for audit. The CAG shall also not proceed with audit in the meantime," the Court ordered.

Beijing warns Delhi over Japan pact

Prime Minister Takaichi's visit also unfolded against the backdrop of worsening ties between Tokyo and Beijing. Bilateral relations have

remained strained since her November 2025 remarks that Japan could respond militarily if China were to attack Taiwan, comments that drew a sharp reaction from Beijing.

China regards the self-governed island of Taiwan as part of its territory and has repeatedly stated that it reserves the option of using force to achieve reunification.

The India-Japan initiative on critical minerals assumes added significance as China continues to tighten controls over rare earth exports to several countries, including India, Japan and the United States. Beijing dominates roughly 70 per cent of global rare earth mining and nearly 90 per cent of processing capacity, giving it considerable leverage over supplies essential for defence equipment, electric vehicles, renewable energy technologies, electronics and other advanced manufacturing sectors.

PM Modi to begin three-nation tour on July 6

He also highlighted Indonesia's pivotal role in ensuring the security and stability of the strategically important Malacca Strait, describing it as one of India's most critical sea lanes of communication and a vital maritime corridor for global trade.

The Prime Minister will then travel to Australia from July 8 to 10, where he will participate in the third India-Australia Annual Summit in Melbourne. The summit is expected to review progress in the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and explore new avenues of cooperation in critical minerals, cybersecurity, supply chain resilience, emerging technologies and other key sectors.

The final leg of the visit will be to New Zealand from July 10 to 11, where Mr Modi will hold bilateral talks with his New Zealand counterpart, Christopher Luxon. The visit will be the first by an Indian Prime Minister to New Zealand in nearly four decades, marking a significant milestone in bilateral relations.

Earlier on Friday, Prime Minister Luxon announced Mr Modi's upcoming visit, describing India as one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies and an increasingly important partner for New Zealand's economic prosperity. Luxon said the recently signed New Zealand-

India Free Trade Agreement would take bilateral ties to the next level by boosting exports, creating jobs and expanding economic opportunities. The agreement, signed earlier this year, is expected to enhance trade in goods and services while promoting greater investment flows between the two countries.

The three-nation visit reflects India's continued emphasis on strengthening partnerships across the Indo-Pacific region through closer strategic cooperation, enhanced economic engagement and deeper people-to-people and cultural ties.

Pranks gone rogue: Govt pulls down apps that...

BAT BMS and Epoch Li-ion are battery management apps that connect via Bluetooth and aid in remotely shutting down lithium-ion batteries. The apps are being used to carry out a "prank" and disable moving vehicles. BAT-BMS works within a Bluetooth range of roughly 15 metres and can connect to multiple batteries simultaneously. The app itself is marketed as a battery monitoring and management utility rather than a vehicle control application. Some BMS units lacked password protection or robust authentication, allowing anyone within Bluetooth range to pair with the battery and disable its discharge function, effectively immobilising the vehicle.

Lossy and Epoch-i-ion (Epoch Li-ion) are similar BMS applications used with Bluetooth-enabled lithium batteries from other manufacturers. Many e-rickshaw drivers operating across Delhi's busy Metro corridors say they are living in fear after a smartphone application allegedly began shutting down their vehicles in the middle of the road without warning, leaving them stranded amid speeding traffic and exposing passengers to the risk of serious accidents.

Following the circulation of the videos, the Delhi Government has ordered a probe into the claims. Drivers plying on some of Delhi's busiest routes said that an unexpected shutdown on arterial roads could prove fatal as vehicles often travel close behind e-rickshaws, leaving little time to react.

Shree Ram, who ferries passengers between

Punjabi Bagh West Metro and Peeragarhi Metro, said the route witnesses heavy traffic throughout the day and e-rickshaws often have to wait for passengers on both ends. "I have heard that several e-rickshaws suddenly stopped on the main road. When a vehicle comes to a halt in the middle of traffic, it becomes dangerous as speeding vehicles approach from behind," Ram said. He said the situation could turn fatal for both passengers and drivers. "We constantly fear that someone may ram into us from behind," he said.

Ankush Kumar, who operates between West Enclave and Pitampura, said he initially believed repeated shutdowns were due to a battery malfunction.

"My e-rickshaw kept switching off. I thought there was a battery fault and spent Rs 500 to get it checked, but no defect was found. Later I came to know that everything was happening because of this Chinese app. When the vehicle stops, passengers refuse to pay and simply board another e-rickshaw. What may look like a joke to some people has become life-threatening for us on the road," he said.

Kumar said drivers were not only suffering financial losses but were also under constant mental stress while driving in congested traffic. Another e-rickshaw driver Anuj Kumar, who operates on the Kohat Enclave-Netaji Subhash Place route, claimed that some people were allegedly locking batteries through the application. "Some people are locking the battery using the app. Now e-rickshaw drivers also have to download the same application to unlock it in an emergency. Sometimes only the person who has the app can unlock the battery. It is creating huge problems for drivers. If the e-rickshaw stops on the main road, it becomes a major safety risk. Police should take action against such app users," Kumar added.

According to a senior Delhi Government official, the app is primarily designed to monitor battery parameters such as voltage, temperature and current in real time, but its control functions could be misused on systems that lack adequate authentication.

"There is no password or authentication. As a result, cutting the power output and bringing the vehicle to a sudden halt becomes easy," the official said.

ECI appoints 10 IAS officers as observers to oversee SIR in Odisha



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhubaneswar

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has appointed 10 senior IAS officers as Electoral Roll Observers (ERO) to oversee the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) in the state, according to a notification issued on Friday.

The draft voters' list for Odisha is scheduled to be published on July 5.

In a notification, the office of Odisha's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) named 10 senior officers as the ERO to oversee the SIR of electoral rolls in the state with effect from July 1.

They have been asked to visit the districts assigned to them at least thrice during the SIR work, the notification said. During the revision process, each officer will have to undertake at least three rounds of field visits including areas not within the district headquarters towns. The first visit will coincide with the period for receipt of claims and objections, with observers expected to be present in one of the districts under their charge on designated special campaign days, it said.

PM to launch ₹1.06 lakh crore projects in Rajasthan, Gujarat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to undertake a high-profile whirlwind tour of Rajasthan and Gujarat on Saturday, during which he will dedicate and lay the foundation stones for massive development projects worth approximately ₹1.06 lakh crore. The major highlights of the Prime Minister's multi-state itinerary include the rollout of a mega aviation connectivity scheme, the inauguration of India's premier greenfield refinery-cum-petrochemical complex, and a massive boost to the nation's semiconductor ecosystem.



On this occasion, he will launch the Modified UDAN scheme. Backed by a whopping 10-year allocation of ₹28,840 crore, this revamped initiative intends to modernise 100 unserved airstrips and establish 200 high-tech helipads across difficult terrains, heavily prioritising indigenous aircraft like the HAL Dhruv and Dornier platforms.

Moving to Balotra later in the afternoon, the Prime Minister will dedicate India's first greenfield integrated refinery-cum-petrochemical complex at Pachpadra.

Developed as a joint venture between HPCL and the Rajasthan Government with an investment exceeding ₹79,450 crore, the state-of-the-art 9 MMTPA facility aims to significantly augment the country's energy security and downstream plastic industries.

While in Balotra, Modi will also lay the foundation stone for the ₹13,000-crore Phase 2 of the Jaipur Metro Rail Project, spanning a 41-km north-south corridor with 36 stations.

His developmental packet for the desert state further

encompasses the Churu-Sadulpur and Churu-Ratangarh rail doubling projects, solar energy ventures in Bikaner by SJVN and NHPC totalling 1,300 MW, and power transmission infrastructure worth over ₹1,900 crore. In a major employment push, the Prime Minister will also distribute appointment letters to nearly 54,000 youth recruited across various Rajasthan Government departments.

Later in the evening, the Prime Minister will travel to Sanand in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, to inaugurate the state-of-the-art CG SEMI Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) facility. Established under the India Semiconductor Mission with an investment of over ₹7,500 crore, the facility boasts an ultimate capacity of manufacturing 5 billion chips annually to power AI, automotive, and 5G sectors, marking a seminal milestone in India's quest for chip self-reliance.

Environment Ministry proposes targets to curb emissions in iron and steel sector

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Environment Ministry has issued a draft notification to set legally binding emission reduction targets for the iron and steel sector under the Greenhouse Gases Emission Intensity (GEI) Target (Amendment) Rules, 2025.

The draft notification published on Thursday sets targets for 255 iron and steel

units. These include Tata Steel in Jharkhand, JSW Steel in Karnataka, and Jindal Steel and Power in Chhattisgarh.

With the draft notification, the total number of carbon-intensive industries required to comply with the framework has risen to nine, the other eight being aluminium, secondary aluminium (made from recycled scrap), petroleum refinery, petrochemical, textile industries,



cement, chlor-alkali, and pulp and paper.

All these sectors are under the purview of the country's domestic carbon market as

part of the Carbon Credits Trading Scheme (CCTS) launched in 2023.

The scheme incentivises reductions in carbon dioxide emissions and supports the country's climate action commitments under the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. If industries achieve the legally binding targets, they earn carbon credits, which can be sold to industries that fail to meet the targets.

DAC clears ₹52,000 cr military procurements

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Giving a major fillip to enhance capabilities to fight modern-day wars, the Government on Friday gave the go-ahead to proposals worth over ₹52,000 crore to procure anti-drone systems and sophisticated surveillance and intelligence-gathering satellites for the Army and IAF.



Missile (MPATGM) Systems, Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) Weapon System, Very Short Range Air Defence System (V-SHORADS), Active Protection System for Tanks and Jet-Based Kamikaze Drone System.

Akash Tarang will provide effective anti-UAV protection to the Army Formations. The MPATGM will enhance the potential of the infantry to counter mechanised threats posed by the adversary. The MRSAM system provides medium-range air defence against a variety of stand-off aerial threats.

The V-SHORADS with multi-spectral sensing will enhance counter-measure resilience and effectiveness of the Indian Army. The Active Protection System will be capable of improving the defence mechanism of tanks

and enhancing their survivability. The Jet-Based Kamikaze Drones provide better Electronic Warfare capability with greater lethality and survivability while also being cost-effective.

For the Indian Navy, approval was given for the procurement of Multi Influence Ground Mine (MIGM), Naval Shipborne Unmanned Aerial System (NSUAS) and the setting-up of Land Based Testing Facility (LBTf) for Electric Propulsion System.

The MIGM will deny freedom of manoeuvre to the adversary. The NSUAS, equipped with advanced sensors, will enhance situational awareness of the Indian Navy. The LBTf will meet the testing requirements for the motors and associated Propulsion Systems of the Indian Naval assets.

CM Suwendu offers to transform West Bengal from Didi era

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
Kolkata

Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari on Friday launched a blistering attack on his predecessor Mamata Banerjee, saying hers was the worst Government the State had seen — since Independence — and calling upon all the legislators to join him in building a democratically strong and performing Bengal.

Speaking at the opening session of a two-day orientation programme of the newly elected Members of the State Legislative Assembly, inaugurated by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, the Chief Minister said, referring to Banerjee, that "most unfortunately never since Independence Bengal fared so poorly under any Chief Minister." Adhikari's statement came in tandem with his Government's decision to seize wage distribution powers in the 125-day work scheme from the hands of the Panchayat Pradhans — often considered the 'king-makers at the lowest level'.

The Chief Minister said that during the previous Government, main policy decisions routinely came from the party offices and were not decided on the floors of the Assembly. "I don't want to launch political attacks or say negative things but only ...



place the facts before the newly elected legislators" he said, adding his Government wanted all the MLAs from all the parties to be a part of the administrative meetings, reminding how during the previous Government no opposition party MLAs were called to administrative meetings. Giving an account of how he, as an Opposition Leader was treated during the last five years by the TMC Government he said, "I was Opposition Leader for five years and was suspended for five times ... mostly during the Budget and important session when decisions were taken," advising the first timers to even those from the Opposition join him "in the development of the State together."

The Chief Minister stressed Bengal's "Gateway of the East" status, often underscored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying it was his wish to restore the democratic institutions in the State

and work towards maximising the State's natural and industrial resources under the guidance of the Prime Minister. "We now want to make Bengal stand on its feet," he said. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, who inaugurated the programme, called upon the new legislators to contribute towards building a new Bengal and carry forward the work of the renaissance by strengthening the democratic traditions, reminding them that the people's representatives were the custodians of the people's aspirations.

Stressing the growing role of technology, Birla said that the digital era had opened the doors for the legislators to access legislative debates, policy documents, and best practices from Parliament and State Legislatures. Referring to the Digital Sansad platform, he said that the Members could now benefit from a vast repository of parliamentary knowledge and comparative legislative experiences. Adhikari also proposed to introduce the digital era in the Bengal Assembly. Adhikari's discernible mention of the 15-year Mamata Banerjee rule, pockmarked with scams, came amidst his decision to free the 100-days work regime from corruption. This, even as his Government decided to seize wage disbursing power from the village panchayat pradhans. Earlier the panchayat pradhans used to decide who would get the wages under the 100 days' work scheme — now rechristened G RAM G scheme "but now the Government officials will be entrusted with that task because in most of the cases the workers' money used to the pockets of the party men or Pradhan's henchmen," Bengal Minister Agnimitra Paul said hailing the decision of the CM. There are about 147 jobs that fall within the G RAM G (Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission — Gramin) scheme, she said, driving home the point that Adhikari said, "Government has embarked on uprooting corruption from the grassroots." The Centre has upgraded the job project to 125 days per year with an upward revision of the wages from about ₹230 to ₹300 per day.

States Focus



CONGRESS, BRS SPAR OVER TELANGANA DEBT BURDEN

The ruling Congress and Opposition BRS in Telangana continued to spar for the second day on Friday over debt burden, with Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhathi Vikramarka stating that a debt of over ₹8.21 lakh crore was made during the previous BRS regime. Slamming BRS leaders KT Rama Rao and T Harish Rao for downplaying the debt burden, he also said the BRS is carrying out a Goebbels campaign against the Congress Government over various issues. He alleged that it was BRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao who "destroyed" the state when he was the chief minister. (PTI)



JAGDEEP DHANKHAR UNDERGOES ANGIOPLASTY IN JAIPUR

Former vice president Jagdeep Dhankhar underwent angioplasty at a private hospital in Jaipur on Friday, hospital sources said. Dhankhar was admitted to a hospital near Jawahar Circle for routine medical examinations. Following cardiac investigations, doctors advised angioplasty, which was performed later in the day. Sources said the procedure was part of a pre-planned cardiac evaluation.

Former chief minister Ashok Gehlot visited Dhankhar at the hospital and enquired about his health. Gehlot said Dhankhar was undergoing treatment under the supervision of noted cardiologist Dr Sameen Sharma, who had come from United States. (PTI)

Amit Shah reviews El Niño rainfall deficit, flood damage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

On Friday, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan met to discuss the impact of below-normal rainfall in some parts of the country, which has been linked to El Niño. Senior officials from important ministries, such as the Home Secretary and Agriculture Secretary, were also present.



Shah said the Government is monitoring the low rainfall and the risk of drought in affected areas. He told the Ministry of Agriculture and other related ministries to work with State Governments and guide farmers on which crops to plant. Shah also asked the

Department of Water Resources to monitor reservoir levels nationwide and suggested focusing on crops that require less water, such as fodder, millets, and pulses.

The Home Minister asked the Secretary of the Power Ministry to ensure a steady and sufficient supply of electricity. Officials told him that there are enough stocks of

important food grains like rice and wheat, and that prices are stable.

The Home Minister told the Inter-Ministerial Central Team from the Ministry of Home Affairs to visit Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to assess the damage caused by recent heavy rain, floods, and landslides. Assam has seen floodwaters rise across several districts, and Arunachal Pradesh has faced landslides and road blockages. The team's visit will help determine the extent of damage to infrastructure, farms, and homes. Secretaries from important departments, including Agriculture, Water Resources, Consumer Affairs, Fisheries, Environment, Power, Rural Development, and Science and Technology, attended the meeting. Representatives from the National Disaster Management Authority, the India Meteorological Department, the Central Water Commission, the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, and the National Remote Sensing Centre were also present.

El Niño to strengthen rapidly, risk of extreme weather: WMO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

El Niño conditions in the tropical Pacific are expected to strengthen rapidly in the coming months, increasing the risk of heatwaves, droughts, heavy rainfall and other extreme weather events across many parts of the world, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) said on Friday. The organisation's monthly 'WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update' indicates a rapid development into a strong El Niño event during July-September this year.

El Niño is one of the three phases of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), a climate phenomenon characterised by changes in sea temperatures along the



central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, accompanied by fluctuations in the atmosphere overhead.

While El Niño is known to have a warming effect on the planet, its opposite phase, called La Niña, usually results in a cooling effect. ENSO also has a neutral phase.

In a statement, WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said, "El Niño conditions are already underway and are forecast to strength-

en rapidly into a strong event as accurately anticipated by WMO forecasts.

"This will intensify the chances of drought and heavy rainfall and the risk of heatwaves on land and marine heatwaves in many regions of the world." On June 12, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) declared the onset of El Niño conditions and said that they would strengthen further during the southwest

monsoon season.

El Niño conditions typically lead to less rainfall in India. They were one of the key reasons why, in June, the country as a whole witnessed a rainfall deficit of about 40 per cent, with central India worst affected with a deficit of 50.4 per cent.

In its June 30 forecast, the IMD said the monthly average rainfall over India is expected to be below normal during July. The weather department said July is most likely to see 94 per cent of the long-period average rainfall (1971-2020). The LPA rainfall over India in July is about 280.4 mm. LPA refers to the rainfall recorded over a particular region for a given period, such as a month or a season, averaged over a long period, typically 30 to 50 years.



States Focus



SHIVAKUMAR MEETS SIDDARAMAIAH AFTER COMPLETING ONE MONTH

Karnataka Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who completed one month in his position, on Friday called on his predecessor Siddaramaiah to seek his blessings and guidance. Accompanied by his wife Usha and brother DK Suresh, Shivakumar met the senior Congress leader at the latter's residence, and they had breakfast together. "As I complete one month in office as the Chief Minister of Karnataka, I had the privilege of calling on Shri Siddaramaiah along with my family," Shivakumar posted on X, sharing pictures of the meeting. "Siddaramaiah's leadership, experience and enduring commitment to the people of Karnataka have strengthened our State's development journey. I value his guidance and blessings as we continue working with dedication to build a stronger, more progressive Karnataka," he said. (PNS)



LADAKH LG LAUNCHES JOB LINKED SKILL TRAINING PLAN

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Friday launched an employment-linked skill training programme for Ladakhi youth, under which 36 shortlisted candidates from all seven districts of the Union Territory will undergo industry-oriented residential training in New Delhi with assured placement assistance. The first batch, comprising 34 girls and two boys, was flagged off from Leh to the GMR Varalakshmi Centre for Empowerment and Livelihoods (CEL) in New Delhi, where they will undergo two to three months of training beginning in the first week of July, officials said. The initiative aims to enhance employability by equipping the youth with market-oriented skills aligned with industry requirements while creating pathways for sustainable livelihoods in organised sectors, they said. Officials said the programme is particularly significant as most of the selected candidates are travelling outside Ladakh for the first time. The trainees include two from Leh, seven each from Kargil and Drass, six from Zaskar, eight from Sham, five from Nubra and one from Changthang, they said. They will receive training in advanced computing and data visualisation, cargo and logistics, customer service, beauty and spa and service, and front office operations. (PNS)

Bengal Govt working for people, taking along all MLAs: CM Suvendu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Friday said the BJP Government in the State is trying to bring transformation in the administration by taking along all MLAs, including the Leader of Opposition, and working for the welfare of people.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of an orientation programme for the newly-elected members of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, Adhikari also said that besides the administration, even the Assembly used to function according to the directives from the ruling party's office, Adhikari said, without taking the name of the previous Trinamool Congress (TMC) Government in the State headed by Mamata Banerjee.

Before becoming the chief minister, Adhikari was the Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly from 2021 to 2026. But now, the chief minister said, he is



trying to bring changes in all spheres of the administration as well as give more responsibilities to the MPs and MLAs. He said now all MLAs and MPs, irrespective of their parties, would get an invitation from the administration for all events and meetings. "I am taking along all MLAs irrespective of the party. We are working together with the Leader of the Opposition, too," he said. Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly,

Ritabrata Banerjee, was sitting on the dais when Adhikari spoke. Ritabrata Banerjee is the leader of the rebel TMC MLAs. The breakaway faction has claimed the party's name, flag, symbol and control of its funds.

Adhikari said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government in West Bengal wants to strengthen democracy in the State and make the Assembly the best in the country. He said live telecast of the Assembly proceedings has already started, Assembly activities will be fully digitised, and other infrastructure of the House will be strengthened. "The Assembly will be people-oriented. In the coming days, Bengal will shine again," he said. Speaking on the occasion, Ritabrata Banerjee said democracy always defeats fascism and autocracy. Democracy strengthens people's rights and people's voice, he said.

Karnataka CEO orders door-to-door SIR form distribution

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Bengaluru

Karnataka CEO V Anbukumar on Friday instructed officials to issue necessary directions to all BLOs to visit houses and distribute enumeration forms for the SIR as per the ECI's guidelines. The instructions came following complaints that some Booth Level Officers were not visiting houses and were instead distributing forms from offices or other locations.

