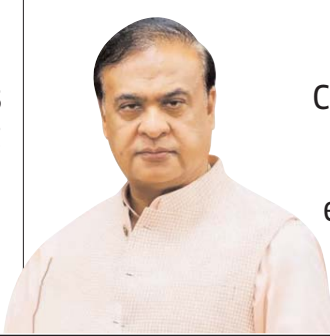


PAGE 5 NATION ISRO targets seven launches this fiscal; next mission within 2 months 	PAGE 7 USP Assam Govt CMAAA scheme empowers 99,971 entrepreneurs 	PAGE 8 GLOBAL Trump shifts tone on Jimmy Carter while grappling with Iran, inflation 	PAGE 11 SPORTS All eyes on Rohit Sharma in ODI series decider at Lord's 	AGENDA 
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India's private space era takes off with Mission Aagaman



- India third country in world to achieve private orbital launch capability
- Vikram-1 carried several symbolic payloads, including an 18-karat gold miniature rocket, an artistic laboratory-grown diamond, and handwritten postcard by PM bearing message "Vande Mataram"

Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 launch vehicle stands on the launch pad ahead of its maiden orbital mission

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India scripted a historic chapter in its space programme on Saturday as Hyderabad-based startup Skyroot Aerospace successfully launched Vikram-1, the country's first privately developed orbital launch vehicle, placing multiple technology demonstration payloads into a 450-km low Earth orbit (LEO). The achievement makes India only the third country in the world, after the United States and China, to demonstrate private-sector orbital launch capability, marking a significant milestone in the country's rapidly expanding

commercial space ecosystem. The four-stage Vikram-1 lifted off at 12.05 pm from the first launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh, after a brief planned hold owing to a navigation-related issue. As the seven-storey launch vehicle soared, leaving behind a trail of orange smoke, jubilant scenes unfolded inside Mission Control, where scientists, engineers and officials celebrated what has been dubbed "Mission Aagaman," signalling the arrival of India's private space industry into the orbital launch market. The maiden mission successfully deployed all its primary payloads, including



SPOKE TO THE TEAM OF SKYROOT AEROSPACE AND CONGRATULATED THEM ON THE SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH OF VIKRAM-1. THIS IS A DEFINING MOMENT IN INDIA'S SPACE JOURNEY

—PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

technology demonstrators from Grahaa Space, Cosmoserve, German company DCubed and

Skyroot's in-house SCOPE satellite, validating the launch vehicle's performance in its first orbital flight. During the conver-

LAUDED THE YOUNG TEAM – HAVING AN AVERAGE AGE OF 28 YEARS – FOR ACHIEVING A SUCCESSFUL ORBITAL MISSION IN THEIR VERY FIRST ATTEMPT AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE "BHARAT 2047" VISION

ISRO CHIEF V NARAYANAN



WE ARE VERY PROUD THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS ENABLED US AND OPENED UP THE SECTOR TO PRIVATE PLAYERS. ALL FROM INDIA WITH A FULLY, FULLY INDIAN TEAM, 100 PER CENT BUILT IN INDIA

SKYROOT AEROSPACE CEO PAWAN KUMAR CHANDANA



Prime Minister Modi to describe the feat as an example of India's young scientific talent.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

GREAT OFFERS!

Scan to Subscribe

PIONEER IN SHORT

CLASS 10 RESULTS: 59% IMPROVE SCORES

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Saturday declared the results for second edition of the class 10th board examinations. According to CBSE, 6,63,777 students appeared for the second board examination, of whom 5,13,955 took the test to improve their scores from the main examination. A total of 3,08,095 students, or 59.95%, improved their performance over the main board exam. The board said the overall pass percentage, after combining the results of the main and second board examinations, stood at 96.78 per cent nomination.

NINE KILLED IN AHMEDABAD FIRECRACKER FACTORY BLAST

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ahmedabad

Nine persons were killed and six others injured in a blast and fire at an illegal firecracker factory in Ramol area of Ahmedabad city in Gujarat on Saturday, officials said. The explosion and the resultant fire occurred at 3:30 pm at the factory located on Ramol-Gatrad road, police said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the incident and announced an ex-gratia of ₹2 lakh to the next of kin of each deceased and ₹50,000 for the injured. Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel announced a financial assistance of ₹4 lakh to the families of the deceased and ₹50,000 to the injured. CM Patel also declared assistance for the families and the injured. The injured persons were transferred to two separate hospitals — Civil Hospital in Asarwa area, and LG Hospital in Maninagar. "One person was brought dead to the Civil Hospital along with five injured persons. The injured are undergoing treatment," the hospital's medical superintendent, Dr Rakesh Joshi, told PTI. LG Hospital Superintendent Leena Dabhi said, "Nine persons were brought to the hospital, of whom eight died. The condition of an injured woman is stable."