"As per the directions, guidelines and schedule issued by the Election Commission of India, distribution of enumeration forms to voters began in Karnataka on June 30. However, some complaints have been received alleging that BLOs are not visiting houses and are distributing the forms from offices," Anbukumar said in a letter to all district election officers. "In view of



the above complaints, you are hereby instructed to issue necessary directions to all BLOs to visit houses for the distribution of enumeration forms as per the guidelines of the Election Commission of India and strictly adhere to the ECI's directions and guidelines regarding all aspects of the Special Intensive Revision," he said. He said that voters who find it difficult to fill out the enumeration forms have the option of visiting Voter Facilitation Centres for assistance, and that this facility should be publicised.

Ex-DMK minister arrested for remarks against TN CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Tuticorin

Former DMK Minister Anitha R Radhakrishnan was arrested here on Friday following the Madras High Court rejecting his anticipatory bail plea relating to his defamatory speech against Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay, police said.

He was arrested while he was on a visit to Aathoor, about 23 km from here, by the police, who escorted him to the waiting police jeep.

Radhakrishnan's supporters gathered and raised slogans condemning the police for the arrest.

DMK president MK Stalin questioned the urgent need to arrest Radhakrishnan, who was conducting an inspection in his constituency, whereas the ruling TVK has not taken any steps to act on a complaint filed by a woman



Anitha R Radhakrishnan

victim over an alleged gang rape involving an MLA, he claimed. "Why the urgency. Is this the change this Government which is unable to prevent the murders, robberies and sexual crimes against women, and is engaged in admitting members from other parties, wants to ensure?" the former chief minister asked on X. If arrests were made in defamation cases, then how many ministers would be arrested for their speeches, Stalin wondered.

Policy first, low-alcohol liquor decision later: Kerala minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Thiruvananthapuram

Kerala Excise Minister M Liju on Friday said a decision on allowing the sale of low-alcohol beverages in the State would be taken only after the Government notifies its liquor policy.

Replying to reporters' queries at a press conference, Liju said Chief Minister VD Satheesan had already clarified that announcing the tax slabs did not mean such low-alcohol liquor would be sold in the State. The minister said the tax cuts mentioned in the Budget were part of the Government's projections regarding various expected sources of revenue.

He said that clauses regarding taxes on liquor in the Finance Bill would come into effect only pursuant to a Government notification. "A notification may be issued only after the Government comes out with its liquor policy," he said.

"If the policy permits the sale of low-alcohol-content liquor, the tax slabs for it are already in place. If the sale is not permitted, then that is the end of it," he added.



Kerala Excise Minister M Liju

Liju said that the LDF Government introduced low-alcohol-content liquor through its 2023 liquor policy. Chief Minister VD Satheesan had on Wednesday said in the Assembly that whether low-alcohol beverages would be allowed in the State would be decided separately as part of the UDF Government's liquor policy after wider public consultation.

Defending the UDF Government's decision to cut taxes on low-alcohol beverages, Satheesan insisted that the proposal would neither automatically come into force nor pave the way for their sale in the State.

Maharashtra introduces bill to regulate clinical establishments



Prakash Abitkar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Mumbai

The Maharashtra Government on Friday introduced a clinical establishments bill, seeking to enhance transparency and accountability by bringing all healthcare facilities under a unified regulatory framework.

Tabled by State Health Minister Prakash Abitkar, the Maharashtra Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Bill replaces the outdated Nursing Homes Registration Act of 1949, mandating registration for all hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centres, and other healthcare facilities.

According to the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill, the existing law regulates only nursing homes and maternity homes, and does not cover the wide range of healthcare institutions.

The Government has stated that the new legislation seeks to ensure transparency, accountability and adherence to minimum standards across all recognised systems of medicine. Under the proposed law, a State council for clinical establishments will be constituted to prescribe minimum standards and specify the services to be provided by different categories of clinical establishments.

Maharashtra to ban sale of Sting within 500m of schools

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Mumbai

The Maharashtra Government on Friday announced that the sale of 'Sting' energy drink and other intoxicating substances will be prohibited within a 500-metre radius of schools after concerns were raised over certain ingredients in the beverage that are considered unsuitable for children.

Replying to a question raised by BJP MLA Vikram Pachpute in the Legislative Assembly, Food and Drug Administration Minister Narhari Zirwal said the decision was taken amid concerns about the impact of energy drinks on schoolchildren. The minister said the FDA



has been directed to enforce the restriction. He also said schools have been asked to conduct awareness programmes to educate students about the health risks associated with the consumption of energy drinks. According to health experts, energy drinks are often high in caffeine and sugar. "The concerns raised

by the honourable member regarding the sale of 'Sting' energy drink in and around school premises are valid to some extent. If the sale of such energy drinks or any other intoxicating substances is found within 500 metres of a school campus, immediate action will be taken against those responsible," said Zirwal. Pachpute also asked whether the Government would introduce a rule prohibiting the sale of the energy drink to children below 18 years of age.

During the discussion, MLAs Rahul Kul and Varun Sardesai urged the Government to take stricter measures to prevent the easy availability of such beverages to children.

Never entered into alliance with BJP in Sikkim: SDF

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Gangtok

The Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) on Friday said the party has never entered into any electoral or political alliance with the BJP and has always upheld its independent political identity.

SDF Spokesperson Yojna Khaling Rai in a statement strongly rejected allegations that it had either "sold" its MLAs to the BJP or maintained a political alliance with the saffron party, asserting that both claims were "false and politically motivated".

The statement came amid the political row triggered by SDF president Pawan Chamling's recent remark that "We won't let Sikkim become another Manipur." "The SDF has never sold its



Yojna Khaling Rai

MLAs to the BJP, nor has it ever entered into a political alliance with the BJP. Political defections have been a recurring reality across India and cannot be equated with the party leadership 'selling' elected representatives. Such allegations against the SDF are baseless and ignore historical facts," Khaling said.

Defending Chamling's statement, the SDF said the remark was intended as a warning against political instability and was rooted in

concerns over recent national developments. The party alleged that the ruling SKM's growing proximity to the BJP had become increasingly visible, while maintaining that the SDF had always safeguarded Sikkim's identity, constitutional rights and political independence during its 25 years in power.

The SDF also argued that political defections have occurred repeatedly in Sikkim and across the country, making it unfair to single out the party over legislators switching sides after elections. It reiterated that maintaining cordial relations with the Union Government while in office was a constitutional obligation and should not be misconstrued as a political alliance. Reaffirming its

stand, the SDF said it would continue to prioritise the interests, identity and constitutional rights of the people of Sikkim over political expediency.

The SDF has never compromised its principles for political convenience. It has always upheld its independent identity and remained committed to the mandate and trust bestowed upon it by the people of Sikkim, the statement said.

Today, the SDF remains the only political party firmly rooted in the aspirations and interests of the Sikkimese people. Ever since the SDF openly questioned the BJP's policies and statements, a narrative has been promoted claiming that the SDF itself was responsible for bringing the BJP into Sikkim.

Punjab ends livestock tax, ending Kashmir mutton crisis

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jammu

The Punjab Government has withdrawn the levy it had imposed on vehicles transporting livestock through the state, ending the mutton supply crisis in Kashmir.

Khazir Mohammad Regoo, president of the All Kashmir Wholesaler and Retail Mutton Dealers Association, announced on Friday that the dispute over the alleged illegal levy on Kashmiri meat traders has been fully resolved.

Kashmir had been facing an acute shortage of mutton ever since the Punjab Government imposed a 4 per cent tax on vehicles carrying livestock through the state.

"The matter has been resolved after the Punjab authorities revoked the levy," Regoo said. He said the association had formed a coordination committee that camped in Punjab and took up the issue with the Government there. "Members of the coordination committee were in Punjab for the last 10 days. They met several people in the Punjab government. Thank God, the



Government there understood that it was an illegal tax and revoked it," he said, expressing gratitude to political leaders, people, and media for their support. Kashmiri traders had raised the issue with Chief Minister Omar Abdullah as well as other political leaders in the Valley. Jammu and Kashmir National Conference Spokesman, Imran Nabi Dar, in a post on X, also confirmed, "Deadlock ended! Kudos to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah for his swift intervention in resolving the Mutton crisis with Punjab.

Datia by-election triggers multi-cornered caste scramble

GIRISH SHARMA
Bhopal

The announcement of the Datia Assembly by-election has detonated a political scramble in one of Madhya Pradesh's most arithmetically complex constituencies, where no single caste commands a majority. Margins have historically been wafer-thin, and the outcome will be determined not by the strength of any one community but by the direction in which half a dozen fractured vote banks ultimately gravitate.

The BJP has moved with characteristic decisiveness, projecting former Home Minister Narottam Mishra as its singular and undisputed claimant - a heavyweight candidature designed to reclaim a seat the party lost by just 7,742 votes in 2023. The Azad Samaj Party has fielded Damodar Yadav as its sole contender, positioning itself to splinter the OBC and Dalit vote. It is within the Congress, however, that the most convulsive internal battle is raging. Disqualified MLA Rajendra Bharti - whose removal from the



Assembly triggered the by-election - is deploying every ounce of political capital to secure the ticket for his son Anuj, determined to preserve the family's custodianship of the constituency. Ranged against him is Avdhesh Nayak, a former Textbook Corporation vice-chairman who abandoned the BJP for Congress ahead of the 2023 elections.

Nayak's claim carries a particular moral sting: the party had originally declared him as its candidate in 2023 before unceremoniously substituting Bharti

following pressure from the latter's faction. Nayak now argues that his acquiescence then has earned him an irrevocable entitlement now. Former Datia MLA Ghanashyam Singh has added a third contour to the Congress's internal turbulence, further complicating the party's selection calculus.

The constituency's demographic architecture makes it among the most delicately balanced in Madhya Pradesh. Other Backward Classes constitute the dominant electoral force at approximately 95,000 voters -

roughly 53 per cent of the total electorate - but this bloc is itself splintered across multiple sub-groups: Yadavs and Kushwahas (17,000), Lodhis (15,000), Baghel-Pals (10,000) and assorted other OBC communities (20,000). No single sub-caste within this constellation commands sufficient numbers to independently swing the result.

The two largest homogeneous caste groups are Brahmins and Ahirwars, each numbering approximately 33,000 - a striking numerical parity that encapsulates the constituency's inherent volatility. The BJP has traditionally enjoyed robust support among Brahmin voters, while Congress has maintained its foothold among Scheduled Caste communities, particularly the Ahirwar segment.

The general category electorate - encompassing Brahmins, Banias, Rajputs, Kayasths and Sindhis - totals approximately 60,000, and any decisive consolidation of this vote behind one party could transform the contest from a cliffhanger into a

route. The Scheduled Caste electorate, estimated at 58,000, is anchored by the Ahirwar community but also includes Khatiks, Valmikis, Koris and Jatavs - sub-groups that hold booth-level influence capable of altering micro-margins across the constituency.

Muslim voters, numbering roughly 8,000, represent a slender but potentially decisive wedge in a contest where the last margin of victory was under 8,000. Political analysts are categorical: Datia cannot be won on the back of any single community.

The Brahmin vote, the Ahirwar vote, the Yadav-Kushwaha consolidation, the Lodhi bloc, the Muslim preference G whichever direction these five currents flow, the electoral tide will follow. The 2023 result - Congress's narrow 7,742-vote triumph - is a standing testament to this fragile equilibrium, where a marginal shift in any one demographic is sufficient to invert the outcome entirely.



Channi row: Punjab Congress rift out in open

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

Former Punjab chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi's supporters gathered at his residence in Punjab's Morinda on Friday, with many former MLAs demanding that he be made the state unit chief.

The development comes after the party's central leadership decided to retain Amrinder Singh Warring as the state unit chief. The announcement to retain Warring came on Wednesday, alongside the unveiling of the party's various committees for the 2027 Assembly polls.

Before the supporters started to gather at Channi's Morinda residence, some former party MLAs, who reached Channi's residence, told reporters that if the Congress has to come to power in Punjab in the next year's election, the former chief minister should be made the president of the State unit.

Channi is said to be miffed at not being appointed to the post. He is learnt to have not even made a customary call to thank the party leadership following the new announcements.

Channi's supporters have expressed disappointment



over not being given the post for which the former Punjab chief minister had been lobbying hard.

Among those who reached Channi's residence were former deputy chief minister OP Soni, former ministers Bharat Bhushan Ashu and Gurpreet Singh Kangar, former MP Mohd Sadiq, sitting MLA Tript Rajinder Singh Bajwa, ex-MLAs Nazir Singh Manshahia, Gurkirat Singh Kotli, Lakhvir Singh Lakha, Darshan Singh Brar and Tarsem Singh.

Before the meeting, several supporters of Channi, including some former MLAs, threw weight behind him demanding that party should

hand over reins of Punjab Congress to the ex-CM. Ex-MLA Darshan Singh Brar said, "If Channi is not made the state president, the Congress cannot form its Government in Punjab. Under Warring's leadership, the Congress cannot come to power".

Gurpreet Kangar said, "We have to go to people to seek votes and people want Channi as the state chief." Amid talks of a change in the leadership of its Punjab unit, the Congress decided to retain Amrinder Singh Warring as the State unit president.

Jalandhar MP Channi, a Dalit, who was seen as one of the main contenders for the post of Punjab Congress

NEW CRACKS EMERGING IN CONGRESS: BJP

New Delhi: The BJP on Friday claimed that "new cracks" are emerging in the Congress, citing reports that party leader Charanjit Channi is "miffed" over the latest organisational reshuffle ahead of the Punjab polls.

The attack came a day after Congress leader Manish Tewari put out a cryptic post on X, saying he wished he had an antidote for the "insecurities of individuals" and "institutions" after he was not assigned any organisational role in the latest reshuffle in the state.

Tewari shared a media report which stated that he was "left in the cold" as the Congress appointed new working presidents and set up poll panels for Punjab.

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said that the opposition party is in "tukde tukde mode" and facing infighting across states. "After Manish Tewari, now it is Channi's turn.



Tewari was upset with the Congress and tweeted about it. A day later, Channi, who is also upset with the Congress, is calling a meeting of his supporters," he said in a video statement.

Poonawalla claimed that the party was coasting headless. "It seems the Congress is giving evidence every day that it has no neta, no niti, no netriva, no mission - only confusion and division," he said.

Citing factional rivalries in several states, the BJP leader alleged that internal conflicts have become the defining feature of the Congress. (PNS)

chief, has been appointed chairperson of the campaign committee, an important position for strategising and planning the party's poll campaign.

The party also did not make any change in the position of the leader of

opposition in the Punjab Vidhan Sabha, which is currently held by Pardeep Singh Bajwa. Gurdaspreet Singh and former deputy chief minister Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa has been appointed chairperson of the core committee.

NHAI suspends officials after Dehradun Expressway cave-in

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

After a video of a section of the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway caving in went viral, NHAI has suspended the team leader of the authority engineer and the project manager of the contractor even as it said the cave-in was due to water stagnation following rains.

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) in a statement, said it has also issued show cause notices to the concerned project director, authority engineer and EPC contractor. A road surface cave-in observed on the Delhi-Dehradun Economic Corridor on July 1, 2026 was the result of localised water stagnation following rainfall the previous night, coupled with constraints in commissioning the permanent cross-drainage system at the location, NHAI said.

"NHAI regrets the inconvenience caused to NH commuters due to the road surface cave-in at a location on the Delhi-Dehradun Economic Corridor following rainfall. The section has been restored and opened for regular traffic movement," it said in a post



on X. According to NHAI, the permanent cross-drainage system at the location could not be commissioned due to sustained resistance from local residents, who did not permit integration of the balancing culvert and instead used the culvert opening as a vehicular crossing.

"Taking serious cognisance of the incident, show cause notices have been issued to the concerned project director, authority engineer and EPC contractor, while the team leader of the authority engineer and the project manager of the contractor have been suspended," it said. Following the incident, NHAI said it immediately undertook restoration works and has commenced con-

struction of an interim parallel drain to ensure safe disposal of rainwater until the permanent drainage system can be commissioned.

The affected location is under continuous monitoring to ensure safe and uninterrupted traffic movement, it added. The 213 km-long six-lane access-controlled corridor has been built at a cost of over Rs 12,000 crore.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway on April 14, 2026.

The corridor traverses through Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and reduces travel time between Delhi and Dehradun from over six hours to around two-and-a-half hours now.

Amarnath Yatra: Second batch of over 3800 pilgrims leave Jammu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

Amid tight security, the second batch of more than 3,800 pilgrims left the Jammu base camp on Friday for the Amarnath cave shrine in the south Kashmir Himalayas, officials said.

The 57-day pilgrimage to the 3,880-metre-high Amarnath cave shrine started on Friday morning simultaneously via the traditional 48-km Nunwan-Pahalgam route in the Anantnag district and the shorter but steeper 14-km Baltal route in the Ganderbal district. The yatra will conclude on August 28.

As many as 3,865 pilgrims left the Bhagwati Nagar base camp in a cavalcade of 201 vehicles escorted by security personnel and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), they said.

Of the total pilgrims, 1,735 were headed for the Baltal base camp in 115 vehicles, while 2,130 pilgrims in 86 vehicles were proceeding to the traditional Pahalgam base camp in the Anantnag district.

The atmosphere at the Bhagwati Nagar base camp was charged with devotion as pilgrims chanted "Bam Bam Bhole", "Har Har Mahadev"



Amarnath Yatra pilgrims riding ponies wave as they proceed towards the holy cave shrine via the Baltal route in Ganderbal district of J&K PTI

and "Jai Barfani Baba Ki" before embarking on their journey. Many expressed satisfaction over the arrangements made for the smooth and peaceful conduct of the pilgrimage.

On Thursday, the first batch of 4,822 pilgrims was flagged off from Bhagwati Nagar by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha. With the fresh departure, a total of 8,687 pilgrims have left the Jammu base camp for the valley since Thursday. Authorities have put in place multi-layered security arrangements along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway and at all transit camps to ensure the safe and smooth movement of the yatra convoys. A multi-tier security setup has been activated in and around the Bhagwati Nagar base camp for the annual pilgrimage.

PM EXTEND GREETINGS ON AMARNATH YATRA

New Delhi: Vice President C P Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday greeted devotees on the commencement of the 57-day Amarnath Yatra. In a two-page letter to pilgrims, Modi urged them to take five pledges, including maintaining cleanliness and promote the 'vocal for local' campaign by supporting local businesses in Jammu and Kashmir. He also asked the devotees to follow instructions related to security and traffic movement during the pilgrimage. Noting that the yatra will conclude on Raksha Bandhan, he asked pilgrims to gift their brothers and sisters a sapling to promote greenery.

BJP seeks ₹51,000 payout for women over AAP scheme delay

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

Punjab BJP chief Kewal Singh Dhillion on Friday said the Punjab Government should transfer ₹51,000 to every woman in the State, ₹1,000 for every month AAP has been in Government, for delaying financial aid promised ahead of the last elections.

Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday rolled out his Government's monthly financial assistance scheme for women - 'Mawan Dhyan Satkar Yojna', and said the AAP has fulfilled its final poll "guarantee" made ahead of the 2022 assembly elections.

Under the scheme, women from the general category will receive ₹1,000 per month, while those belonging to the Scheduled Castes will receive ₹1,500.

Mann said more than 40 lakh women have already been regis-



Punjab BJP chief Kewal Singh Dhillion

tered under the "landmark" initiative. Speaking to reporters here, state BJP chief Dhillion said Mann Government has cheated the women of Punjab.

"We demand that the Government immediately transfer ₹51,000, the total amount due for 51 months of AAP rule in Punjab, as per the third guarantee given by AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on November 21, 2021, during a programme titled 'Kejriwal di Teeji

Guarantee, Mahilavan Nu Vadhayan' in Moga," Dhillion said.

Dhillion, who was flanked by Punjab BJP leader Vineet Joshi, claimed the "delay" in the rollout of the scheme a "historic betrayal".

First, by transferring only ₹1,000 per month to general category women and ₹1,500 per month to Scheduled Caste women, the Mann Government has effectively denied the ₹51,000 due for 51 months under Kejriwal's original promise of ₹1,000 per month to every eligible woman, he said.

The AAP came to power in Punjab in March 2022. "Second, Kejriwal's guarantee was for every woman above 18 years of age in Punjab, covering more than 1.25 crore women. Yet, the Mann Government claims to have transferred money to only 36 lakh women, meaning over 89 lakh women have been denied even the promised ₹1,000 assistance," Dhillion

said. The AAP has mastered the art of misleading people through false claims and propaganda, the BJP leader alleged. He said Kejriwal had claimed at the Moga rally that he delivers on his promises.

But in reality, this promise appears to have been a calculated attempt to mislead Punjab's women and secure votes through false guarantees when Punjab polls were barely few months away, Dhillion said. Dhillion said that Kejriwal had then claimed that there was no shortage of money for the scheme and that stopping ₹20,000 crore worth of illegal sand mining would finance the initiative.

"But after AAP came to power, illegal mining has not stopped; rather it has increased manifold," Dhillion alleged. The Punjab BJP chief asserted that BJP will continue to fight for Punjab's women until every promised rupee reaches their bank accounts.

UCC bill to be passed in West Bengal Assembly in August: Senior official

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

The bill for implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in West Bengal will be passed in the assembly next month, a senior official of the state government said on Friday.