FULL REPORT >> P5

Morning drama: Police remove Wangchuk

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

Early Saturday morning, as the sun rose over Jantar Mantar, a dramatic scene took place at India's main protest site. Plainclothes police officers, pretending to be a medical team, quickly removed climate activist and education reformer Sonam Wangchuk from his 21st day of an indefinite hunger strike. Wangchuk, a 59-year-old Ladakhi innovator known for his peaceful protests, had been camping at the site since late June to support the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP). The group, led by Abhijeet Dipke, is calling for Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan to resign over alleged irregularities and paper leaks in national exams, including NEET. Eyewitnesses described a tense scene as, around 7 am, about 10 plainclothes officers approached the protest



Activist Sonam Wangchuk, waves as he is shifted to a hospital from Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Saturday

stage. Protesters said the officers initially claimed to be a medical team but revealed their identities when questioned. "They ordered volunteers to move aside. We kept requesting them to wait, but suddenly they announced there was a High Court order to take Sonam, Sir away," one protester said. As tensions increased, police put up large white

sheets or curtains around the stage to block the view. Wangchuk was then carried away, covered with white sheets, and, according to some reports, he waved as he was moved. Videos and eyewitnesses described pushing, and a brief commotion as protesters tried to form human chains to protect him.

RELATED REPORTS >> P3
CONTINUED ON >> P4

ACTIVIST NEEDS URGENT THERAPY: HOSPITAL

New Delhi: Activist Sonam Wangchuk, who has been on a 21-day hunger strike, is showing signs of dehydration and urgently requires fluid and electrolyte therapy to prevent potentially serious complications, even as he and his family declined the recommended treatment despite repeated counselling, Safdarjung Hospital authorities said on Saturday. Wangchuk remains conscious and haemodynamically stable, with his pulse, blood pressure and oxygen saturation currently within normal limits, the hospital said in a statement issued around 9 pm. However, it said his prolonged fast has led to clinical signs of dehydration, making immediate oral or intravenous fluid and electrolyte therapy medically necessary.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Shah inspects BSF outpost near Siliguri

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi/Siliguri

On Saturday, Union Home Minister Amit Shah visited the BSF's 18th Battalion outpost near Siliguri to check security along the India-Bangladesh border. He was joined by senior Border Security Force (BSF) officials as he reviewed the facilities, surveillance equipment, and the readiness of personnel stationed in the North Bengal Frontier. Shah spoke with the jawans, listened to the challenges they face, and checked the steps taken to stop infiltration, smuggling, and other cross-border threats. The 18th Battalion, based in Kadamtala in the Siliguri sector, guards important parts of the India-Bangladesh border. The Siliguri Corridor, known as the "Chicken's Neck," is a narrow stretch linking mainland India to the eight



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during an inspection of the surveillance system in Siliguri, West Bengal

SECURITY-FENCING

- With fencing progressing and surveillance intensifying, the Government wants to build a strong, layered defence along the Bangladesh border
- These efforts are part of a bigger plan to close gaps along the 4,096-km India-Bangladesh border, which faces problems like illegal immigration, human trafficking, and smuggling

Northeastern States. Because of its location, it is vital for national security. If security is breached here, the Northeast could be cut off, and illegal activities

could increase. Shah's visit highlights the Government's efforts to secure this area with fencing, technology, and more personnel.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Ayodhya row: 30 more staff members face SIT scrutiny

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

The investigation into the alleged theft of cash offerings at the Ram Temple has expanded. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) is now looking into nearly 30 more employees who helped count donations. Eight accused have been arrested so far, but the number may increase in the coming days, sources told *The Pioneer*. The investigation has found that about 50 people were involved in counting the donated currency notes at the temple. Nearly 40 of them were reportedly hired



on the recommendation of Trust office-bearers or their associates. This finding has made recruitment a key focus of the SIT's investigation into the alleged embezzlement of temple donations.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Iran warns US of unforgettable lessons

JON GAMBRELL/TOQA EZZIDIN
■ Dubai

Iran's supreme leader warned of "unforgettable lessons" on Saturday if the United States keeps attacking the Islamic Republic and called President Donald Trump's signature "worthless and invalid." The comments came hours after a negotiator said Tehran was suspending its commitments to the interim deal signed about a month ago. The statement attributed to Mojtaba Khamenei, still unseen since the war began, was read out on state television after the United States and Iran again exchanged strikes aimed at infrastructure and military targets.