The West Bengal cabinet on Thursday approved the formation of a committee to examine the draft UCC bill and the panel will have four weeks to scrutinise the draft legislation and submit its recommendations.

"August is a month of many significant events in the country.

The Quit India movement began this month. India got independence in August.

Khudiram Bose was martyred in August and there are many other historical events. By August this year, another significant event will happen. We will pass the UCC bill in Bengal assembly," the official said.

Earlier this week, Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari formally launched the process to implement the UCC in West Bengal.

Since 2014, three states have adopted the UCC bills - Uttarakhand, Gujarat and Assam

and West Bengal is set to become the fourth. The West Bengal UCC bill aims to standardise civil laws across all communities regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption. The bill is similar to the models in Uttarakhand and Assam in key parameters.

The UCC was one of the BJP's key electoral promises in the 2026 Assembly polls. The party came to power ending the Trinamool Congress's 15-year rule in the state. Talking about the priorities of the BJP government in Bengal, the official said every month, at least two



new industries are coming to the state and the trend will continue for many months to come. Adhikari on June 12 had said that his government would bring the Tata Group back to the state.

However, he had said, the land at Singur on which Tata Motors had set up a car factory is no longer with the state government as it had been returned to the farmers by the previous Mamata Banerjee-led government.

The official also said that ever since the BJP government came to power in West Bengal, about 10,000 illegal immigrants

were handed over to the Bangladesh authorities along the border after verifying their Bangladeshi nationality.

About 1,800 more illegal Bangladeshi immigrants are kept in holding centres in West Bengal and they would also be sent back to the neighbouring country.

On June 23, Adhikari had said his government has identified thousands of illegal immigrants and begun deporting them while assuring genuine Indian citizens they would not be affected, irrespective of their faith.

Karnataka LoP questions Shivakumar's silence over Mekedatu project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

Senior BJP leader R Ashoka on Friday hit out at Karnataka Chief Minister D K Shivakumar accusing him of maintaining "silence" over Tamil Nadu Congress' warning that it would not allow even a single brick to be laid for the Mekedatu dam on river Cauvery.

Questioning whether Shivakumar was hiding out of fear of coalition politics in Tamil Nadu, the Leader of Opposition in Karnataka Assembly challenged the CM to march to Chennai now and stage a hunger strike in front of the Tamil Nadu Congress office, if he had courage.



BJP leader R Ashoka

Help the common man, LS speaker Om Birla tells new Bengal MLAs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla asked the newly elected MLAs of West Bengal on Friday to make efforts to change the life of the last person in society while fulfilling the hopes of the common people.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of an orientation programme for the newly elected members of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, Birla also said a developed West Bengal is necessary to build a developed India by 2047. He said each MLA represents their area as well as the collective aspirations of people.

"Their aim should always be to



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh, Union Minister Kiren Rijju, West Bengal CM Suwendu Adhikari, Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly Ritabrata Banerjee and others at a two-day orientation programme for the newly-elected members of the State Assembly in Kolkata PTI

change the life of the last person while fulfilling the hopes of the common people of Bengal," Birla said. He said great visionaries from West Bengal played a crucial role in social reformation and the struggle for freedom, along with spirituality, religion and culture.

"Bengal gave voice to the freedom movement with the proclamation of 'Vande Mataram'. The MLAs should work tirelessly to enrich the heritage, spiritual consciousness and cultural renaissance of Bengal again.

They should make all efforts for making India a developed country and empower the democracy with democratic dialogue," he said. The Lok Sabha speaker said there

may be agreement and disagreement, but the tradition of democracy and excellent dialogue should remain intact.

He said the newly elected MLAs should learn from the experiences of old and experienced members and study old proceedings of the Assembly. "The newly elected MLAs should have a desire to learn and understand, a desire for innovation," he said. Birla said legislative members keep themselves updated in the times of AI technology and digitalisation.

"The newly elected members should sit in the House for maximum time and listen to the statements of other MLAs," he said.

Paswan promises justice in Bharat Tiwari killing case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhojpur

Union Minister Chirag Paswan on Friday said police officials allegedly responsible for the killing of Bharat Tiwari in Bihar's Bhojpur district would face strict punishment.

Tiwari, a resident of Bilauti village within Shahpur police station limits, allegedly opened fire on a police team with an illegal firearm when officers attempted to arrest him on June 17, officials said.

Police claimed they retaliated in self-defence, during



which Tiwari sustained bullet injuries and later died while undergoing treatment.



Editor's TAKE

Delhi and Tokyo rewrite their strategic compact

As geopolitical tensions rise, Delhi and Tokyo are positioning themselves as trusted strategic partners, in an increasingly uncertain world

The optics were carefully choreographed – a ceremonial reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan, a santoor session recalling Takaichi's days as a college drummer, and Modi's warm invocation of her as "meri chhoti behen." But beneath the pageantry lay a substantive recalibration. The two prime ministers stressed the strategic salience of the India-Japan partnership in an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment and agreed to advance cooperation in three priority areas: economic security, energy resilience and technology.

That framing is telling. This is no longer a relationship built primarily on Japanese aid and infrastructure financing, the template of the past two decades. Both governments are now working to reduce vulnerabilities in global supply chains, particularly in semiconductors, critical minerals and advanced manufacturing, and – perhaps most significantly – they signed an agreement on their first joint defence co-development project, the naval radio antenna effort dubbed "Unicorn." For two countries that have historically kept defence cooperation at arm's length compared to their economic ties, this is a genuine step-change, one Modi framed as opening a new chapter in defence technology partnership. The China factor hovers over all of it, even if never named outright in the joint statements. Modi and Takaichi discussed the situation in the Indo-Pacific, a region that has witnessed growing Chinese military muscle-flexing, and the drive toward resilient supply chains is explicitly aimed at reducing dependence on China for critical minerals and active pharmaceutical ingredients. Add to this the disruption from West Asia's conflict – which has exposed vulnerabilities in the movement of critical goods and energy – and the summit reads less like ceremony and more like risk management between two trading nations trying to insulate themselves from a world of choke points. On technology, the two sides leaned into complementarity rather than competition. Modi's formulation – that the convergence of Japan's precision technology and India's software capabilities would impart new momentum to global AI development – captures the pitch both governments are making to investors: Japan brings hardware and industrial discipline, India brings scale and digital talent.

The Japan-India Economic Forum pulled in over 150 Japanese companies and produced 120 fresh business agreements, alongside pacts spanning clean energy, healthcare and biotechnology. Three takeaways stand out. First, defence cooperation has crossed a symbolic threshold, with Tokyo's review of its arms-transfer principles opening the door to deeper co-development beyond token gestures. Second, "economic security" has replaced "connectivity" as the organising vocabulary of the relationship – a shift that mirrors how both nations now think about China and West Asia simultaneously. Third, the personal rapport between Modi and Takaichi, still new to her role, suggests continuity of India-Japan warmth across a change of Japanese leadership. The biggest takeaway, however is, that Delhi and Tokyo intend to be each other's hedge against an unpredictable world – this maiden visit has done its job.

The 11 year legacy of digital India

By ensuring that technology acts as a tool for inclusion, accessibility, and sovereign strength, Digital India is quietly architecting the Viksit Bharat we envision for 2047



S KRISHNAN

Just over a decade ago, a farmer in a remote village in Uttar Pradesh had to navigate a maze of paperwork to receive subsidies or seek advisories to improve his yield. It was an era when waiting in line was the norm. Today, the same farmer can access support for his crops, and subsidies are deposited directly into his bank account without middlemen.

Walk down any street and you will witness another quiet revolution, one that has fundamentally redefined the ease of living. A local fruit seller or an autorickshaw driver who once relied entirely on the physical exchange of cash, now proudly points to a QR code hanging from his cart/autorickshaw.

India today stands empowered by a staggering 102.86 Crore connected citizens, supported by a massive broadband subscriber base of 99.56 Crore. With the cost of mobile data at an ultra-affordable 78 to 710 per GB, individual monthly data usage has scaled to an extraordinary 24.01 GB. This digital foundation has completely reimaged the relationship between the citizen and the state, anchoring it in trust, transparency, and digital autonomy.

Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Digital India has proven that technology must act as a democratic equalizer for citizens bringing them ease of living and ease of doing business.

Bridging the Divide

The first step in this revolution was democratizing access and building a robust, indigenous digital identity framework that guarantees technological self-reliance. The BharatNet initiative was deployed at scale, successfully connecting nearly 2.2 Lakh Gram Panchayats with high-speed broadband, ensuring that geography is no longer a barrier to economic opportunity.

This infrastructural leap, coupled with the generation of 144+ Crore Aadhaar identities, powered the Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile (JAM) Trinity. By utilizing this sovereign digital identity framework, the government has successfully transferred 751.5 Lakh Crore directly to citizens through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). This system has effectively eliminated leakage, removed middlemen, and dramatically improved the ease of living for millions of households by putting financial autonomy directly into their hands.

The DPI Phenomenon

Once the foundation was laid, India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) changed the every-



facilitating ease of living. Through the eSanjeevani platform, India has delivered over 48+ Crore free tele-consultations, allowing patients in remote, underserved areas to consult specialists. Similarly, the world's largest vaccination drive was powered by an indigenous platform. Over 220 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses were administered and tracked transparently through CoWIN, establishing a robust digital backbone that healthcare systems across the globe studied.

Looking at the Horizon

As Digital India completes its 11th year, the mission is firmly pivoting toward frontier technologies, ensuring they are harnessed as public goods to solve challenges for India and the Global South.

For years, the massive cost of computing power kept brilliant young innovators in smaller towns away from advanced technology. Under the IndiaAI Mission, India is systematically dismantling this barrier to boost the ease of doing business for startups. The government has established a massive, shared compute facility to democratize access. By offering world-class computing capacity to homegrown startups and students at just 765 per hour, the aim is to spark grassroots innovation. The goal is to make India the AI Applications capital of the world with our talented workforce transforming service delivery and boosting productivity in enterprises in all sectors at home and abroad.

Simultaneously, India is securing its hardware future. Under the Semicon India Programme, 12 Semiconductor manufacturing and packaging projects with an investment of 71.65 Lakh Crore have now been approved across the country. Building on this momentum, the Union Budget 2026-27 announced the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0.

This new phase goes beyond manufacturing by focusing on semiconductor equipment and materials, designing full-stack Indian Intellectual Property (IP), and fortifying global supply chains. With 24 semiconductor design startups approved under the scheme, India is rapidly translating its capacity creation into deep technological depth, nurturing a vibrant domestic fabless ecosystem that designs the very chips powering the modern world.

The true legacy of this initiative is in the mindset of a nation that now expects innovation, seamless business operations, and governance to be at its fingertips. By ensuring that technology acts as a tool for inclusion, accessibility, and sovereign strength, Digital India is quietly architecting the Viksit Bharat we envision for 2047.

TODAY, INDIA ACCOUNTS FOR NEARLY HALF OF ALL REAL-TIME DIGITAL PAYMENTS ON THE PLANET, WITH THE IMF RECOGNISING UPI AS THE WORLD'S LARGEST REAL-TIME PAYMENT SYSTEM

The writer is Secretary of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)

India's elderly are ageing faster than its care system can keep up



MURALIDHARA CP

2ND OPINION

The world is greying quickly, and India is no exception. Global health authorities project that by 2050, one in five people worldwide will be over 60 - twice the share seen in 2015. India already has 157 million people in that age group, one of the largest elderly populations anywhere, and this number will climb to 192 million by 2030. The systems meant to support them - caregiving, healthcare access, social support, and dignity in daily life - are still catching up.

From Family Care to a Vacuum

For generations, Indian families absorbed the responsibility of caring for their elders. That arrangement is unravelling. Urban nuclear families are now the norm in major cities, and adult children working in places like

Bengaluru or Gurugram often cannot provide the sustained, daily care their ageing parents need in cities like Pune or Coimbatore. Families can see the need clearly, but distance, work demands, and shifting household structures make it increasingly difficult to meet.

At the same time, seniors are entering old age with more chronic health conditions than earlier generations faced at the same stage of life. The line between simply growing older and needing real medical support is blurring faster than most communities and families are prepared for.

A Generation That Expects Better

Today's seniors are not passive recipients of whatever care is offered. Many spent their working lives in structured, professional environments, and they carry those expectations into old age - wanting transparency, accountability, and genuine dignity in how they are treated. They ask questions, compare options, and expect real answers. Any system built around old assumptions of quiet compliance is already out of step with this generation.

There's also a practical concern many families overlook: rigid housing commitments don't suit older people well. Committing to a home for retirement, then waiting years for construction to finish, or being unable to leave a community that isn't meeting one's needs, is a poor fit for someone in their 80s who needs flexibility and immediate access to care - not another long-term contract.

What Genuine Care Requires

Meaningful support for India's elderly cannot be reduced to a transaction. It requires daily health monitoring, mobility assistance, medication management, and coordinated medical attention - the kind of sustained, hands-on care that families alone can no longer reliably provide. Trust is everything in this space. Seniors and their families are making decisions about people they love, and failures - in safety, in dignity, in basic responsiveness - are felt immediately and remembered for a long time.

An Undersupplied, Underdiscussed Need

India will need care capacity for well over 5 lakh senior living arrangements by 2030, and what currently exists is fragmented and concentrated in only a few cities. Closing that gap isn't just an infrastructure problem - it's a question of how society chooses to treat its oldest members.

The demographic shift is already locked in. What remains uncertain is whether India builds a system that genuinely serves its ageing population, or one that leaves millions of older people without the care and dignity they need.

Dr. Muralidhara CP, Founder, Jeevin Consulting and Jeevin Senior Care

PIC TALK



The first batch of Amarnath Yatra pilgrims proceeds towards the holy cave shrine via the Baltal route, in Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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ALLEGATIONS DEMAND A TRANSPARENT INQUIRY

The bribery allegations surrounding the appointment of government advocates by the TVK government, now before the Madras High Court, raise serious concerns about the integrity of public appointments. Government advocates represent the State and safeguard the public interest; any suggestion that such positions were secured through bribery or favouritism undermines confidence in the rule of law.

While the allegations remain subject to judicial scrutiny, the government must respond with transparency rather than treat the matter as a routine political dispute. A government elected on promises of clean governance must demonstrate its commitment through prompt and credible action. An independent inquiry should be instituted

without delay, and the appointments under challenge should remain in abeyance until the investigation is completed.

If irregularities are established, the entire selection process must be reopened through a transparent, merit-based procedure. Such action would protect deserving candidates while restoring public confidence in the system. The Madras High Court's intervention is therefore significant.

Judicial oversight can ensure fairness and adherence to constitutional principles. Ultimately, the issue extends beyond these appointments; it concerns whether public offices are filled through merit or influence. The answer will shape public trust in governance and the administration of justice.

AP THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Privacy reforms must not compromise security

Propos "Govt seeks pause on WhatsApp usernames" (July 2). For years, WhatsApp offered end-to-end encryption but required users to disclose their phone numbers before initiating conversations, exposing an important privacy gap. Meta's decision to introduce unique usernames is therefore a welcome step, enabling users to communicate without revealing personal contact details.

The feature is especially beneficial for professionals, activists and others seeking greater control over their digital identities. However, enhanced privacy must not come at the cost of security. Usernames could also encourage impersonation, fake accounts, username squatting and phishing scams, creating new opportunities for cybercriminals and eroding user trust. The success of this feature will depend on the safeguards accompanying it. Strong identity verification, effective reporting mechanisms, proactive detection of fraudulent accounts and swift action against abuse are essential. Privacy and security are inseparable pillars of the digital ecosystem. While giving users greater control over their identities is a progressive reform, lasting confidence will depend on Meta's ability to ensure authenticity & accountability.

N. SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

Kerala sets an example in caring for seniors

Kerala has once again demonstrated its leadership in social welfare by creating an exclusive department dedicated to the well-being of senior citizens. As India's ageing population continues to grow, this initiative offers a model that other States should seriously consider adopting.

To maximise its impact, the national helpline for senior citizens, Elderline 14567, must be publicised as extensively as other emergency helpline numbers. Wider awareness will enable elderly citizens facing neglect, abuse or distress to seek timely assistance and access essential support services. Equally important is fostering respect and empathy for senior citizens among younger generations. Awareness about elderly care should begin in schools and colleges through community-based programmes that encourage meaningful interaction between students and senior citizens. Such initiatives can bridge the widening generation gap, promote mutual understanding and preserve the invaluable knowledge and experience of older people.

A compassionate society is judged by the dignity it affords its elderly. Kerala has shown the way; the challenge now is for other States to strengthen institutional support and nurture a culture where senior citizens are valued, protected and actively included in community life.

MURALI M. MALLAREDDY | VISAKHAPATNAM

India and Japan share a common goal

The recent India-Japan Annual Summit has reaffirmed the strength of one of Asia's most trusted strategic partnerships. Expanding cooperation in defence, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, rare earths and economic security reflects the shared resolve of both nations to build resilient supply chains and promote stability in the Indo-Pacific. The partnership also presents enormous economic opportunities. Japan's expertise in advanced technology, precision manufacturing and innovation complements India's large market and skilled workforce. As global businesses seek to diversify supply chains, India is well placed to emerge as a preferred destination for Japanese investment.

To realise this potential, India should establish a dedicated Japan Investment Facilitation Cell to provide sector-specific guidance, expedite clearances and offer strong post-investment support. Greater understanding of Japanese business culture, policy consistency and prompt resolution of operational concerns will further strengthen investor confidence. The next phase of bilateral ties should move towards technology transfer, and advanced manufacturing. A deeper institutional partnership can become a powerful engine of sustainable growth.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI



Cooperatives: The engine of inclusive growth and sustainable development

From dairy to banking and housing, cooperatives have shaped India's grassroots economy. As the government pushes the vision of Sahakar Se Samridhi, modernising these institutions through better governance, technology and professional management can unlock inclusive growth, and build a more resilient economy



SATISH MARATHE

As the world grapples with widening inequalities, climate change, food insecurity, financial instability and the need for sustainable economic growth, the cooperative movement has emerged as one of the most effective models of people-centric development. Cooperatives are not merely business enterprises; they are democratic institutions owned, managed and governed by their members. Built on the principles of self-help, mutual assistance, equality and collective prosperity, cooperatives have consistently demonstrated that economic growth and social justice can go hand in hand.

India has a rich cooperative tradition inspired by visionary leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Vaikunthbhai Mehta and Dhananjayrao Gadgil. They viewed cooperation not merely as an economic activity but as a powerful instrument for rural development, social harmony and empowerment of ordinary citizens. Today, as India aspires to become a developed nation by 2047, the cooperative movement is once again acquiring strategic significance in shaping an inclusive and resilient economy.

The cooperative movement in India began with the enactment of the Cooperative Credit Societies Act of 1904. Over the decades, it expanded far beyond agricultural credit to encompass dairy, banking, sugar, fertilisers, housing, fisheries, consumer services, handloom, marketing and numerous other sectors. Today, cooperatives have one of the largest grassroots institutional networks in the country, reaching almost every village and serving millions of members across urban and rural India.

Agriculture continues to provide livelihoods to a substantial proportion of India's population while supplying raw materials to numerous industries. Small and marginal farmers, who constitute the overwhelming majority of cultivators, often face fragmented landholdings, inadequate access to markets, volatile prices and climate-related uncertainties. Cooperatives provide an institutional mechanism through which these farmers can pool resources, access affordable credit, procure quality inputs, undertake collective marketing and strengthen their bargaining power.

Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), dairy cooperatives and farmer producer organisations have become indispensable pillars of rural development. Beyond credit delivery, modern cooperatives are increasingly participating in food processing, warehousing, value addition, cold storage and exports, enabling farmers to capture a larger share of the value chain. This transformation is particularly significant at a time when global food demand continues to rise and agricultural sustainability has become a worldwide concern.

The Government of India's decision to establish a dedicated Ministry of Cooperation under the vision of "Sahakar Se Samridhi" marks an important milestone in revitalising the sector. The computerisation of PACS, expansion of multipurpose cooperative societies, creation of a national cooperative database, promotion of cooperative exports and initiatives for the world's largest grain storage programme through cooperatives reflect a renewed policy commitment to strengthening grassroots institutions. The cooperative model is equally significant in financial inclusion. Cooperative banks and credit societies have historically extended banking services to areas where commercial banks found limited commercial viability. By mobilising local savings and providing affordable credit, they have supported agriculture, micro-enterprises, artisans, self-employed workers and rural entrepreneurs. Unlike purely profit-driven financial institutions, cooperatives operate on the principle of member welfare, ensuring that financial services remain accessible to economically weaker sections.

Housing cooperatives have enabled millions of middle-class families to own affordable homes, while consumer cooperatives have protected members from exploitative market practices. Dairy cooperatives have transformed India into one of the world's largest milk producers, demonstrating how collective ownership can create globally competitive enterprises. Despite these achievements, the Indian cooperative sector faces several structural challenges. Many societies suffer from dormant membership, inadequate member participation, weak governance, political interference, insufficient professional man-



agement and excessive dependence on government financial support. Financial stress arising from loan defaults, limited capital mobilisation and inadequate technological adoption has also affected the competitiveness of several cooperative institutions.

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms rather than greater governmental control. Cooperative autonomy, democratic functioning, professional management, transparent governance and accountability must remain the cornerstones of future reforms. Legislative frameworks should facilitate innovation while preserving the unique identity of cooperatives as member-owned enterprises.

The constitutional recognition accorded to cooperatives through the Ninety-Seventh Constitutional Amendment reinforced the importance of voluntary formation, democratic control and autonomous functioning. Although constitutional developments have refined its scope, the amendment remains an important milestone in recognising cooperatives as essential institutions of democratic economic development. Globally, the cooperative movement represents one of the largest socio-economic networks in the world. More than one billion people across over one hundred countries are members of cooperatives operating in diverse sectors including agriculture, finance, insurance, healthcare, retail, housing, fisheries, renewable energy and telecommunications. Millions of jobs worldwide are directly or indirectly supported by cooperative enterprises.

Countries such as Finland, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore and Norway demonstrate exceptionally high levels of cooperative participation. Kenya derives a significant share of its GDP from cooperative enterprises, while New Zealand's dairy industry owes much of its global competitiveness to farmer-owned cooperatives. Cooperative banks in Europe have consistently demonstrated financial resilience, often weathering global financial crises more effectively than investor-owned institutions because of their prudent lending practices and long-term orientation. Health cooperatives have become important providers of affordable healthcare in countries such as Brazil, Japan, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Consumer cooperatives dominate retail markets in Switzerland, Italy and Singapore, while housing cooperatives have successfully addressed urban housing challenges in Scandinavia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Electricity cooperatives continue to deliver reliable power to rural communities in the United States, Bangladesh and Argentina where private utilities have limited commercial incentives to operate. International experience also demonstrates the remarkable resilience of cooperatives during periods of conflict and economic disruption. In countries recovering from civil wars, cooperatives have helped rebuild livelihoods, restore agricultural production, revive financial systems and strengthen community trust. Their democratic character enables them to bridge social

divisions and foster inclusive local development.

However, cooperatives worldwide face emerging challenges. Rapid technological change, digital transformation, climate risks, changing consumer behaviour, cybersecurity concerns and increasing competition from multinational corporations require cooperative institutions to modernise their operations. Attracting young professionals, promoting women's leadership and embracing digital governance have become essential for ensuring long-term sustainability.

Climate change presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Cooperatives are uniquely positioned to promote climate-resilient agriculture, renewable energy, water conservation, organic farming, sustainable fisheries and community-based natural resource management. Their local ownership structure enables them to implement environmentally responsible practices while ensuring that economic benefits remain within local communities.

Digital technology offers another transformative opportunity. Integration with digital payments, e-commerce platforms, artificial intelligence, precision agriculture, blockchain-enabled supply chains and digital marketplaces can significantly enhance transparency, efficiency and market access. Cooperatives that successfully combine traditional community values with modern technology will be well positioned to compete in an increasingly digital economy.

The future of India's cooperative movement lies in creating professionally managed, technologically enabled and globally competitive institutions that remain firmly rooted in democratic values. Greater emphasis on skill development, financial literacy, innovation, entrepreneurship and cooperative education will help create a new generation of capable cooperative leaders.

As India advances towards becoming a developed economy, cooperatives can serve as powerful engines of inclusive growth by reducing inequalities, empowering farmers, generating employment, strengthening rural industries, promoting women's economic participation and ensuring equitable distribution of wealth. They represent an economic model where prosperity is created through collective participation.

The cooperative movement may not be the sole answer to every developmental challenge, but it undoubtedly constitutes one of the most effective pathways towards sustainable and inclusive progress. By combining economic efficiency with social responsibility and democratic governance, cooperatives embody the vision of development that leaves no one behind. Strengthened by progressive policies, modern technology and active member participation, India's cooperative sector can become a defining pillar of national development, transforming the philosophy of "Sahakar Se Samridhi" into a lasting reality for millions of citizens.

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The spotless kingdom: What the 'clean' countries conceal



ACHARYA PRASHANT

I have been travelling through Britain these past weeks, speaking at Cambridge, at Oxford, and in the British Parliament on freedom, self-knowledge, and the climate crisis. Last Friday evening, at the London School of Economics, I sat in dialogue with Professor Jonathan Birch on animal sentience. Professor Birch's research informed recent animal welfare legislation, and in matters of animal protection, Britain is counted among the leading nations of the world.

That same evening, I went to Richmond Park, the great royal park on the edge of London. Dusk was settling. Deer grazed on the open grass without a trace of fear; rabbits darted out of the undergrowth. At first sight the park seems to announce something admirable about the society that maintains it. Look, it says, how free these animals are, how protected! Then I learned that every year, roughly two hundred deer are killed in this very park, methodically, as a matter of policy. Richmond Park was enclosed in 1637 by Charles I as a hunting ground, and the deer were brought in for exactly that purpose. They are not native to this ground; they were imported for royal 'sport'. The centuries passed, the hunting stopped, but the deer remained inside the same walls. Now, when their numbers grow, the growth is described as a problem, and the killing is described as management. First, uproot an animal from its habitat and settle it elsewhere for your entertainment. Next, declare the settlement you created to be an ecological problem, and offer killing as its solution. The killing itself is conducted at night, in silence, so that no visitor strolling through the park the next morning has the faintest idea of what happened there in the dark.

The park photographs beautifully, and that is precisely what should give one pause. A scene can look clean for two very different reasons: because the dirt has been removed, or because the dirt has been hidden. What the park and its deer communicate is not love of animals but the performance of it. Real affection for these creatures would never have tolerated the arrangement in the first place: brought here for slaughter, kept here for display, killed here for convenience. The welfare legislation is real, the research behind it is rigorous, and the killing continues regardless.

The developed world speaks a particular vocabulary: clean energy, clean technology, clean growth. Listen to this vocabulary carefully, because it contains a confession its speakers did not intend to make.

The moment a technology is called 'clean' because it emits less carbon, a definition has been established. Cleanliness now means low carbon; dirt now means high carbon. That definition did not come from the Global South; it was authored and institutionalised by the developed nations themselves. Very well then; let the definition be applied consistently. If it holds for a machine, it must also hold for the society that runs the machine. Apply it, and the world's moral geography rearranges itself. The global average for per-capita carbon emissions stands at roughly 4.9 tonnes a year. Saudi Arabia sits near 22.8 tonnes, Australia at 22.3, Canada at 19.8, Russia at 18, the United States at 17.3. India's figure is about two tonnes per person, among the lowest of any major economy on earth, and that figure belongs to a country carrying a fifth of humanity. By the developed world's own chosen metric, the country so long dismissed as unclean stands in the front rank of the world's clean nations.

A clarification is necessary here. Nothing said so far is an indictment of any particular people, because the tendency being described is universal, and India supplies its own evidence. Watch an Indian abroad. The same person who tosses litter onto his own street without a second thought becomes, in London or Singapore, a scrupulous follower of every rule. He queues, sorts his rubbish, waits for the signal. His nationality has not changed between the two cities; his circumstances have. The change came from outside pressure rather than inner intent: from fear of fines, from surveillance, from the social shame of being seen.

Remove the pressure and the old habit walks straight back in. So the matter was never one of nation or race; it is one of circumstance, and beneath circumstance, of the ego, which bows readily to external pressure while remaining untouched within. The fine, the camera, and the disapproving glance can all discipline behaviour; none of them has ever reached the one behaving. That is why the discipline travels so poorly, evaporating the moment the enforcement does. So the real question was never whether the cleanliness exists. Anyone can see that it exists; the laws of London are proof enough. The question is what the cleanliness proceeds from. Cleanliness born of fear departs when the fear departs, and the kind born of law breaks wherever the law cannot see. As for the cleanliness maintained for display, it does not remove dirt at all; it relocates dirt to wherever the audience isn't looking, which is exactly what the emissions data and the nighttime culls of Richmond Park describe in their different vocabularies. Had there been real love of cleanliness, the response to dirt would have been its removal rather than its concealment.

The industry's demand would have been reduced rather than its address changed. The deer would never have needed the darkness. Every one of these arrangements testifies to the same thing, which is that the claim of love remains, so far, a performance of love. So what, then, does real cleanliness actually mean? The ego is the performer. The ego is the dirt within, and the same ego is what dirties the world without; a polluted interior can polish its exterior endlessly and produce nothing except dirt with a better complexion. That evening in Richmond Park stays with me. Somewhere in the coming months, on some scheduled night, about two hundred deer will quietly cease to exist, and the morning visitors will notice nothing. If carbon dioxide ever acquires a colour, the world will discover where its real dirt has been accumulating all along. Until then, the question stands open: who will render the true account of the developed world's cleanliness?

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



Ancient Indian thoughts on Intelligence for internal security



NEHA G

Over two millennia ago, long before the digital age of encryption and satellite surveillance, the foundations of sophisticated intelligence systems were laid in ancient India. From Kautilya's clinical analysis in the Arthashastra to the pragmatic diplomacy of Tiruvalluvar's Tirukkural, statecraft was viewed as a rigorous science in which information served as a vital instrument of power. These ancient texts discuss espionage, diplomacy, and governance in ways that continue to resonate in the modern era of strategic competition and information warfare.

Kautilya in his Arthashastra described a sophisticated intelligence system comparable to a modern secret service, a crucial instrument of power. Secret agents (gudha purusa) were broadly divided into stationary and mobile spies. While stationary agents reported to the ruler's chancellor, the most sensitive intelligence operations were directly supervised by the ruler himself. These stationary agents included civil servants who did routine surveillance, ascetics with religious covers, spies posing as astrologers, bankrupt farmers, artisans and merchants who monitored neighbours and customers, among others. Mobile agents, i.e. intel-

lectually sharp female agents who infiltrated wealthy homes, artists and servants who used poison to kill, assisted elite intelligence officers reporting to the ruler personally. Espionage was directed not only against enemy states but also against ally and neutral states, for example, placing secret informants at their courts.

Hence, detailed categories of people encompassing nearly all social groups operated in various locations as spies to avoid suspicion, including children when necessary. This vast network of secret agents and informants collected information about treasonable activities, corruption, serious crime, popular mood and acted as 'secret police'. Kautilya advocates techniques such as, secret agents infiltrating enemy camps to spread disinformation often as "divine proclamations" to create fragmentation within the enemy's hierarchy or to declare fictitious triumphs to inspire their own troops, using deception to propagate disunity amongst internal rivals by inducing a ruler's second or third son to attempt a revolution against their own family, tracing and unmasking of enemy agents, turning exposed enemy agents into double agents rather than discharging them, employing trained killers for covert assassinations and extra-judicial killings disguised as accident, normal crime, or natural death and staging political public relations to influence public opinion.

If the secret service detects legitimate public grievances or growing anger among sections of the population, Kautilya argues that the state must first address their root causes before resorting to



repression. Arthashastra looks at the ruler's duty to secure and expand public welfare as inseparable from the strength of the state. The secret service therefore functions not merely as an instrument of surveillance, but as an "early warning system" that alerts the ruler to social discontent and policy failures, enabling timely corrective action. Kautilya also insists that statecraft must rest on empirical data and scientific knowledge grounded in reality, rejecting magic, astrology, prophecy, or impulse. He further considers a strong economic base essential to internal stability and security. Enhancing agriculture, production, trade and tax revenue was therefore central to state power. He warns that a weak state leads to matsya-nyaya, the "law of the fishes," where the strong prey upon the weak, both within society

and in inter-state relations.

The Arthashastra has discussed four methods of statecraft (upayas) that predate it within the Indian traditional wisdom, in the order: saam (peaceful conciliation), daam (enticement or bribery), dand (force or punishment), bhed (division or sowing discord) for diplomatic relations. The Tirukkural (Kural) by Tiruvalluvar also considers diplomacy essential to maintaining stable inter-state relations. Tiruvalluvar emphasises that ministers and ambassadors must be skilled in statecraft, knowledgeable about world affairs, and capable of making prompt and impartial decisions. He also highlights the importance of persuasive and fearless communication in foreign courts. In matters of diplomacy, the Kural often adopts a pragmatic approach, advising rulers to reconcile with stronger powers while acting firmly against weaker adversaries.

Echoing the Kautilyan principle of dvaidhibhav (dual policy), Verse 875 advises that a ruler helpless against two foes should secure one as an ally to help against the other. Verse 679 further suggests to secure alliances with the enemies of one's enemies than to focus solely on existing friends.

Kautilya's views on intelligence encompass not just information collection and analysis, but also counterintelligence, i.e. manipulating the espionage picture of one's own state for the enemy in one's favour. He prioritises covert means such as subversion, sabotage and targeted operations over conventional wars that cause great human and material losses. Kautilya may seldom be cited explicitly in India's strate-

gic discourse, but his influence remains deeply embedded. Mahatma Gandhi's preference for non-violent resistance can be seen through a Kautilyan lens of realism, choosing methods that weaken a stronger adversary without incurring unsustainable costs like a traditional war.

Kamandaka's Nitisara (Nitisashtra) also advises against frequent warfare due to its destructive consequences. At the same time, he stresses the importance of safeguarding state secrets while systematically probing an adversary's vulnerabilities, an early articulation of what is today called information asymmetry. His intelligence framework is broad, extending even to monitoring weather, disasters and epidemics that could affect state stability.

The relevance of these ideas has remained unaltered through the ages. Intelligence agencies today continue to strive hard as agents not only of security but of strategic foresight - anticipating and preventing threats, preventing mishaps, shaping outcomes and protecting the nation from all kinds of threats - internal and external. Ancient Indian wisdom reveals that internal security was never viewed merely in terms of coercion or military strength, but rather as dependent upon informed governance, economic resilience, effective diplomacy and responsiveness to public grievances. In an age increasingly shaped by covert influence and hybrid threats, the above principles of intelligence continue to hold good for all times to come.

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SCBA condemns threats against MP district judge



The Supreme Court Bar Association on Friday condemned alleged threats, abusive social media campaign and acts of intimidation directed against Additional District and Sessions Judge Tabassum Khan following her judgment sentencing members of a cow vigilante group in a lynching case.

"The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) expects the High Court of Madhya Pradesh and the government of Madhya Pradesh to ensure a prompt, fair and effective investigation into the matter, identify all those responsible for issuing threats or inciting hatred against the judicial officer, and take strict action against them in accordance with law," the bar body said in a statement issued by its secretary Prayaga Baghel.

The bar body said reports indicated that the judicial officer was subjected to threats and online abuse after pronouncing a verdict in a criminal case, resulting in the registration of an FIR and the enhancement of her security. "The district judiciary is the foundation of our justice delivery system. Judicial officers across the country decide thousands of sensitive civil and criminal cases every day. They deserve the assurance that the law will protect them whenever they faithfully discharge their constitutional responsibilities," it said.

The statement said the SCBA stood firmly in support of the judge and reiterated its unwavering commitment to safeguarding the independence, dignity and impartiality of the judiciary. (PTI)

Hearing on Khan Sir's bail plea deferred till July 7



A Patna court on Thursday deferred the hearing of educator Faisal Khan, popularly known as 'Khan Sir', anticipatory bail plea in connection with the coaching institute firing case till July 7.

The case relates to a firing incident that occurred in early June after Khan Sir's coaching institute was allegedly vandalised by a group of miscreants. His security guards are accused of opening fire during the incident.

The court was also expected to hear the bail applications of both security guards of Khan Sir who are in judicial custody. "Since the district judge was absent today, the hearing took place under ADJ-2. The next hearing will take place on July 7," educator Roshan Anand's advocate Satyam Jha told PTI Video.

Reiterating the same facts, Khan Sir's advocate Arvind Kumar Mour added that the "stay on Khan Sir's arrest has been extended till July 7."

Both the advocates said that the hearing on the bail petitions of Khan Sir's two bodyguards will also take place on the same date. (PTI)

Mamata, Abhishek told to file affidavits in contempt petition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kolkata

The Calcutta High Court on Friday directed Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee and general secretary Abhishek Banerjee to file affidavits in a contempt petition alleging violation of the court's direction on blocking arterial roads during the party's July 21 Martyrs' Day rally in 2025.

The petitioner alleged contempt of the high court's order passed in May, 2018, which had directed that public meetings or gatherings on thoroughfares must not cause total blockage of the road.

A division bench presided by Justice Arijit Banerjee directed Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek Banerjee to file affidavits within the next four weeks stating their position over the allegation in the contempt petition. The court directed the



petitioner to file his affidavit in reply to the contention of the TMC leaders within the subsequent two weeks.

The division bench, also comprising Justice Apurba Sinha Ray, directed that the matter will appear for next hearing on August 17.

A division bench comprising the then Chief Justice Jyotirmoy Bhattacharya and Justice Arijit Banerjee had in 2018 directed that passage must be left on such roads for the movement of pedestrians and emergency vehicles.



SC recognises homemakers as nation builders



In 1917, Mahatma Gandhi had said: "Women are the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities, she has the right to participate in the minutest details in the activities of man, and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him." Since independence, there has hardly been any judgment that has dealt with, or examined the contribution of women in family life, nation building, and the economy. Though, primarily because of votes, from time to time, various political parties have been announcing schemes which appear to be beneficial for women.

In a recent judgment dated 11.06.2026, in the matter of Shishu Pal Vs Surjeet & Ors, a Bench of the Supreme Court of India comprising Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice N Kotiswar Singh, in a landmark judgment, dealt with several burning issues pertaining to the dispensation of justice in Motor Accident Cases and delays therein. While adjudicating the issues, the Supreme Court also recognised the contribution of women in "Home Making" and "Nation Building" and the contribution estimated at 15-17 per cent to the GDP by unpaid care giving work/household/unrecognised work.

Peculiar facts of the case were that in November, 2001, a lady/housewife died in a road accident. In December, 2003, the Motor Accident Claim Tribunal granted a meagre compensation of ₹2,42,000 only. Being aggrieved, the family



members of the deceased filed an appeal in 2004, which was allowed by the High Court in December 2024 (after a delay of 21 years), enhancing the compensation to ₹8,43,000 along with interest at 7.5 per cent from the date of filing of the petition. It was further ordered that in case the amount is not paid within 3 months, then the rate of interest would be further enhanced to 9 per cent per annum and further, in case the amount is not paid within the said period, then the rate of interest would be enhanced to 12 per cent per annum.

Not satisfied, the family members of the deceased challenged the same before the Supreme Court in 2025. The fact that the appeal before the High Court was filed in 2004 and was decided at the fag end of 2024, the Supreme Court called for the record of the appeal to find out the cause of delay. The High Court record shows that in the year 2011, a fire broke out, in which

the original record of several files got burnt and the High Court removed about 2200 cases from the list of pending cases as their files could not be reconstructed. It took almost 14 years for the reconstruction of Shishu Pal Vs. Surjeet & Ors. file. The Supreme Court took serious note of the situation that in the cases arising out of either an injury or death, the circumstances are different and beneficiary-oriented litigation in such cases should not be pending at the level of the High Court for a period of 4 years. Keeping these circumstances in mind, a bench comprising Justice Sanjay Karol had adjudicated over 100 appeals in beneficiary-oriented cases wef 11.02.2025 to 20.04.2026. In almost 50 per cent of the matters, the pendencies were over 4 years.

The Bench expressed its unhappiness over the picture of pendency and held that "in reality, the households functioning depends

substantially on the homemaker. The earning members are in fact solely dependent on the homemaker but alas, the reality does not receive the acknowledgement it deserves." The Bench took note of the recommendation issued in the tenth session of the Committee of Elimination of Discrimination against Women, wherein the quantification of the unremunerated domestic activities of women, which contribute to development in each country, reveals the de facto economic role of women. The contribution of women in home-making and Nation Building has been judicially pronounced by the Supreme Court.

In Lata Wadhwa Case (2001) 8 SCC 197, the Supreme Court had calculated compensation using the ₹3,000 per month metric. However, in Shishu Pal Case the Supreme court held that not justifiable and observed that "to measure the contributions of a

homemaker and mother as in this case in strictly Monetary Terms is a task of considerable difficulty for each and every aspect of the day, month and year of such homemaker family member is informed, shaped by her sometimes acknowledged, but most often unacknowledged or taken for granted." While discussing other case laws and in view of the peculiar facts of the Shishu Pal Case, the Supreme Court computed "loss of domestic care/ monthly income at ₹30,000 and keeping other factor such as, future prospects, multiplier deduction etc awarded the compensation of ₹62,77,900.

While concluding, in order to take care of delays at the Tribunal and High Court level, the Supreme Court directed that Claim Petitions shall be accompanied by necessary proofs such as: (i) Official proof, date of birth, (ii) Disability certificate as also the opinion of the doctor regarding functional disability, (iii) ITR/ Salary Slips issued by the employer under stamp and the seal/ certificate of salary issued by the employer under the stamp and seal, (iv) If compensation is claimed under the head of medical expenses, bills duly attested by the competent authority of the clinic/hospital/nursing homes be attached, (v) If attendant charges are claimed and such a person is already in employment, a notarised affidavit, disclosing salary paid to them, per month.

This judgment will go a long way in curtailing delays in Motor Accident Claims.

The writer is a senior advocate

NCLT reserves order on Sapphire Land Development liquidation plea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Mumbai

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has reserved its order on a petition seeking liquidation of Sapphire Land Development, triggering debate in insolvency circles over whether a company can be liquidated without completing a mandatory procedural requirement under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

The case has spotlighted a critical gap in the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP): the non-publication of Form G, the official invitation for Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from prospective resolution applicants. During the hearing, the Resolution Professional informed the tribunal that the statutory CIRP timeline had expired.