Tehran's declarations snapped another fragile thread as the war shows no end in sight. The deal was aimed at permanently ending the fighting. Now Khamenei warns of "lessons" not only from Iran but its armed proxies

in the region, calling them the "Axis of Resistance." The battle over the Strait of Hormuz has intensified in a conflict increasingly focused on control of the essential waterway that previously carried a fifth of the world's crude oil. The

widening strikes threatened civilians and services to them, including desalination plants for drinking water, while the global economy again was on alert. The US Central Command said early Saturday that its seventh straight night of strikes hit "surveillance sites, military logistics infrastructure, underground weapons storage, and maritime capabilities." The US has violated its commitments under the deal that was signed about a month ago and now Iran is "no longer implementing them," Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's deputy foreign minister, told State TV.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Monsoon Session: Speaker Birla approves Shinde, Sena merger

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A day before the customary all party meeting scheduled pertaining to the Monsoon Session which begins Monday, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Saturday gave his approval to the merger of six Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs with the Shiv Sena-led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and a separate seating in the House for the 20 rebel TMC lawmakers, who have joined a Tripura based party NCPI.



Official sources said that with the merger of the six MPs, the strength of the Shiv Sena has gone up to 13 from seven. The TMC rebel group of 20 MPs will sit separately, away from the parent party, the sources said. However there was no clarity on the status of the rebel TMC MPs' demand to be recognised as part of the Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI). The all-party meeting has been convened by the Government on Sunday ahead of the Monsoon session of Parliament.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

From Article 370 to Chandu Champion : Stars celebrate National Awards glory

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Bollywood movie *Article 370*, based on the events surrounding the abrogation of this section of the Constitution in 2019, was on Saturday named as the best feature film at 72nd National Film Awards. Yami Gautam Dhar, who acted in *Article 370* was named the best actress in a leading role while Malayalam superstar Mammooty and Kartik Aaryan shared the best actor award for their lead roles in *Bramayugam* (Malayalam) and *Chandu Champion* (Hindi) respectively. Announcing the awards,

chairman of the central jury Jayaraj said Telugu movie *Kalki 2898 AD* bagged the trophy for best popular film for wholesome entertainment. Srikanth won Best Hindi Film award, and Captain Miller took home the award for Best Film promoting national, social values. Apart from the top honours, Sanjay Mishra won best supporting actor for Bhakshak, while Ropashree Varkady (Mithya) and Sachana Namidass (Maharaja) shared the best supporting actress award. Reacting to the honour of best music direction for *Article 370*, an emotional



Shashwat said, "I came into cinema with no inheritance and only a deep love for music, so this National Award feels like a beautiful pause to look back at every uncertain day, every quiet sacrifice, and every person

who stood by me before there was anything to celebrate. I share this with my family, my team, and especially Aditya Dhar, whose faith in me has shaped so much of this journey". The competition was

AWARDS	
Best Feature Film:	Article 370
Best Actor:	Kartik Aaryan and Mammooty
Best Actress:	Yami Gautam Dhar
Directorial Debut:	Randeep Hooda
Non-Feature Film:	Bhangaar
Best Documentary:	Ram-Nami

among the strongest in recent years, with acclaimed films such as *All We Imagine As Light*, *Laapataa Ladies*, *Bramayuga*, *Aadujeevitham*: *The Goat Life*, *Pushpa 2*, *Street 2*, *Jigra*, *Meiyazhagan*, *Premalu*, *Manjummel Boys*

and *Hanu Man* earning widespread critical and commercial acclaim. From powerful performances and ambitious storytelling to box office successes and festival favourites, the 2024 slate reflected the diversity of Indian cinema. The awards recognise the best of Indian cinema from films certified by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) between January 1 and December 31, 2024. The winners were selected by an 11-member jury chaired by Jayaraj. The prestigious awards are regarded as India's highest official recognition for cinematic excellence.