Form G was never published because the Committee of Creditors (CoC) did not approve its issuance. Suraksha Asset Reconstruction Ltd., which moved the liquidation plea, argued that the process had effectively run its course, with significant CIRP costs already incurred and no realistic chance of a successful resolution. However, Unity Small Finance Bank strongly opposed the plea, contending that the CIRP remained incomplete. The bank pointed out that Regulation 36A of the CIRP



Regulations mandates the publication of Form G to invite potential resolution applicants. In its absence, no opportunity was given to investors or bidders to submit resolution plans.

The lender further submitted that while the proposal to publish Form G was placed before the CoC, the voting process was never concluded, preventing the process from advancing to the stage of inviting, evaluating, and considering competing resolution plans. The development has raised a broader legal question: Can a corporate debtor be pushed into liquidation when a core step designed to test market interest in its revival has not been undertaken? Insolvency professionals emphasise that Form G is not a mere formality but the primary mechanism to expose distressed assets to the market and attract potential rescuers.

Skipping it, they argue, undermines the IBC's core objective of prioritising resolution over liquidation.

Legal experts are watching the NCLT's forthcoming order closely. It could set a precedent on how tribunals should handle cases involving incomplete procedural steps. Possible outcomes include directing the completion of the remaining CIRP formalities before considering liquidation, or ruling that the expiry of the statutory timeline overrides the procedural lapse.

Any liquidation order is likely to be challenged before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT), where issues concerning compliance with Regulation 36A and the IBC's preference for resolution are expected to come under judicial scrutiny.

The tribunal has reserved its order, with the decision awaited in the coming days.

Acquisition of place of worship for secular purposes not barred: HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Prayagraj

The Allahabad High Court has observed that the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 prohibits only the 'conversion' of the religious character of a place of worship from one religious denomination to another, but it does not bar the state from acquiring such properties for secular and public purposes.

The court dismissed a writ petition seeking to halt the widening and beautification of the Dalmandi area in Varanasi, a project undertaken as a part of the Uttar Pradesh government's Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham corridor development.

The petitioners, who are six tenants and shopkeepers operating in the Dalmandi area, moved the high court seeking a writ of mandamus to prevent their dispossession from the area. They also sought protection for six ancient mosques in the area that were proposed for takeover and demolition as part of the project.

Dismissing the writ petition filed by Syed Rashid Ali and six other tenants, a division bench comprising Justices JJ Munir and Arun Kumar observed, "The Act of 1991 prohibits the conver-



sion of place of worship of one religious denomination into another. It does not derogate from the state's authority to acquire any place of religious worship for a secular and public purpose like development of a road or augmentation of infrastructure or any similar activity."

The Dalmandi area is located around 800 metres from the Kashi Vishwanath temple and the six ancient mosques proposed for demolition by the administration are Anjuman Intezamia Masjid, Masjid Rangile Shah, Masjid Ali Raza Khan, Masjid Karimullah Baig, Masjid Nisaran and Masjid Sangammar.

In its 32-page judgment delivered on Thursday, the court observed that the petitioners being mere tenants and not owners of the properties in question had limited standing to challenge the acquisition process.

"We would think that the petitioners are more or less here in order to protect their business and source of livelihood rather than proprietary rights," it noted.

The court further noted that the title holders had not come forward to challenge the project emphasising that in matters of land acquisition under the 2013 Act, it is primarily the title holder who has locus to object, negotiate a sale or suffer an acquisition.

The court also was not persuaded that being Muslims, the petitioners themselves have a right to protect the mosques in question. On this, the court said, "The mosques are admittedly registered Waqf with their own Mutawalli in each case. No doubt, members of the Muslim community may come forward in certain cases, but essentially it is the Mutawalli and the Waqf Board who have to protect such properties."

SC refuses to stay bail to Sonam Raghuvanshi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to stay a Meghalaya High Court order granting bail to Sonam Raghuvanshi, accused of killing her husband during their honeymoon in the north eastern state in 2025.

A bench of Justices M M Sundresh and Sheel Nagu expressed reservation over the high court order but refused to stay it, noting that Raghuvanshi has been released from jail and is in Shillong pursuant to the bail conditions imposed by the trial court. Appearing in the court for the State, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the allegations against Raghuvanshi are serious in nature and she cannot be released on technical grounds. Mehta said the case is "really shocking" and sought a stay of the high court order granting bail as it was given citing non-supply of full grounds of arrest.

"This is the case where both of them went on honeymoon in Meghalaya. It



was a premeditated murder. There were three of her accomplices. She killed the husband on a hill and threw the dead body into a gorge. The three assailants and the lady herself were part of the physical assault. She absconded and was later arrested from a place in Uttar Pradesh," Mehta said.

If the high court order is not stayed, she may abscond, he said and referred to the order of the magistrate, who issued the order for transit remand in Uttar Pradesh and had recorded satisfaction that the grounds of arrest were supplied to her. Mehta submitted that multiple bail applications of Raghuvanshi

have been rejected and the ground of non-supply of documents was not taken in any of those. He said it was a typographical error to refer to section 403(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) instead of section 103(1) (punishment for murder) and the high court upheld the grant of bail on this ground.

When the bench asked about the stage of the trial, Mehta said the trial is going on, adding that of the 94 witnesses, four have been examined. The bench told the counsel, appearing for Raghuvanshi, "Prima facie, we have some reservation with the high court's judgment. The way the high court

has dealt with the issue, we have a reservation with that." Justice Sundresh pointed out that the grounds of arrest were explained to Raghuvanshi and it was recorded in the magistrate's order, and this ground was not raised in the previous bail applications.

"After that, somehow, wisdom dawned on you and you raised this ground. Is the court right in granting bail on the technical ground that a wrong provision was quoted, especially when bail was rejected on merits earlier?" Justice Sundresh asked. The lawyer, however, claimed that the grounds of arrest were never communicated to Raghuvanshi at any point. He submitted that the magistrate's order was for transit remand, when she was not represented by her counsel and only a memo was given to her.

Justice Sundresh asked if that is the case, could this ground be raised belatedly.

"If bail is granted only on this reason, the State is not barred under the law from arresting her again," the

bench said. The accused's counsel then submitted that she has been put to strict bail conditions by the trial court and has to remain in Shillong itself, and hence, there is no likelihood of her absconding.

The bench then noted that the accused has already been released and expressed its reluctance to stay the bail order. "If she is released, then we cannot stay the order," it said, adding that the court was under the impression that she was still under custody.

The solicitor general then attempted to persuade the bench by highlighting the gravity of the crime. He said instances of wives killing husbands are increasing and referred to the recent Lohagad case, where a woman allegedly killed her fiancé. Justice Sundresh said an element of introspection is needed from all stakeholders and referred to another case from Bengaluru.

The Meghalaya government moved the Supreme Court on Thursday against the bail granted to the prime accused in the case.



Time has come for separate AI law, says IT Secretary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India appears set to move towards a dedicated regulatory framework for Artificial Intelligence (AI), with IT Secretary S Krishnan on Friday saying the time has come to look at a separate AI regulation.

Krishnan noted that while existing legal provisions have so far been adequate in addressing initial concerns on issues like deepfakes and AI-generated synthetic content, an "additional regulation or law may be needed".

"It is a conversation which has commenced, and my Minister (IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw) and I have both



IT Secretary S Krishnan

been on record earlier that we will look at AI regulation when the time is right, and it appears that the time is getting right, and we will start looking at it," Krishnan said.

He added: "We have used the IT rules, and other provisions of existing law to address various concerns that AI raises, but now, probably the time has come to look at a separate legislation." Asked about the timelines for bringing out a new AI regulation, the IT secretary said: "As Ministry, at an

official level, what we can do is prepare draft legislation...when it finally comes out, is not something which I can comment, especially when it is a legislation."

Last month, in an interview to PTI, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had said that the current information technology law was framed much before the rapid emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and that a new legal framework may be required to deal with the changing landscape.

Vaishnaw had said discussions are on with the industry and that the Government will seek to strike a balance between innovation and regulation.

Sensex climbs 262 points in 3-day rally

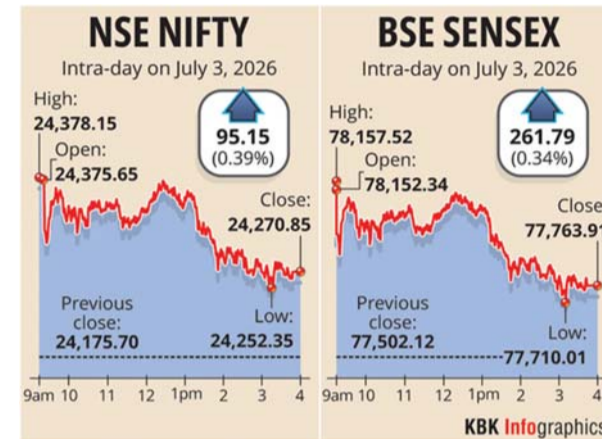
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended higher on Friday, extending their winning momentum to the third day running, amid a rally in IT stocks and a softer-than-expected US jobs data tempering expectations of near-term monetary tightening by the Federal Reserve.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 261.79 points, or 0.34 per cent, to settle at 77,763.91

markets, South Korea's Kospi rebounded nearly 6 per cent. Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index also ended in positive territory. The BSE MidCap Select index declined 0.46 per cent and SmallCap Select index dipped 0.33 per cent.

Sectorally, realty surged 2.22 per cent, focused IT jumped 1.74 per cent, IT (1.55 per cent), healthcare (1.31 per cent), commodities (0.90 per cent), metal (0.89 per cent) and telecommu-



During the day, it jumped 655.4 points, or 0.84 per cent, to 78,157.52. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up 95.15 points, or 0.39 per cent, to end at 24,270.85. From the Sensex pack, HCL Tech surged 5.79 per cent, followed by Tech Mahindra which climbed 1.81 per cent. Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, Bajaj Finserv, UltraTech Cement, Tata Steel Bajaj Finance, Tata Consultancy Services, and ICICI Bank were also among the winners.

Axis Bank, State Bank of India, Mahindra & Mahindra, and Larsen & Toubro were among the laggards. In Asian

nication (0.77 per cent). Power declined 2.39 per cent, capital goods (2.26 per cent), industrials (1.45 per cent), utilities (0.58 per cent), auto (0.42 per cent) and consumer durables (0.32 per cent). A total of 2,257 stocks advanced, while 1,986 declined and 198 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"Domestic markets closed the session higher, despite intermittent volatility and profit-booking, aided by supportive global cues and growing expectations of a more accommodative global rate environment following softer US labour market data.

UIDAI enables free email update via Aadhaar app

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The UIDAI has enabled free email update facility directly through its new app for Aadhaar holders without the need to visit any centre, according to an official statement issued on Friday.

This is a free service via the Aadhaar app only, effective July 1, 2026 for a period of six months, making it easier for residents to keep their Aadhaar information up to date, the statement said.

"The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has allowed people to add or update their email ID in Aadhaar directly through the Aadhaar App, eliminating the need to visit an Aadhaar centre.

Within two days of the new service available on the Aadhaar App, more than 250,000 people have updated their email addresses, the statement said.



"Linking email with Aadhaar helps in receiving real-time email notifications whenever an Aadhaar authentication request is executed. It enhances transparency and provides an additional layer of security by enabling Aadhaar number holders to stay informed about the use of their Aadhaar for any purpose," it said.

The new mobile application of Aadhaar has crossed 31 million (3.1 crore) downloads within five months of its launch.

To date, over 4 million people have updated their mobile numbers using the new Aadhaar app. At the same time, about one million people have used the app for updating their address.

SEBI issues unpaid securities guidelines, introduces auto-pledge system

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

SEBI on Friday came out with a regulatory framework for trading members (TMs) to handle clients' unpaid securities, introducing an auto-pledge mechanism while laying down safeguards for investors.

Under the framework, if trades executed outside the Margin Trading Facility (MTF) remain unpaid, the securities will be credited directly to the client's demat account. Instead of withholding the securities, an auto-pledge will be created in favour of a dedicated account of the trading member — the Client Unpaid Securities Pledgee Account (CUSPA) — without requiring any instruction or approval from the client. The pledge will be specifically marked as "unpaid", as per SEBI guidelines.

After the pledge is created, the TM will be required to inform the client through email or SMS about the payment obligation and the TM's right to liquidate the securities if the dues are not cleared, SEBI said in a circular.

The regulator has also directed TMs to formulate and maintain a



policy for handling unpaid securities, either as a standalone policy or as part of their risk management framework, in line with the circular and operational guidelines issued by stock exchanges.

The policy must be communicated to clients before implementation. Moreover, the policy should clearly specify the reasons, manner and timeline for invocation or release of pledge and liquidation of unpaid securities. It must also prescribe the

maximum period within which clients must meet their payment obligations, which cannot exceed five trading days from the pay-out date.

While securities pledged in the TM's CUSPA can be considered for reporting client margin collection to the Clearing Corporation, trading members will not be allowed to provide additional trading exposure against such securities, SEBI said.

As long as the client's payment obligation remains outstanding, the

TM will have to determine the maximum value of securities that may remain pledged daily, based on the client's ledger balance and overall margin obligations.

If the value of pledged securities exceeds the permissible limit, the TM must release the pledge on the excess quantity by the next trading day, in accordance with exchange guidelines. If the client fails to make payment within the prescribed timeline, the TM will invoke the pledge and liquidate the unpaid securities according to its policy, after giving reasonable notice to the client.

Upon invocation, the securities will be blocked for early pay-in in the client's demat account, while maintaining an audit trail in the TM's CUSPA account.

SEBI said that depositories will verify the block details against the client's obligations, following which the securities will be sold in the market using the respective client's Unique Client Code (UCC). Any surplus remaining after settlement of the client's dues will be credited to the client's ledger.

IEX electricity trade volumes grow 16% to 37,534 MU in June quarter



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Indian Energy Exchange (IEX) on Friday posted a 15.9 per cent on-year rise in electricity trade volumes to 37,534 million units in the first quarter of this financial year.

The uptick in trading volumes on power exchanges was largely owing to a spike in power demand primarily driven by heavy usage of air conditioners and cooling appliances as persistent heatwaves swept across North, Central, and Eastern India. In June alone, IEX achieved a monthly electricity traded volume of 12,210 million units (MUs), posting a year-on-year (y-o-y) rise of 12.5 per cent, the energy exchange said in a statement.

The Market Clearing Price in the Day-Ahead Market was at ₹5.1/unit during Q1 FY27, a rise of 15.7 per cent compared to Q1 FY26. Similarly, the Market Clearing Price in the Real-Time Market stood at ₹4.5/unit during Q1 FY27, increased by 13.8 per cent compared to Q1 FY26.

A total of 9.77 lakh renewable energy certificates (RECs) were traded during Q1 FY27, a decline of 81.4 per cent YoY. A total of 2.49 lakh RECs were traded in the trading sessions held on June 10 and 24.

Rupee gains 14 paise against dollar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

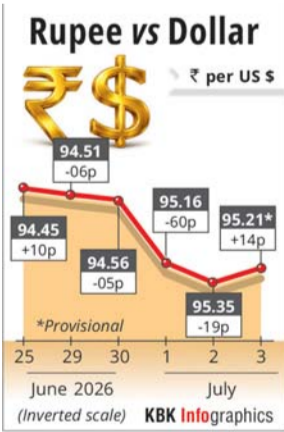
The rupee appreciated 14 paise to close at 95.21 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday as the dollar index retreated from its recent 15-month high levels and mirrored positive domestic equities.

Forex traders said despite a weaker dollar index and lower crude oil prices, the rupee is facing pressure from robust dollar demand from importers and corporate hedgers.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 95.20 against the American currency and traded in a range of 95.16-95.35 during the session.

The rupee finally closed at 95.21 (provisional), registering a rise of 14 paise from its previous close.

On Thursday, the rupee pared initial gains and settled for the day on a negative note, lower by 19 paise at



Maersk places order for 1,000 shipping containers with DCM Shriram Group

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Global shipping major AP Moller-Maersk has placed an order for 1,000 additional India-manufactured shipping containers with DCM Shriram Group.

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Friday unveiled the first export-import (EXIM) shipping container manufactured in India for AP Moller-Maersk at the Maersk-CONCOR Inland Container Depot in Dabri, Uttar Pradesh.

Maersk placed an order for 1,000 additional India-manufactured shipping con-



Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal

tainers with DCM Shriram Group during the event, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways said in a statement.

This marks the beginning of a long-term commercial partnership that is expect-

ed to strengthen India's position in the global maritime value chain, the statement added.

"The unveiling of the first India-manufactured EXIM shipping container for a leading global shipping line

is a defining milestone in our journey towards Atmanirbhar Bharat," Sonowal said. It reflects the growing confidence of global industry in India's manufacturing capabilities and our commitment to building world-class maritime infrastructure, he added.

According to the statement, the first India-manufactured container has been produced in accordance with internationally accepted quality and safety standards, including ISO specifications and the International Convention for Safe Containers (CSC), making it suitable for global deployment.

Need conducive policy to promote specialty fertilisers, says FAI

LAXMI DEVI AERE ■ Gandhinagar

The sale of specialty fertilisers such as biostimulants is on the rise in India, and a conducive policy is needed to promote such products, industry body Fertiliser Association of India (FAI) said.

The current system is designed mainly for bulk fertilisers and may not adequately support emerging products, the association said, calling for a fresh relook at the distribution system. "The sale of specialty fertilisers is on the

rise and farmers know the importance of such need-based fertilisers," FAI Chief (Statistics and IT) Kuldeep Sati said at the Specialty Fertilizer Summit & B2B Expo 2026 (SOMS 2026), being held here from July 2-4.

Fertiliser distribution is fully regulated by the Government, with movement of all major and subsidised fertilisers monitored via an online web-based system — Integrated Fertiliser Management System (IFMS), he said.

"The current system is designed mainly for bulk fertilisers and may not adequately support emerging products," he said, calling for a fresh relook at the distribution system in view of changing agricultural practices, increasing nutrient imbalance, technological advancement and sustainability concerns.

As per data, the total number of sales points for companies marketing traditional as well as specialty fertilisers stood at 3 lakh, Sati said. Sati said reforms are needed

in the fertiliser distribution system, which plays a critical role in ensuring timely availability of nutrients to more than 150 million farmers across the country.

Potential measures include bringing nano-fertilisers, liquid fertilisers, bio-fertilisers, water-soluble fertilisers and chelated micronutrients into the mainstream distribution cycle, which would improve nitrogen use efficiency, reduce nutrient losses and enhance crop quality and productivity, he said.

Highlighting the challenges in agricultural growth, he said soil health and crop response to fertiliser application are on the decline, while nutrient use efficiency of applied fertilisers remains low. Nutrient use efficiency is less than 50 per cent for nitrogen, 15-25 per cent for phosphate, 50-60 per cent for potash, 8-12 per cent for sulphur and less than 5 per cent for micronutrients, he said, adding that imbalance in the use of fertiliser nutrients remains a major issue.





FROM THE WORLD

SRI LANKA

Ex-commander arrested

Sri Lankan anti-graft agency on Friday arrested a former commander of the Navy over the irregular appointment of ex-president Mahinda Rajapaksa's son in the force. Wasantha Karannagoda, a former commander of the Sri Lanka Navy, was arrested by the Commission to Investigate Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC), according to a statement issued by CIABOC. Karannagoda is accused of enlisting Yoshitha Rajapaksa, the second son of the former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, in the Navy after altering the required qualifications in 2006. He was later sent to the British Royal Navy Academy for training at the state's expense. Yoshitha Rajapaksa was arrested last month and was granted bail after being produced before the magistrate. (PTI)

PAKISTAN

Two policemen killed in attack

Two police personnel, including a senior officer, were killed and another critically injured after unidentified gunmen opened fire on a routine police patrol in northwest Pakistan, authorities said on Friday.

The militants ambushed the police patrol party late on Thursday in Mohmand district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, close to the Afghan border. According to police, the attack took place in the Machni Agrab Dag area in Lower Mohmand subdivision, where unidentified assailants ambushed a police mobile patrol and opened indiscriminate fire. As a result, an additional station house officer and a head constable were killed on the spot, while the police vehicle driver sustained critical injuries. The bodies of those killed and the injured constable were shifted to the rural health centre. (PTI)

Vladimir Putin shrugs off fuel shortages in Russia

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Moscow

Despite severe fuel shortages across Russia, President Vladimir Putin appears unbothered by Ukraine's increasing attacks on his country's oil refineries.

He has shrugged off the setback for one of the world's leading oil producing nations as "not critical," dismissed ceasefire proposals and insisted the war will continue until his goals are met.

Putin has described the attacks on Russian energy as an effort by Ukraine to distract attention from its losses on the battlefield, although analysts say the advance of Russian forces has been stymied in recent months.

The Russian leader appears to believe his government can keep the fuel crisis from eroding his authority and support for the war he launched more than four years ago. The Russian military unleashed a massive 11-hour barrage on the Ukrainian capital overnight into Thursday morning that killed at least 21 people. It was one of the deadliest attacks on Kyiv since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion.

Here's a deeper look at the latest exchange of strikes and Putin's refusal to halt the fighting:

There have been more than 50 reported Ukrainian attacks on oil refineries and other energy facilities in

Russia and the occupied Crimea since March — a barrage Ukrainian leaders have said is intended to pressure Moscow to end the war. At the very least, the attacks have brought the war home even more poignantly for millions of Russians, shattering Putin's narrative of the conflict as something that doesn't affect the lives of ordinary people in his country. An estimated one-third of Russia's refining capacity has been cut off, according to Chris Weafer, CEO of the consultancy Macro-Advisory. The attacks have inflicted lasting damage that will be costly to fix.

Despite significant air defences protecting Russia's



capital, a top refinery in Moscow has been hit twice. The second strike on June 18 set it ablaze, damaging key equipment that will reportedly take until the end of the year to repair.

With gasoline production in Russia reduced by roughly 17% to 850,000 barrels a day, according to government statistics, rationing has been introduced in many regions, and motorists have had to wait in line for hours to refuel.

Crimea, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014, has faced the worst fuel shortages. Gasoline sales to individuals have been halted there altogether. Putin chaired a meeting of Government officials last

weekend to discuss the fuel shortages. In televised statements, he acknowledged the country was going through a "difficult period." He pledged to accelerate repairs of energy facilities and said Russia would consider importing gasoline to help make up for what he described as "temporary" shortages. He also said Russia's arms industry will boost production of air defense systems to fend off future Ukrainian attacks.

Putin portrayed the Ukrainian strikes as an attempt to divide Russian society, halt Moscow's offensive and try to force the Kremlin into negotiations on "terms advantageous to our adversary."

Overseas Pakistani remittances seen at \$44 billion next fiscal: Central bank

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi

Remittances from overseas Pakistanis are expected to reach \$44 billion in the fiscal year 2026-27, an increase from the record remittances of \$41.5 billion received in the previous fiscal, the country's central bank said on Friday.

Addressing a press conference, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Jamil Ahmed said that despite making foreign payments of over \$5 billion in the last fiscal year, Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have exceeded \$18 billion.



The SBP governor also said that due to several measures to stabilise the economy over the past four years, Pakistan's external

debt has remained stable at around the \$100 billion mark. He added that new schemes are being introduced to make fund transfers

even easier for overseas Pakistanis.

"Under these schemes, no additional financial burden will be placed on the remitters, as the transaction costs will be borne by the banks themselves," he said.

He said that between 2015 and 2022, Pakistan's external debt grew at an average of \$6 billion annually, however, since 2022, it has maintained a level of approximately \$100 billion.

The increase in foreign exchange reserves is not merely due to loans, but is the result of better economic management and

improvements in the external sector, the governor said.

Ahmed further said exports are expected to increase in the current fiscal year, while inflows through the Roshan Digital Account (RDA) are also on the rise.

RDA is a central bank facility allowing overseas Pakistanis to open and operate a bank account in the country entirely online, without visiting a branch or embassy.

The monthly inflows into RDA have risen from \$200 million over the last three months to exceed \$300 million, Ahmed said.



India-funded Nepal monastery wins UNESCO conservation award

SHIRISH B PRADHAN ■ Kathmandu

A 17th-century Buddhist monastery in Nepal, damaged in the 2015 quake and reconstructed with Indian assistance, has received an award from the UN's heritage agency for conservation.

Jestha Varna Mahavihar at Lalitpur, on the outskirts of Kathmandu, was handed over the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) award at a ceremony on Thursday. A metal plaque and an official certificate for the 2025 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation were handed over by Jaco Du Toit, UNESCO Representative in Nepal, to the Jestha Varna Mahavihar User Committee in an award handover ceremony at Lalitpur.

Jestha Varna Mahavihar was reconstructed under the government of India's post-2015 earthquake reconstruction grant in the cultural heritage sector in Nepal for

Nepalese rupees (NPR) 13.78 crore, the Indian mission in Kathmandu said in a statement. The ceremony was attended by Rakesh Pandey, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of India, and other dignitaries from Nepal.

Pandey congratulated the user community and other stakeholders as he highlighted that the success of the Jestha Varna Mahavihar project underscores the deep-rooted cultural and historical ties shared by India and Nepal. He also reiterated the government of India's continued commitment to partnering with the government and the people of Nepal in preserving and restoring the rich and shared cultural identity.

The conservation project is recognised by UNESCO for its exemplary community-centred approach, the Indian missions said, adding that it combines modern earthquake safety upgrades with the preservation of traditional architecture and detailed historical Newari woodcarvings. (PTI)

Australian PM condemns delay to social media ban for children

ROD MCGUIRK ■ Melbourne

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Friday condemned senators who blocked changes to a world-first social media ban for children, saying tech giants would use the delay to destroy incriminating documents that could be used as evidence against them.

The government this week introduced to Parliament amendments aimed at increasing powers of the eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant, Australia's online safety watchdog, to enforce the ban on Australian children younger than 16 from holding accounts on platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube that has been in place since December.

The amendments would have given Inman Grant power to demand documents as well as information from platforms about their efforts to



exclude young children. She can currently only demand information.

But the conservative opposition

Liberal Party and minor Australian Greens party referred the draft legislation Thursday to an eight-week

Senate inquiry. The centre-left Labour Party government does not hold a majority in the Senate.

"It is outrageous the delay because what the eSafety Commissioner has said very clearly is that that will allow

the platforms to go and just delete a whole lot of material," Albanese told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"Whereas if it was passed yesterday, that would have been the date from which these demands could be made by the commissioner. So then fines can be issued," he added.

The amendments would also give the commissioner power to demand information from third parties, including age assurance technology providers, to test claims made by platforms about how children continued to circumvent the ban.

The bill would double the maximum fine to 99 million Australian dollars (\$68 million) for platforms that fail to take reasonable steps to exclude children.

Greens Sen. David Shoebridge, who has always opposed the social media ban, questioned why a fine that had never been issued needed to be doubled. (AP)

UK Culture Secretary Nandy quits X over misinformation

ADITI KHANNA ■ London



ment department to exit the platform, after Attorney General Lord Richard Hermer banned his department from using X last month.

"I can understand why other departments feel they need to be on the pitch, engaging with people, but that is not where the attorney general's office needs to be," Hermer told the House of Commons Justice Committee soon after.

"I can engage with people in serious debate, detailed debate, respectful debate without being on a platform that constantly descends to racism and misogyny. I think my department can do better than that," he said. (PTI)

UK minister Lisa Nandy took to social media to announce that she and her Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will leave X, formerly known as Twitter, over its tilt towards "abuse and misinformation".

The British-Indian Culture Secretary said in a post on the Elon Musk owned social media platform on Thursday that people can continue to follow her on alternative networks such as Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

"I've decided to leave this platform and my Department will too," reads her X post. "A platform originally designed for free speech and expression now favours abuse and misinformation over meaningful debate. It isn't healthy for our democracy or our communities and I don't want to support it," she said. Nandy's move makes DCMS the second UK govern-

Body of American pilot killed in Indonesian separatist conflict recovered

NINIEK KARMINI ■ Jakarta (Indonesia),

Indonesian security forces on Friday recovered the body of an American pilot who was killed after armed separatists attacked and burned a small aircraft in the restive Papua region, a military commander said.

Nicholas F. Goselin, a pilot for Indonesian aviation company PT AMA, was shot dead Thursday shortly after he landed at the Ipdeheik airstrip in Balinggama village of the Yahukimo regency in the mountainous province of Papua Highlands.

The evacuation that involved 10 personnel from the Habema Operations Command was carried out after troops secured the remote airstrip in a rapid operation, said Brig. Gen. Riyanto, deputy commander of the operation.

Rebels armed with guns and axes raised the Morning Star flag, a symbol of Papuan independence, as they



claimed responsibility for the attack in a video distributed to the media by the West Papua Liberation Army, the armed wing of the Free Papua Movement.

A decades-old insurgency in impoverished Papua between Indigenous Papuans and Indonesian security forces has spiked in the past year, with dozens of

rebels, security forces and civilians killed. The rebels have especially targeted foreign pilots.

Contact had been lost with the airstrip shortly after Goselin reported the plane landing. It carried one pilot and seven passengers, Indonesia's Directorate General of Civil Aviation said in a statement.

There was no immediate comment from the US Embassy.

Rebel spokesman Seppy Sambom said the aircraft violated their ban on civilian flights in areas the separatist group considers its operational zones.

He alleged that civilian aircraft have been used to transport Indonesian mili-

tary personnel and logistics into Papua's remote interior. He said the American pilot was killed because the aircraft continued operating despite the group's warning. The claims could not be independently verified.

The Indonesian military denied that the plane was used to carry troops. Those on board were seven indigenous Papuan civilians, including three women. They were unharmed, the military said.

Sambom called on Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to open international negotiations aimed at resolving the decades-long conflict in Papua, which separatists say has resulted in civilian deaths and mass displacement.

"The shooting of the American pilot is the result of the failure of the Indonesian, US and Dutch governments, as well as the United Nations, to address the root causes of the conflict in Papua, which has persisted for 64 years," he said in a statement. (AP)

PM of Moldova steps down, triggering Government's resignation



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Chisinau (Moldova)

Moldova's Prime Minister Alexandru Munteanu announced Friday that he's stepping down, in a surprise move that automatically triggers the government's resignation.

Munteanu did not give a clear reason for his departure, which comes less than a year after he was sworn in to lead the European Union candidate country's pro-Western government following a tense election widely viewed as a choice between East and West.

"Today I end my term as prime minister," Munteanu wrote in a statement posted on social media. "The moment I understand that I can no longer exercise my mandate in accordance with my principles and beliefs, I choose to walk away."

He added, "I accepted the proposal to be prime minister with a lot of responsibility and strong conviction that I can contribute to changing things for the better." (AP)

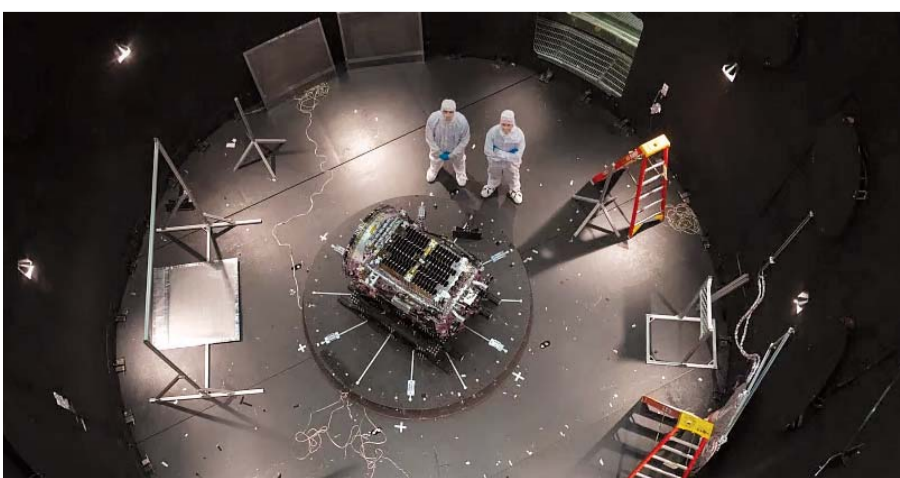
Rescue mission launches to save NASA telescope that's falling back to Earth

MARCIA DUNN ■ Cape Canaveral (US)

Launched in 2004, Swift is sinking faster than ever because of recent solar storms. NASA is paying \$30 million for Katalyst to capture the telescope and boost its orbit so it can continue tracking some of the biggest explosions in the universe, like gamma ray bursts and exploding stars.

If all goes well, Swift could be back scanning the cosmos by September. Observations are currently on hold to preserve the telescope's orbit as long as possible.

NASA's Hubble Space Telescope could be a candi-



date for a similar salvage operation in a few years. It's also slipping in altitude because of increased atmospheric drag caused by the sun's outbursts.

The 1.6-ton (1.4-metric ton) Swift is currently circling 224 miles (360 kilometres) above Earth. Katalyst aims to raise the telescope's altitude by 150 miles (240 kilometres), back to where it all began. Link's thrusters will fire to boost Swift slowly, so there's no heavy jostling.

Katalyst threw the mission together in just nine months. NASA insisted on a rush job

because the telescope will be too low to recover by the fall. Without a boost, it's predicted to plunge to its demise in October.

Bad weather and technical issues caused a series of last-minute launch delays.

"This is a high-risk, high-reward mission," Katalyst Space CEO Ghonhee Lee said ahead of liftoff. "The biggest danger was always that we don't launch anything, and we let Swift burn up in the atmosphere. So we were always trying to avoid that risk, and our team has done that." (AP)



40 killed after bus falls into ravine in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Peshawar/Islamabad

At least 40 people, including women and children, were killed when a bus they were travelling in fell into a ravine in northwest Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Friday, officials said.

The Peshawar-bound bus departed from Quetta in Balochistan. The accident took place after it reached Dera Ismail Khan district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, officials said.

Preliminary investigation suggests that the brakes of the bus failed, causing the driver to lose control while navigating a difficult bend on the mountainous terrain. The bus skid off the road and fell into the ravine.

However, an investigation has been initiated to further examine the cause, officials said. "According to initial reports, 40 people have been killed and eight others injured in the accident," said Shahid Rind, who is Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti's aide for media and political affairs.

"District administrations from both provinces, rescue and other relevant



Soldiers and volunteers taking part in a rescue work at the site of an overcrowded passenger bus plunged from a highway into a rocky ravine, in Dana Sar, a remote area near the border of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, in southwestern Pakistan on Friday. PTT

departments are providing assistance to the affected persons," he said.

According to the 1122 rescue team, there were 48 people on board when the incident happened.

The Dawn newspaper reported that 36 people were in the bus when it departed from Quetta, and the others boarded it on the way.

Deputy Commissioner of Sherani district Wali Khan Kakar said identification of the deceased and those who are injured is underway.

Road accidents are common and often fatal in the mountainous regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa because of a combination of factors like treacherous terrain, extreme weather, frequent traffic violations, poor road conditions, poor vehicle conditions and untrained drivers.

President Asif Ali Zardari has directed relevant authorities "to ensure the provision of all possible and best medical facilities to the injured", his office said in a statement, adding: "The entire nation shares equally in the grief of the affected families in this tragic incident."

Indian officials to counter US tariff move at USTR hearing

SAGAR KULKARNI
■ Washington

India is set to challenge the proposed US tariffs on exports with the US Trade Representative next week, contending that the findings on forced labour are legally flawed and would affect American businesses and consumers.

Representatives from the commerce ministry as well as industry bodies, such as APEDA, FICCI, CII and ACMA, are scheduled to present India's counter to the USTR proposal to impose tariffs at a public hearing on July 8.

India has already, in written submissions, said that the USTR's findings do not take into account the country's robust domestic legal regime reflecting a structured and progressive approach combining statutory prohibitions, institutional



mechanisms, and ongoing policy measures aimed at reducing vulnerability to forced labour.

In its counter to the proposed tariffs, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has said India's policy framework does not qualify as 'unreasonable' or 'discriminatory' under Section 301(b) of the Trade Act of 1974. The CII also asserted that India has a robust constitutional and statutory framework that ensures Indian companies cannot practice forced labour. (PTI)

Nepal eyes new markets, quality after India tightens tea imports



Fresh from a disruption to tea export to India, a government task force report has suggested focussing attention on improving the commodity's quality apart from exploring newer markets, officials said Friday.

After Indian authorities introduced strict regulation for testing Nepalese tea, export to India had halted since May 1. With diplomatic efforts by the Nepal government, the Indian authorities agreed to loosen its regulation and the export resumed from June 30.

The episode has been a learning experience for Nepal, which exports almost 86 per cent of the tea produced in Nepal to India.

The task force formed by the government to address the issues related to disruption of tea export to India, has in its report

suggested exploring alternative markets for Nepalese tea besides India, said sources at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forest and Environment. The report has not yet been officially released.

"We have now focused our attention to improve tea quality and diversify the market," Deepak Khanal, director, National Tea and Coffee Development Board of Nepal, said. "We have asked the tea producers to further enhance the quality of their products."

China, Pakistan, the US and Europe can be the alternative markets for Nepalese tea, Khanal, who is also the spokesperson for the board, Khanalsaid. He, however, said that the Indian market cannot be ignored so far as the export of Nepalese tea is concerned. (PTI)

Trump-Erdogan ties shaped NATO summit; Turkey eyes gains

SEUNG MIN KIM/SUZAN FRASER
■ Washington

President Donald Trump has berated and belittled many of his European counterparts expected to attend next week's NATO summit in Turkey. But host Recep Tayyip Erdogan has drawn on his close ties with the US president to secure his presence at the Ankara event - an appearance that may even come with a significant gift related to Turkish defence.

Trump has frequently lavished praise on the Turkish president, calling him a "hell of a leader" and a good

friend. "I would not have gone for most people," Trump said last week. "But he called me up. He said: Please, I have it in Turkey. You got to be there. The United States has to be in there." And so I'm going out of respect to President Erdogan."

Leveraging that respect has helped Erdogan avoid the disarray that the US president's absence would cause the alliance, particularly at a time when Trump has been repeatedly threatening to pull US forces from Europe and scale back America's role in NATO, unsettling allies. Trump has long



rebuked other NATO countries over their defense spending — and claimed last year's pledge to collectively boost it as a major personal win — while more recently clashing with them for failing to back his war against Iran. But Trump has sweetened the deal for Erdogan by also hinting that he could make news during his visit related to jet engines and the potential sale of F-35 fighter jets barred for years because of Turkey's closeness with

Moscow. The Republican president's affinity for strongmen leaders has long made him an admirer of Erdogan, who amassed power in Turkey first as its prime minister and now in his 13th year as president.

"His relationship with Erdogan, which is pretty strong, is consistent with what seems to be a pattern of his preference," said Philip Gordon, who served as national security adviser for Vice President Kamala Harris. "It has often been pointed out he seems to have better relationships with adversaries and autocrats, and he

certainly says nicer things about them than with allies."

Gordon, now at the Brookings Institution, added, "Erdogan is taking full advantage of it."

Trump — who is expected to have a bilateral meeting with Erdogan on the sidelines of the NATO summit — will be the first US president to visit Turkey since Barack Obama in 2015.

By contrast, US President Joe Biden's administration kept Erdogan at arm's length during his four years in office over Turkey's democratic backsliding and close ties to Russia.

The dombra continues to unite Kazakhstan through music, heritage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Astana/Kazakhstan

As Kazakhstan celebrates its rich cultural heritage, the dombra remains at the heart of the nation's identity, serving as both a cherished musical instrument and a powerful symbol of the country's history, traditions, and spirit.

Recognised as Kazakhstan's most iconic traditional instrument, the two-stringed dombra has accompanied the lives of the Kazakh people for centuries, preserving stories, historical events, and emotions through its distinctive melodies. Renowned Kazakh composer and musicologist Akhmet Zhubanov once described the dombra as "the ancient chronicle of the nomadic people and the melody of their soul," reflecting its enduring cultural significance.

Historians and ethnographers trace the instrument's origins back thousands of years. Archaeological discoveries suggest that instruments resembling the dombra were played across the Eurasian steppes between 2,000 and 6,000 years ago. Its roots are closely linked to the Altai Mountains, regarded as the ancestral homeland of many Turkic peoples, where ancient two-stringed instruments have been uncovered in caves across the Altai-Mongolian region.

Each year, Kazakhstan marks National Dombra Day with nationwide celebrations that include public performances, exhibitions, educational events, and cultural festivals. The annual observance



underscores the instrument's role in preserving national identity and strengthening appreciation for Kazakhstan's traditional arts among younger generations.

The dombra plays a central role in the performance of kui—instrumental compositions that tell stories without words. Through these works, musicians convey themes of courage, sorrow, love, wisdom, and devotion to the homeland. Over time, two major performance traditions emerged: the dynamic Tokpe style, originating in western Kazakhstan, and the lyrical Shertpe style, associated with the country's central and eastern regions.

The legacy of the dombra has been shaped by generations of celebrated composers and performers, including Kurmangazy Sagyrbayuly, Tattimbet Kazangapuly, Dina Nurpeisova, Seitke, Sugir, and Kazangap. Their compositions remain central to Kazakhstan's musical heritage and continue to be performed by artists both at home and abroad. Today, the dombra has become one of Kazakhstan's most recognizable cultural symbols on the international stage.

Singapore court sentences two Indian nationals involved in illicit remittances

GURDIP SINGH
■ Singapore

A Singapore court on Friday sentenced two Indian nationals to different terms of imprisonment for allegedly withdrawing funds from migrant workers' bank accounts and illegally sending remittances to India, a local media reported.

Cousins Angappan Arivalagan, 33, and Durairaj Kulothungan, 27, did not have licences that entitled them to carry out cross-border money transfer services and were convicted under the relevant acts, according to a report by The Straits Times.

Arivalagan was sentenced to 15 months and three weeks'



jail with a fine of SGD 6,000, while Kulothungan was handed a jail term of eight months and three weeks. The illicit transaction involved buying items with the cash Arivalagan collected from the workers and moving the items overseas, where these objects were sold for a profit.

During the COVID-19

period, Arivalagan convinced several workers living in the same dormitory as him that he could withdraw money on their behalf and arrange for the funds to be sent to India, the daily reported.