Land hurdle cleared for Savitri Cinema flyover: PWD Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Public Works Department (PWD) Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh on Saturday said a request for land for the Savitri Cinema half-flyover has been approved by the DDA, and the tendering process is expected to commence soon.

“The Delhi Government had requested land from the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to begin construction of the Savitri Cinema half-flyover. Recently, the approval for land has been given, after which we will start construction work on the ground after issuing a

tender,” Singh said. The PWD had approved the project in December last year, along with the Modi Mill flyover’s integration with the Kalkaji Temple road.

“Last year even after administrative approvals, however, due to constraints of space in the area, work could not start on the ground, and the government had requested DDA for around two acres so that construction can be carried out without too much hindrance to traffic movement,” Singh added. At the Savitri Cinema junction, a 900-metre-long one-way, three-lane grade separator will be built to

tackle chronic bottlenecks affecting residents of Greater Kailash I & II and CR Park.

It will feature 435 metres of raised roadway, seamless integration with the existing flyover, two ramps for entry and exit, dedicated bus bays and redesigned junctions to enhance pedestrian safety and streamline traffic.

According to the plan, the second flyover at Savitri Cinema will be constructed parallel to the existing structure for ₹58 crore. This construction will provide hassle-free movement between Greater Kailash and Nehru Place, Chittranjan Park and the Chirag Delhi area. The



upcoming flyover will run parallel to the existing single-carriageway flyover, which was constructed in 2001.

In the past few years, traffic congestion has increased on the stretch due to the slowing

(Planning & Engineering) Centre (UTTIPEC).

“Once operational, the flyovers will provide signal-free movement, improve traffic speeds, and eliminate congestion at key junctions, particularly at Captain Gaur Marg — Outer Ring Road and Outer Ring Road — GK-II Road and nearby areas,” Singh added.

The Delhi Government is also working on a plan to integrate Kalkaji Mandir with the Modi Mill flyover, for which a new three-lane carriageway will be constructed. Officials said a three-lane carriageway will be constructed for a cost of ₹312.94 crore.

PARVESH SINGH INSPECTS KEY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN EAST DELHI

New Delhi: The Public Works Department (PWD) and Water Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh inspected key infrastructure projects in East Delhi on Saturday under the Delhi Government’s “Government on Wheels” campaign. He reviewed measures to tackle chronic waterlogging at Patparganj and the Jhilmil Underpass while announcing that Laxmi Nagar will get a modern skywalk to improve pedestrian safety and traffic movement.

Accompanied by Chief Whip and Laxmi Nagar MLA Abhay Verma, Patparganj MLA Ravinder Singh Negi, Trilokpuri MLA Ravikant, Shahdara MLA Sanjay Goyal and senior officials, the Minister assessed the progress of drainage works, interacted with residents and reviewed civic projects across the district.

During the inspection, Singh visited the Patparganj Highway stretch and the Jhilmil Underpass, both of which have historically been major waterlogging hotspots during the monsoon.

Parents’ body seeks audit of private schools, fee regulation committees



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Seeking greater transparency in private school fee regulation, the newly launched Parents Association for Welfare and Justice (PAWJ) on Saturday demanded an independent financial audit of private unaided schools and the immediate constitution of School Level Fee Regulation Committees (SLFRCs).

The association also urged the Government to establish democratically elected Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in all schools and strictly implement provisions to protect children from harassment due to fee-related disputes. Furthermore, they urged the Government to strictly enforce the provisions of the Delhi School Education Act, 2025.

Speaking at the launch of the association at the Press Club of India, PAWJ president Divya Mathey said parents are equal stakeholders in education and should have a greater role in making the school system transparent, accountable and child-centric.

The association said it formed the group to promote children’s welfare, safety, transparency and accountability, while creating a platform for parents, schools, policymakers and civil society to collaborate on education-related issues.

The parents’ body appealed to the Chief Justice of India and the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court to consider

taking suo motu cognisance of issues arising from a May 22 judgment related to private school fee regulation.

PAWJ said the judgment raised questions over the interpretation of earlier Supreme Court and Delhi High Court rulings on prior approval for fee hikes by schools allotted land by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA).

The organisation also expressed concern that, according to its understanding, the judgment recognised fee collections made between the 2017-18 and 2025-26 academic sessions without prior approval from the Directorate of Education in certain cases.