Kulothungan started working for him in March 2023 by helping to make

daily withdrawals using the workers' ATM cards, it added. In July 2023, a bystander spotted Kulothungan withdrawing large sums of cash from a Plaza Singapura ATM and called the police. Officers arrested him on-site, seizing 51 ATM cards and nearly SGD 75,000 in cash. Arivalagan was arrested the following month.

Deputy public prosecutors Daphne Lim and Teng Yin Hang said that from January to March 12, 2023, a total of SGD4,099,305 was illegally remitted from 28 bank accounts, while SGD6,166,515 was illegally remitted from 33 bank accounts from March 13 to July 2023. (PTI)

Iran prepares for days-long funeral for late Supreme Leader Khamenei

NASSER KARIMI/JON GAMBRELL
■ Tehran

Iran prepared Friday for the days-long funeral of the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with banners across Tehran urging the public to rise up in support of the Islamic Republic after the devastating war that killed the 86-year-old cleric.

The country's theocracy plans to see millions flood the streets of the capital beginning Saturday in scenes reminiscent of the burial of the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989. That could provide a boost for Iran's government, particularly as it tries to lever-

age its hold on the Strait of Hormuz in negotiations with the United States over a permanent end to the war, and as concern still lingers that Israel could attack yet again.

Despite that, a powerful general who leads Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard emerged publicly for the first time in months for the funeral. Other top government officials likely will be on hand alongside foreign dignitaries as well, in a show of strength for Iran.

"As long as these people, who are chosen (by God), are on the field, we will definitely continue the same no to humiliation" policy that was founded by the Islamic Republic," said



Foreign religious leaders and other mourners pay their respects before the coffins of slain Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and members of his family during a viewing ceremony ahead of the dayslong funeral ceremonies at the Imam Khomeini Hussainiya in Tehran, Iran on Friday. PTT

Mohammad Hossein Rezaei, a volunteer preparing for the funeral on Friday.

"We will continue our policy of pursuing independence, and decisions will be

made inside the country, and the people will decide their own fate," he said.

Khamenei's flag-draped coffin sat at Tehran's Grand Mosalla alongside family

members killed in the Israeli airstrike that came in the first moments of the war on February 28. The dead being honored include a son-in-law, his eldest daughter, a 14-month-old granddaughter and the wife of Iran's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of the previous leader who remains in hiding after reportedly being wounded in the attack.

Religious leaders and foreign dignitaries walked up to Khamenei's casket as a military band played or a man sang prayers.

A video published by Iranian state media showed an earlier mourning ceremony on

Thursday night for Khamenei. The black-clad mourners, whom state media identified as coming from families of those who lost loved ones in the 12-day war in 2025 and the recent Iran war, threw scarves and other items for attendants to brush against the coffin, a common practice in Iran seen as a blessing.

Later, state media showed images of Khamenei's casket draped by a red flag with white calligraphy reading "Ya Hussein," a Shiite expression in remembrance of the 7th-century martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson. It had been flying over the Imam Hussein golden-domed shrine in Karbala, Iraq.

Deaths surged 29% in France during week of record heat, says health agency

JOHN LEICESTER
■ Paris

Deaths surged by nearly a third in France during the hottest week of a record heat wave last month, the country's public health authority said Friday, reporting at least 2,000 more deaths than in the previous week when temperatures were already climbing and filling emergency wards with heat victims.

The new and still incomplete figures from Public Health France doubled its first preliminary estimate of at least 1,000 additional deaths that it gave last Sunday. That earlier estimate covered just

three of the hottest days of extreme, deadly heat.

In Paris, funeral service directors have said they've struggled to find places to store bodies before burial or cremation, with some mortuaries saying they were full and having to turn bodies away.

The updated tally of deaths from Public Health France spans the week of June 22 to June 28, during which France saw its hottest-ever days and records shattered for peak daytime and nighttime temperatures in many cities and towns across the country. The heat also broke temperature records in many other parts of Europe.



Public Health France said it has counted 8,973 deaths so far for that week, cautioning that the number is still only partial. It said the preliminary total was 29 per cent more than the 6,948 deaths registered for the previous week of June 15 to June 21, when the

heat wave started.

The difference between the two sets of figures - a total so far of 2,025 - is therefore considered to be additional deaths from one week to the next, from all causes and covering all age groups, it said.

At the Paris-Saclay Hospital,

patients suffering from heat exposure started arriving in a surge on June 20, Dr Nicolas Gonzales, head of the emergency department, told The Associated Press.

He said they treated heat victims for heart attacks, dehydration, kidney malfunctions and other heat-related problems, from children to older people living alone.

Public Health France said there was a particularly sharp increase week-on-week in the number of deaths in private homes, with those figures up 91 per cent. Deaths in care homes for older people increased by 37 per cent and in hospitals by nearly 20 per cent. (AP)

Pakistan PM Sharif, Army chief Munir pay tributes to Khamenei

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
■ Islamabad

A high-level delegation from Pakistan led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday paid tributes to Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was assassinated in US-Israeli strikes in February, in Tehran.

Sharif, Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, Deputy PM & Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and other senior officials attend-



PM Shehbaz Sharif waves before departing to Iran to attend funeral ceremonies for Iran's late supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at Nur Khan airbase in Rawalpindi, Pakistan on Friday. PTT

ed the funeral of Ayatollah Khamenei.

Sharif recalled the contributions of the late supreme leader for Islam and "paid rich tribute" to Ayatollah Khamenei, who guided the Iranian nation for decades, with remarkable wisdom and sagacity, his office said in a statement.

He expressed full solidarity with the new Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Hosseini Khamenei, President Masoud Pezeshkian and the people of Iran in this moment of "national grief," it added.



PROSPECT

CBI books ex-STC CMD, 6 former officials, KS Oils

The CBI has registered an FIR against former State Trading Corporation CMD, six ex-officials and KS Oils Ltd over alleged irregularities in extending ₹75 crore in trade finance for mustard oil purchases between 2010 and 2014, officials said on Friday. The CBI has alleged that STC extended trade finance to KSOL without proper due diligence, issued Letters of Credit (LC) beyond the approved limit, shell and front companies were used as suppliers of mustard oil and LC proceeds were routed back to the company, according to the FIR. The agency said in the FIR – registered after over a year of preliminary enquiry – that a false storage quality certification was issued and timely recovery action was not taken, causing wrongful loss to STC and corresponding wrongful gain to the accused persons and entities. KSOL Chairman Ramesh Chand Garg and Director Davesh Agarwal had approached STC for trade finance for the purchase of mustard oil, it said. (PNS)

Lakhipur's Kew Pineapple enters Dubai market



Renowned for its exceptional sweetness and organic quality, Lakhipur Pineapple has already made its way to Dubai, bringing global recognition to the hard work and dedication of our farmers. The Kew variety of pineapple grown in Lakhipur is among the finest varieties in India and stands as a testament to the region's rich agricultural potential.

This initiative will strengthen post-harvest management, enhance market linkages and create greater opportunities for our pineapple growers. We remain committed to empowering our farmers and unlocking the full potential of Cachar's world-class pineapple. The programme was graced by Rahul Gupta, DC Cachar, Sandeep Saha, Regional Head (NER & Ladakh), Dhruvajyoti Pathak, CDC, Lakhipur, Raktim Baruah, ADC, Cachar, Pijush Rai, Assistant Commissioner, Cachar, Dr Sunil Pareek, Professor & Dean, NIFTEM, Evan T Munsong, DGM, NABARD, Dr Rahul Chakraborty, District Agriculture Officer, Reena Singh, Chairman, All Manipuri Development Council, and Mirinal Kanti Das, Chairman Lakhipur MB. (PNS)

MOC launches new cancer care centre in Faridabad

The Mumbai Oncocare Centre (MOC) has inaugurated a new facility in Faridabad, expanding its presence in North India and strengthening access to specialised cancer services across NCR. The facility was inaugurated by Dr YK Gupta, President, AIIMS Kalyani, West Bengal and Principal Advisor India Strategy Development – Global Antibiotics Research and Development Partnership. This centre is the 31st cancer centre by MOC. MOC has impacted the lives of over five lakh cancer patients and administers more than 85,000 chemotherapy treatments annually. The Faridabad centre adds to the organisation's footprint aimed at making specialised oncology care more accessible and affordable. (PNS)

ED auctions seized business jet for ₹3 crore in Ponzi case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Hyderabad

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday said it has auctioned a seized business plane for ₹3 crore as part of a money laundering investigation against a Hyderabad-based company and its promoters on charges of duping investors through a multi-crore Ponzi scheme.

The Hawker 800A aircraft, parked at the Rajeev Gandhi International Airport at Shamshabad in Telangana's capital city, was seized by the central agency's Hyderabad zonal office in March 2025 during searches in the case against the company named Capital Protection Force Pvt Ltd.

The ED subsequently moved an application before the Adjudicating Authority of the Prevention of Money Laundering (Taking possession of attached or frozen properties confirmed by the Adjudicating Authority) Rules, 2013, seeking permission to sell the seized aircraft, the agency said in a statement.

The adjudicating authority allowed the ED to auction the seized aircraft in November 2025, it said.

The plane was auctioned through Metal Scrap Trade



ED team auctions jet

Corporation Ltd (MSTC) on July 1 for a sale consideration of ₹3 crore, according to the ED.

This money shall be utilised by the ED for restitution to the genuine investors in accordance with the provisions of the PMLA, subject to the leave of the Special Court established under the anti-money laundering law,

it said. The money laundering case stems from an FIR filed by the EOW of Cyberabad Police against Capital Protection Force Pvt Ltd. (Falcon Group), its CMD Amardeep Kumar and some others.

It was alleged that the accused "defrauded" a large number of investors through a Ponzi scheme to the tune of ₹792 crore on the pretext of returning a higher amount to the investors that was received under an invoice discounting scheme, though no such actual business was carried out.

The agency had arrested three persons in this case, including Kumar's brother Sandeep Kumar, Chartered Accountant Sharad Chandra Toshniwal and CEO of Falcon Invoice Discounting Aryan Singh Chhabra. It also filed a charge sheet in this case in September last year.

BRO builds 180-foot Bailey Bridge in Kurung Kumey



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Itanagar

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has completed the construction of a 180-foot Bailey Bridge in the remote Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh, boosting critical connectivity to forward border areas. Executed under Project Arunank, the bridge was launched by the team of 85 Road Construction Company (RCC) and 756 Border Roads Task Force in extremely challenging conditions, marked

by relentless rainfall, flash-flood risks and treacherous mountainous terrain. Officials stated that BRO personnel worked day and night to overcome severe logistical and environmental obstacles during their deployment.

The newly completed triple-double reinforced (TDR) Bailey bridge is expected to significantly enhance the movement of security forces, equipment and essential supplies in the sector while also serving as a vital lifeline for local residents living in remote border pockets.

Red Shield Division conducts security conference under military-civil fusion initiative



TONY DAS
Guwahati

As part of the ongoing Military-Civil Fusion initiative, the Red Shield Division under the aegis of Spear Corps organised a Security Conference at Laipul on July 1, 2026, in preparation for the forthcoming Independence Day celebrations. The conference was aimed at strengthening inter-agency coordination and reviewing the overall security framework to ensure the peaceful and secure conduct of Independence Day.

The conference was attended by Army officials and representatives of the Assam Police, including the

SSP, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh.

Deliberations focused on intelligence sharing, coordinated preventive measures, proactive security planning and enhanced inter-agency synergy to effectively address emerging security challenges.

The conference concluded with all stakeholders reaffirming their commitment to seamless coordination and a unified approach towards ensuring a safe, secure and incident-free Independence Day. Through such collaborative initiatives, the Indian Army continues to strengthen mutual trust with civil agencies and contribute towards maintaining peace, security and stability in the region.

Tata Power-DDL secures 7 convictions in electricity theft cases in FY 2026-27

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

To combat the issue of power theft and ensure disciplined electricity usage, Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL) has secured 7 convictions in electricity theft cases so far in FY 2026-27, including the recent conviction from Patiala House Courts. The special court has sentenced the offender to undergo one month of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of ₹10,000, along with civil liability of ₹379,124/-.

The case pertains to an electricity theft complaint received by Tata Power-DDL's Corporate Enforcement Group, following which an inspection was conducted on February 17, 2023, at an unauthorised jhuggi located opposite WZ-462, near the Pump House, Village Todapur, Dasghara, Delhi.

During the inspection, Devi Prasan, son of Raj Kumar, originally a resident of Haryana, was found dishonestly abstracting electricity for domestic use by



directly tapping the LT Network Distribution Box through illegal wires connected to the premises. The enforcement team assessed a connected load of 7.408 kW, with electricity being illegally used for domestic purposes, including the operation of multiple electrical appliances, commercial use of a concrete mixer machine, and charging of e-rickshaws. The theft assessment was calculated at ₹3,79,124/-.

The inspection proceedings were documented through photographs and videography, while the illegal wires used for theft were removed and seized as evidence.

After examining the inspection report, seizure memo, site plan, photographs, videographic evidence and testimonies of the enforcement team, the Court of Syed Zishan Ali Warsi, Additional Sessions Judge, Patiala House Courts, found Devi Prasan guilty of power theft punishable under Sections 135 and 150 of the Electricity Act, 2003, and sentenced him to one month of rigorous imprisonment with a fine of ₹10,000. He was further held liable to pay civil liability of ₹3,79,124/- under Section 154(5) of the Electricity Act for using electricity illegally.

The conviction reinforces

Tata Power-DDL's continued efforts to curb electricity theft through regular enforcement drives and sustained legal action while sending a strong message that power theft is a punishable offence carrying both criminal and financial consequences.

Commenting on the development, spokesperson, Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited, said, "Such judgements help reinforce disciplined usage of electricity in Delhi. This conviction further strengthens our resolve to eradicate the menace of power theft from our area of operations. We continue to appeal to consumers to avoid unethical practices and act as responsible consumers."

Beyond ensuring a reliable power supply, these actions reflect Tata Power-DDL's focus on providing sustainable and affordable electricity, supporting community development, and strengthening customer experience through continuous engagement and a nuanced understanding of customer needs.

DAILY SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

HOW TO SOLVE IT

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



SOLUTION (3.7.26)

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

DOUBLE CROSSWORD SATURDAY | JULY 4, 2026

ACROSS
1 Is he less clever than Dick? (5)
6 Charges that bring tears? (5)
9 Huge lad, upset, took things lightly? (7)
10 Demand 150, an excellent figure (5)
11 Those in the leaves of tangled vines? (5)
12 A number observed to be about five (5)
13 Various ways to get money? Nuts! (7)
15 Fade a lot, that is (3)
17 One or many men, maybe (4)
18 Agatha's maybe robbed of an article, and shocked (6)
19 Fur bundled in bales (5)
20 Where the plug goes for a receiver (6)

DOWN
2 What can be used for lubricating? (6)
3 Affiliation seeming trivial to a blockhead (6)
4 Plant that comes up in May (3)
5 Gapes at an unlucky goal conceded by Les (5)
6 It's taken when Reg. being mad, is out to get even (7)
7 A large stream of uninvited entrants (4)
8 It can be bad for the elbow, sport (6)
12 It transpires in waste disposal (5)
13 When dogs go to earth, it means

22 The team I had in the Kentish area (4)
24 Before leaving Everest? (3)
25 Nominally the person to sort out a riot? (7)
26 Space in which to do wrong to us (5)
27 The mug I sent broken (5)
28 Was she a saucy singer? (5)
29 Needing no organ transplant was capital (7)
30 Only one customer's requirement in a series (5)
31 Second choice article in gold (5)
trouble (5)
14 Because a music centre can be nice? (5)
15 One holding the boat up? (5)
16 Three can be useful in hospital (5)
18 False name as used in Dakar (5)
19 Marines in studios assembly (7)
21 His speech may seem endless! (6)
22 One may be so in order to listen (6)
23 Can you drink one twice? (6)
25 A critic of the legal system? (5)
26 A stable parent? (4)
28 Being low, it obviously isn't a full moon (3)

SOLUTION (3.7.26)

ACROSS
3. Idles (slide)
8. Not-Ch.
10. Im-age
11. Her
12. Stage
13. Honesty
15. Have-n
18. W-ar
19. Strode
21. Leg-ally

DOWN
1. Nohow
2. Screwed
4. Du-ty
5. Eighty
6. Smeat
7. Ogled
9. Ten
12. Strayed
16. V-o-tes
17. Neath

19. Slu-MBE-F
20. Deign
21. Lemon
23. S-wart-hy
24. Settle
25. Era
27. Lo-re
28. Vesta
30. Re-play
32. Lean
33. Na-y

ACE India, KATO Japan join hands for global market in cranes sector

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Action Construction Equipment (ACE) Limited, India's leading construction equipment manufacturer and the world's largest pick-and-carry crane manufacturer, and KATO Works Co., Ltd., Japan's globally recognised manufacturer of mobile cranes and construction machinery, announced ACE KATO Pvt. Ltd., their 50:50 joint venture company that will manufacture high-capacity cranes in India for domestic and global markets.

ACE KATO Pvt. Ltd has been incorporated to establish a dedicated manufacturing platform for truck cranes, crawler cranes and rough terrain cranes, catering to infrastructure, transportation, mining, ports, energy, metro rail, industrial and other heavy-duty applications.

The joint venture has established an 11-acre manufacturing facility in Haryana with a planned investment of approximately ₹200 crore. The investment will support manufacturing infrastructure,



advanced production systems, technology integration and product development, with additional investments to be made in phases to expand capacity and strengthen the company's manufacturing capabilities.

Under the partnership, KATO will lead product engineering, design and technology, while ACE will be responsible for manufacturing, sourcing and localisation. The product roadmap will initially focus on the development and manufacturing of truck, crawler and rough-terrain cranes, followed by the phased introduction of more crane models.

The products will be manufactured in India for customers across domestic and

international markets, reinforcing the vision of 'Made in India for the World'.

Commenting on the announcement, Sorab Agarwal, Executive Director, ACE Limited, said, "ACE KATO Pvt. Ltd. marks a defining milestone in ACE's growth journey and reinforces our long-term commitment to strengthening India's construction equipment manufacturing ecosystem."

Commenting on the partnership, Tomoyasu Kato, Director, KATO Works Co., Ltd., said ACE has established itself as one of India's most respected construction equipment manufacturers with strong manufacturing capabilities, a robust supplier ecosystem and an extensive market presence.

Dhairya retains top spot in ACAD QUAD school category

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Patna

Dhairya Pandey of Don Bosco Academy, Patna, has retained his top national rank for the second consecutive month in the School category of the online crossword challenge ACAD QUAD. The results for June of the year-long contest have been announced.

The remaining three categories – College, Senior, and Global – have seen new winners. Om Kumar Jha of NIT Manipur topped the College category, while R. Uma of Chennai secured first position in the Senior category. In the Global category, veteran Ramki Krishnan stood at the apex of the merit list.

The 2nd and 3rd positions across the four categories also featured several new winners, indicating increased participation from crossword enthusiasts. In the School category, Prashant Kumar Lency of Allen Career Institute, Kota, and Sahil Kumar of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar Residential School, Bharra, Begusarai, Bihar, won the 2nd and 3rd spots respectively.

In the College category, Shivam Kumar Jha of IIT Manipur and Pranav Kumar Jha of Muzaffarpur Institute of Technology secured 2nd and 3rd positions.

The Senior category saw Sree Prakash of Ernakulam and N. Rengaswamy of Chennai take 2nd and 3rd place.

कार्यालय नगर निगम, देहरादून

पत्रांक-619/INCAP/2026-27

(ई-निविदा सूचना)

दिनांक 03/07/2026

नगर निगम देहरादून द्वारा निम्नानुसार आपूर्ति/कार्य किये जाने हेतु ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है तथा निविदा से सम्बन्धित समस्त विवरण ई-निविदा पोर्टल www.uktenders.gov.in से प्राप्त किये जा सकते हैं।

कार्य का विवरण	निविदा शुल्क (18% जीएसटी सहित)	घरोहर राशि (EMD @ 2% of Estimated Cost)	निविदा डाले जाने की प्रारम्भिक एवं अंतिम तिथि	निविदा खोलने की तिथि एवं समय
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नगर आयुक्त नगर निगम, देहरादून



BRIEFLY

Napoli hires former Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri



Serie A runner-up Napoli officially hired Massimiliano Allegri as coach on Friday. The news had been expected for weeks, since Antonio Conte confirmed he was leaving Napoli at the end of May and AC Milan fired Allegri following "an unequivocal failure" of a season. Allegri has signed a three-year contract at Napoli.

He steered Milan to the Serie A title in 2011 in his first stint in charge of the Rossoneri, and also led Juventus to five league titles and as many Italian Cup trophies.

The 58-year-old Allegri returned to Milan last year tasked with taking the Rossoneri back to the Champions League after the team finished eighth in Serie A the previous season. However, despite spending much of the campaign in the top two positions and fighting for the title, a run of only two wins in Milan's last eight matches dropped it to fifth on the last day of the season.

Napoli, which was plagued by injury problems all season, finished second. Conte had steered the team to the Serie A title the previous campaign, in his first year in charge.

Conte is one of the leading candidates to take over the Italian national team, for what would be his second stint as Azzurri coach. (AP)

Klopp signals willingness to take over as Germany coach



Julian Nagelsmann has resigned as Germany coach after his team failed to make the World Cup round of 16 for the third tournament running, and former Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp is in line to take over.

Nagelsmann's departure, announced on Friday by the national soccer federation, comes four days after Paraguay stunned Germany on penalties in the round of 32 and follows talks with his bosses.

The federation said it planned to speak to Klopp and "he has already signaled his willingness in general to take on the role."

It would be Klopp's first coaching job since leaving Liverpool in 2024.

Nagelsmann initially said he'd stay on with Germany on a contract which had another two years to run and reportedly made him among the highest-paid coaches at the World Cup. He faced mounting criticism over his tactics and team selection at the tournament.

Germany's defeat in the round of 32 followed group-stage losses at the 2018 World Cup in Russia and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, when it was a 32-team tournament. It has not won a men's World Cup knockout game since beating Argentina in the 2014 final. (AP)

Switzerland moves on to knockout stage

ANNE M PETERSON ■ Vancouver

Switzerland finally broke through with a win in a World Cup knockout match.

Breel Embolo and Dan Ndoye both scored and the Swiss advanced to the round of 16 at the World Cup with a 2-0 victory over Algeria on Thursday night.

Switzerland will play the winner of Friday's match between Colombia and Ghana in Kansas City, Missouri. The round-of-16 game is set for next Tuesday in Vancouver.

Switzerland had not won a knockout-round match since 1938 in France, but in 1954 the team won a playoff game to reach the quarterfinals.

Although the Swiss reached the round of 16 at the past three World Cups, there was a smaller field of 32 teams in each of those tournaments, and they could get no further.

"Today we write one page of history, but we want more, and we work for more," Ndoye said.

"I think we show that we are a strong team, and now we need to



show it in the next game, and we hope again to the next game."

Celebrating the victory, the Swiss players sat on the field as they were serenaded by their fans. As the song reached a crescendo, the players jumped up and danced.

Algeria was eliminated after returning to the World Cup for the

first time since 2014, when it advanced to the knockout round but fell to eventual champion Germany.

Algeria dominated the first 10 minutes before Johan Manzambi raced down the right side and crossed to Embolo for the tap-in. Embolo celebrated his 26th inter-

national goal with a knee slide.

"It was important to score at the right moment," Swiss coach Murat Yakin said.

"It was a lucky punch, but then after that, I think that we were dominating on the pitch, and I'm really happy with the overall performance, because we played against very strong individual players."

Less than a minute into the second half, Ndoye scored with a blast from the top of the box that diving Algeria goalkeeper Luca Zidane couldn't stop.

Fabian Rieder nearly got a third goal for Switzerland in the 81st minute but missed on the tap-in as the ball skirted across the face of Algeria's goal.

"I think the second goal was decisive. In the first half, we played a good match. We had several opportunities, and unfortunately we did not score," Algeria head coach Vladimir Petkovic said. (AP)

Riyad Mahrez retires from Algeria national team

OWEN CAMEROS ■ Vancouver (British Columbia)

Riyad Mahrez, a five-time Premier League winner, announced his retirement from international soccer following Algeria's World Cup exit, a 2-0 defeat to Switzerland in the round of 32 on Thursday.

"There were good times and difficult times as well, of course. That's part of a career," he said afterward. "But representing Algeria has been a dream of mine ever since I was young, to play for my country. It's been an immense honor and a great source of pride."

He added: "It is the new generation's turn to play."

As he walked off the field following the match, Mahrez gave a thumbs-up, then patted his heart and waved to the fans.



Mahrez, who plays for Al-Ahli in Saudi Arabia, has had an illustrious career at the club and international levels.

The 35-year-old forward retires with the second-most appearances for Algeria (119) and the second-most goals (40). Mahrez was a part of the Algerian team that won the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations. (AP)

Croatia vs Portugal: What happened in those final, chaotic minutes

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Toronto

In the 109th minute of a wild, pulsating, nerve-shredding World Cup match for the ages, referee Espen Eskas finally called time.

Portugal advanced to the round of 16 after a 2-1 win against Croatia at Toronto Stadium on Thursday.

That doesn't even begin to tell the story of the most dramatic of clashes that relentlessly swung back and forth and ended in the cruelest way for Croatia when Josko Gvardiol's would-be game-saving equalizer 13 minutes into added time was ruled out for offside after video review.

Croatia legend Luka Modric, age 40 and likely playing for the last time at a World



Cup, looked crestfallen at the final whistle.

The 41-year-old Cristiano Ronaldo lives to fight another day and couldn't hide his relief when just

moments earlier he stood helplessly on the sidelines in anguish, believing Portugal had blown it.

Here's how it all happened: **The First Goal in Added Time:** After 90 minutes of play, the electronic board signaled 10 minutes of added time, and it was difficult to imagine at that point just how much drama would be packed into the coming minutes.

Messi and Argentina await Cape Verde in the round of 32 at WC

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Miami Gardens (Florida)



Argentina has the World Cup titles, arguably the best player of all-time in Lionel Messi, the rich history and a roster filled with stars.

Cape Verde has none of that. Soccer's version of David vs Goliath happens Friday night at Hard Rock Stadium, where defending World Cup champion Argentina faces a Cape Verde squad with absolutely no burden of expectations going into the round of 32 match.

"I believe we can do a great thing here," Cape Verde backup defender Ianique dos Santos Tavares, who goes by the name Stopira, said through a translator on Thursday.

"And this is no exception. This match is no exception."



A win by Cape Verde would be one of the most stunning upsets in soccer history, maybe even sports history.

Think of it on a "Miracle on Ice" scale from 1980, when the youthful U.S. hockey team stunned the supposedly unbeatable Soviet Union at the Lake Placid Olympics and went on to win the gold medal.

This would be a Miracle on Grass, without question.

Impossible for England to acclimate to altitude for Mexico match: Tuchel

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Atlanta

From the altitude of Mexico City to the memories of Diego Maradona's infamous "Hand of God" goal, England will have to contend with brutal conditions and the weight of history when it plays co-host Mexico at the World Cup on Sunday. The Azteca Stadium — the site of the round of 16 game and the scene of Maradona's memorable goal against England in the 1986 World Cup quarterfinals — sits at more than 7,300 feet (2,200 meters) above sea level.

With little time to acclimate, conditions are against England's team and very much in favor of Mexico, which is undefeated in 10 World Cup games at its home stadium over three tournaments.

"My understanding is that we



cannot adapt to the altitude. That is just a huge advantage that Mexico will have," England coach Thomas Tuchel said. "It just takes too much time."

For elite athletes to perform at their peak at high altitude, a period of adaptation is required to reduce fatigue caused by lower atmospheric pressure and reduced oxygen availability.

Sports scientists generally recommend an extended acclimation period of at least two weeks, or the "fly-in, fly-out" method of arriving as close to game time as possible before acute symptoms set in.

Spain goalkeeper Unai Simon sets record with 519 straight scoreless minutes in net

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Inglewood

Spain goalkeeper Unai Simon has the longest shutout streak in World Cup history, breaking a 36-year-old record while blanking Austria in a 3-0 victory Thursday for his fourth consecutive clean sheet in this World Cup.

Simon hasn't allowed a goal in 519 consecutive minutes across the past two World Cups. He broke the record set in 1990 by famed Italy goalkeeper Walter Zenga, who recorded 517 straight scoreless minutes and five consecutive clean sheets in his home World Cup.

The 29-year-old Athletic Bilbao mainstay isn't the most famous goalkeeper in this competition — or even on his own team — but Simon's outstanding play at the back of Spain's superb defence has launched him into the World Cup record books. Spain has yet to allow a goal at this World Cup, and its Basque backstop has only had to make four saves — none against Austria, which got none of its five shots on target. "I feel proud of him," Spain coach Luis De La Fuente said. "I feel like he is a member of my family. I'm very happy for him."

Simon has been Spain's first choice in net for most of the past half-decade, keeping the job despite roster competition from David



Raya and Joan Garcia, the championship-winning goalkeepers in two of Europe's four biggest leagues.

Simon has spent his club career on smaller stages with Bilbao, which only reached the Champions League for the first time in his career last season.

Simon owes his international success to his stellar results and to his tight bond with De La Fuente, who has largely resisted calls to give more playing time to his goalkeeping options with more accomplished club careers.

Simon and De La Fuente have been bonded since 2015, when the coach and his 18-year-old keeper

won the European Under-19 championship in Greece. They stayed together in Spain's youth system and then reunited in early 2023, when De La Fuente took over the senior national team and promptly embarked on one of the most successful stretches in Spain's proud history.

Under De La Fuente, Spain has just one loss in 37 competitive matches, going unbeaten in its last 35 straight — a streak which includes a loss on penalties to Portugal in the 2025 Nations League.

Mikel's 2 goals send Spain past Austria 3-0, into round of 16 at World Cup

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Inglewood

Mikel Oyarzabal scored two goals and Spain beat Austria 3-0 on Thursday for its first World Cup victory in a knockout match since winning the title in 2010.

Pedro Porro added a goal in the second half for Spain, which put on its most impressive performance of the tournament while dominating possession and demonstrating the offensive creativity across its vaunted lineup.

Spain also has yet to allow a goal at this year's World Cup. Unai Simon didn't have to make a save while keeping his fourth consecutive clean sheet, since Austria failed to get a shot on target.

"I'm happy to have helped the team for us to go through another round," Oyarzabal said. "Now just rest and get ready for the next one. It was a complicated match. We knew that it was going to be difficult against a very physical team, but we had a very good day and played a good match." La Roja will next face the winner of

Portugal's match against Croatia in Dallas on Monday in the round of 16.

The 18-year-old Barcelona sensation played his longest stretch of the tournament before coming off in the 85th minute, moments after Austria defender David Alaba deflected Yamal's hard shot off the goal line.

Spain got its marquee offense from Oyarzabal, the Real Sociedad captain who doubled his goal total at this year's World Cup by opening the scoring in the 36th minute and clinching the victory in the 89th. Marc Cucurella had assists on both of Oyarzabal's goals, demonstrating an excellent connection from the left side.

"The great teams step up when it's needed," Spain coach Luis De La Fuente said. "We played a great match. We came close to perfection, but we must keep improving. There is always room for improvement, because every upcoming match will be very difficult."

Goalkeeper Alexander Schlager made six saves in an outstanding performance for Austria, which reached the knockout rounds of its first World Cup since 1998 by squeaking out a late draw with an injury-time goal against Algeria. Coach Ralf Rangnick's team hasn't won a knockout match at the World Cup since 1954.





Sanju Samson, Tilak Varma under scanner ahead of second T20I

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Manchester

With Vaibhav Sooryavanshi breathing down his neck, Sanju Samson will be under pressure to turn the frequent busts in his performance graph into consistent booms as India take on England in the second T20 International on Saturday.

The first game was abandoned after India posted a healthy 189 for 7 at the Chester-Le-Street in Durham, riding on half-centuries from Abhishek Sharma and skipper Shreyas Iyer.

However, the focus of attention during the next few games would be Sanju Samson and whether he can weather the Sooryavanshi storm that is building up on the sidelines.

In an alternate universe, three back-to-back match-winning knocks in India's T20 World Cup triumph would have given Kerala's most 'globally followed' sporting icon a



cushion for a year. But with Indian cricket discovering the generational talent of Sooryavanshi, Samson's margin for error has become minimal and the T20 World Cup halo alone can't save him.

With Abhishek Sharma smashing his way to 49 and 59 in two of the last three games, the pressure is entirely on Samson to get some runs under his belt. In the opening game that was

that moved off the surface. In case of Samson, the occasional high scores have always been flanked by a series of low returns on either side and that has been his biggest bane.

While the team management is firm on not pushing the 15-year-old Sooryavanshi but he possibly can't be kept cooling his heels if this continues for another couple of games.

However, it is not just Samson who is struggling in this batting order. The highly-talented Tilak Varma's held-back approach in the middle overs is also an issue.

Varma simply seems incapable of pushing the scoring rate once slow bowlers come into operation or seamers take pace off their deliveries.

In 12 T20I games in 2026, Varma has been able to hit only 12 sixes — which is one per game. And that statistic is poor for anyone who is seen as a finisher.

The bowling department is unlikely to feature any changes as Old Trafford track offers some grip and wrist spinners have had a good time at the venue.

Ireland to be more acceptable, says CI chief O'Donnell



G UNNIKRISHNAN ■ Bengaluru

Cricket Ireland president Bryan O'Donnell believes that the "impactful" T20 International series win over India recently will transform the national team into a "more acceptable opposition" globally, and open avenues for challenging assignments.

Ireland stunned India 2-0 recently at Belfast to register their first ever series win over the reigning T20 world champions in any format.

"Well, it's going to be fairly instantaneous because it is a

huge lift for our players and on that basis, they will probably become available in other areas of the game," O'Donnell told PTI.

"A huge amount of impact because it elevates the players. It lifts the potential performance of Irish cricket hugely," he added.

But the real impact of the win over a storied opponent, O'Donnell thought, will be the changed perception around Irish cricket. "I think we would be more acceptable as opposition than we may have been heretofore. So, you know, it is a moving elevation. (PTI)

Aakarshi, Tanya lose, Indian challenge ends in Canada Open



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Markham (Canada)

Tanya Hemnath and Aakarshi Kashyap lost their women's singles second round matches to draw curtains to the Indian challenge at the Canada Open here. Tanya lost to third seed Riko Gunji of Japan 11-21 11-21 in 31 minutes while Aakarshi went down fighting to fourth seed Beiwen

Zhang of USA 22-20 17-21 17-21 in the second round match that lasted one hour and seven minutes.

Earlier, Tanya had prevailed 21-16 21-18 over USA's Disha Gupta in the opening round while Aakarshi saw off Anna Tatranova of France 21-14 21-12.

With the ouster of Tanya and Aakarshi, the Indian challenge ended at the Super 300 tournament.

Sciver-Brunt's stirring 75 leads England into Women's T20 WC final

FOSTER NIUMATA ■ London

Captain Nat Sciver-Brunt's awe-inspiring knock of 75 after an injury led England past South Africa and into the final of the Women's Twenty20 World Cup on Thursday.

Sciver-Brunt and former skipper Heather Knight rescued England from 23-3 with a 133-run partnership — the highest ever in a World Cup knockout match — to set South Africa a forbidding 170 target in The Oval semifinal.

South Africa, which chose to chase, had the life squeezed out of it and saw the writing on the wall as early as the 11th over after the great Marizanne Kapp was just the third out. By then the run rate required was already at 11 per over for the finalist in the previous two T20 World Cups. No 2-ranked England won by 40 runs and will face No 1 Australia in the final at sold-out Lord's on Sunday. It's the first time since 2010 that both teams in the final are unbeaten.

England put up 169-5 and South Africa was shrunk to 129-8 in front of a women's T20 semifinal record attendance of 21,128.

Sciver-Brunt retired hurt against Ireland on June 16 due to tightness



in the calf she tore in April. While missing England's last three group games, the captain threw everything into getting fit for the semifinals, including uncommon treatment using electromagnetic energy.

She replaced Sophie Dunkley, England's second highest run-scorer, and was called on just

seven balls into the match as pacers Shabnim Ismail and Kapp gave South Africa a dream start of three wickets inside four overs.

Ismail became the first woman to reach 50 career wickets in T20 World Cups and Kapp bowled Danni Wyatt-Hodge, the highest ever run-scorer in a single World Cup. But as Kapp and Ismail bowled

out, their teammates were preyed on by Sciver-Brunt and Knight, who share more than 600 international caps. South Africa lost both of its reviews trying to get rid of Sciver-Brunt on 2 and 14. She reached her eighth fifty in a T20 World Cup, tying the record with New Zealand's Suzie Bates and Australia's Beth Mooney. Knight followed.

"I was nervous," Sciver-Brunt said. "The occasion gets quite big so that increases the nerves, and I have missed a few games. But as soon as the warmup started I managed to switch back on to game-time and just enjoyed myself out there. Heather and I... with our experience, we put our heads together and got the job done." Nonkululeko Mlaba removed both batters in the 19th over; Sciver-Brunt for 75 runs from 47 balls including 50 from boundaries and Knight for 58 from 47.

The partnership of 133 from 90 surpassed the previous best in a World Cup knockout match of 122 not out between Beth Morgan and Claire Taylor for England against Australia at The Oval in the 2009 semifinals. That stand helped to set the benchmark for the previous highest successful chase at 164.

South Africa had to make 170. Its chances plunged as captain Laura Wolvaardt, Annerie Dercksen and Kapp were removed cheaply. Opener Tazmin Brits endured until the 15th over but for a too-slow 45-ball 51.

England's attack was impressive with five bowlers taking wickets. Freya Kemp led with 1-11 and spinner Sophie Ecclestone took 1-21 and two catches. (AP)

We need to host more international tournaments to produce quality tennis players, says Uppal

SUMAN RAY ■ Gurgaon

Former Davis Cupper and Asian Games bronze medalist Vishal Uppal feels the need of hour for India is to host more international tennis tournaments to produce top-100 players from the country.

"If we look at other countries, they host 45-50 international tournaments a year to support their players. We do what, 10-12 maybe? So, the players are asking, where's the support? Why do we not have enough opportunities in this country," Uppal told PTI at his academy here on Friday.



"Again, please understand, the majority of players currently pursuing professional tennis are not from wealthy families. They lack the means to travel for 25-30 tournaments abroad. Now,

unless we bring those opportunities to a wider pool of players, how will we help the raw talent to emerge? The people with the means don't have the hunger and the people with

the hunger don't have the means," he lamented.

He urged former players to help in bringing more international tournaments to India.

"What is stopping all the former players from getting together. If somebody hosts two international tournaments in their city, someone else does two in theirs, you can do 10 or 15 tournaments like that. So you just take AITA's help to get those tournaments sanctioned, then you do it. I've hosted 10 women's world ranking events at this venue where we're sitting," Uppal said. (PTI)

Stewart Cink, Charlie Wi share US Senior Open lead after opening 67s

JOE REEDYAP
■ Columbus (US)

Stewart Cink got off to a great start in a bid to win his third straight senior major.

Cink was the only player to make five birdies on the back nine at Scioto Country Club on Thursday, shooting a 3-under 67 for a share of the first-round lead in the US Senior Open with Charlie Wi.

Cink struggled on the front nine, shooting a 2-over 37, but found momentum once he made the turn. "I've been off for a little while, and I started like I've been off for a little while. I had to prove it to myself again that I could play decent golf a certain way," Cink said. "The back nine was really nice. I actually could have shot quite a bit lower on the back nine. I missed three very reasonably like inside-right around 10 feet or less birdie putts." The 53-year-old Cink has



four wins in nine PGA Tour Champions starts this year, including the Senior PGA Championship and the Tradition.

The last player to win the Senior PGA, Tradition and US Senior Open in the same year was Jack Nicklaus in 1991. Scioto, the Donald Ross course hosting its third US Senior Open, is where Nicklaus learned to play the game. Simon Griffiths, Freddie Jacobson and George

McNeill were tied for third at 68. Defending champion Padraig Harrington was among a group of 10 players at 69.

"Of course it's tough, we know that, so once you get through that, the golf course itself is playing nicely," Harrington said.

Cink is also attempting to become the fifth player to win the event after being runner-up the previous year. Fred Funk was the last to do it in 2009. (AP)

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नोट:- निविदा प्रपत्र एवं दर ऑफर ऑनलाइन निविदा प्रकाशन से दिनांक 17.07.2026 को साय 06:00 बजे तक प्रस्तुत की जा सकती है। निविदा में किया गया कोई भी संशोधन www.mptenders.gov.in वेबसाइट पर किया जाएगा। पृथक से कोई भी प्रकाशन नहीं किया जाएगा।

अध्यक्ष नगर परिषद ईसागढ़
उपाध्यक्ष नगर परिषद ईसागढ़
मुख्य नगरपालिका अधिकारी नगर परिषद ईसागढ़

बैंक ऑफ बड़ौदा Bank of Baroda

Branch : First Floor J.K. Plaza Gast ka Tazia Chouraha Lashkar, Gwalior, (M.P.) - 474001, Ph. No. : 0751-2421992
Email ID: Gwalio@bankofbaroda.com

POSSESSION NOTICE [RULE 8 (1)] FOR IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

Whereas, the Undersigned being the Authorised officers of the Bank of Baroda 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, issued demand notice upon the Borrower calling to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice being 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 and the public in general that the undersigned has taken the possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under section 13(4) of the Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this the borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with the property will be subject to the charges of Bank of Baroda For an amount as shown below and Interest thereon.

Name & Address of Borrower	Description of the Property	Demand Notice Date Amount Possession Date
Borrower: M/s Soni HealthCare and Diagnostic Lab Proprietor: Mr. Shivanarayan Ramprasad Soni Guarantor : Mrs. Kavita Soni	Property Owner - Mrs. Kavita Soni - All that part and parcel of the residential flat No. 405 4th Floor deshpande complex shinde ki goth Lashkar, Gwalior-474009 with area of 600 Sqft. , Boundaries: East: Jain Temple, West: Passage, South: Stair / Passage, North: Flat No. 404	Demand Notice Date: 27-04-2026 Rs. 51,19,314.53/- + Interest & other expenses Possession Date: 02-07-2026

Place: Gwalior Date: 03/07/2026 Authorised officer, Bank of Baroda