The association claimed this resulted in unequal treatment of parents, alleging that while some schools were restrained from recovering disputed fee arrears, those who had already paid the increased fees received no similar relief. The parents’ organisation also sought a comprehensive financial audit of all private unaided recognised schools that applied for fee hikes from the 2020-21 academic session onwards to examine compliance with statutory provisions and Government norms.

It demanded the immediate operationalisation of School Level Fee Regulation Committees under the Delhi School Education Act, 2025, and called for transparent PTAs to strengthen parents’ participation in school governance.

Delhi restaurants, cafes to operate till 4 am for FIFA WC final: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced on Saturday that restaurants, cafes and other eligible establishments across the Capital can remain open till 4 am this weekend, allowing fans to fully enjoy the final match of the FIFA World Cup 2026.

The defending champions, Argentina, will take on Spain in search of their fourth World Cup title and a second consecutive title when they clash in New York.

“Every football fan has watched Lionel Messi make history. Now, history has one more story to tell. A legend. A teenage prodigy. One trophy. One night that generations will remember. Delhi is ready for that night,”



the chief minister said in a post on X.

The chief minister said the decision has been enabled under the city’s 24x7 business-friendly operating framework under the Government’s ease of doing business reforms.

“With the city’s 24x7 business-friendly operating framework already in place under our Government’s ease of doing business reforms, restaurants, cafes

and other eligible establishments across the Capital can welcome fans till 4 am this weekend, making it easier for the city to experience football’s biggest night together,” she added.

The announcement was made with the hashtag #FIFAWorldCup2026, aimed at giving football fans in Delhi the flexibility to gather and watch key World Cup final matches during late-night hours.

Govt replaces Essentiality Certificate with self-certification for opening private schools

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government on Saturday approved replacing the mandatory “Essentiality Certificate” required for opening private schools with a self-certification system, saying the move will simplify the school recognition process and align it with the RTE Act, 2009.

According to the Education Department, the decision, approved by Education Minister Ashish Sood, removes long-standing procedural requirements under the Delhi School Education Act and Rules (DSER), 1973, as part of a compliance reduction and deregulation exercise.

Under the new self-certification system, applicants seeking recognition for schools will only have to certify that they meet the norms prescribed under the RTE Act, including infrastructure, safety, teacher qualifications and pupil-



teacher ratio, instead of requiring prior government approval on whether a school is “necessary” in a particular area.

As part of the changes, Rule 44 (3) of the Delhi School Education Rules, 1973, has been amended to do away with the requirement for applicants to submit a prior notice of intention to open a school and obtain an assessment of its necessity in a particular zone, it stated.

The Government has also removed the provision

educational standards are maintained.

Sood said the reforms bring Delhi’s school recognition framework in line with the provisions of the RTE Act, under which recognition is based on objective norms and standards rather than subjective assessments of local need.

“Our goal is to ensure that every child in Delhi has access to high-quality education in safe, well-equipped schools. By replacing the outdated Essentiality Certificate with a simple self-certification system, we are shifting the focus from unnecessary administrative paperwork to what truly matters: excellent infrastructure, qualified teachers, and proper student-teacher ratios,” the minister said.

He said the changes would make the recognition process more transparent while ensuring compliance with the standards laid down under the RTE Act.



Shiv Mandir, situated within the Vatika. The upcoming project is part of a broader road and related civil works package being taken up by the NDMC’s Civil Engineering Department during 2026-27, according to the tender notice.

The work has received administrative approval and expenditure sanction of Rs 28.13 lakh. The detailed estimate has been pegged at Rs 27.93 lakh, the notice said.

The proposed cafeteria

will provide improved food and refreshment options, while the new Hawan Kund will facilitate ritual ceremonies.

The initiative is part of the larger road maintenance and infrastructure upgrade programme for the NDMC area during 2026-27, officials said. Bids have been invited on a percentage-rate basis and can be submitted online through the Delhi Government’s e-procurement portal.

Temperature drops slightly in Capital, IMD predicts light rain on Sunday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The national Capital saw a slight decrease in the maximum and minimum temperatures on Saturday.

A yellow alert has been issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) for Sunday, warning of light rain, along with hot and humid conditions.

Safdarjung, representative of the city’s weather, recorded a maximum temperature of 38.2 degrees Celsius on Saturday, three degrees above the normal and a 0.6 degree decrease from the day before. The minimum temperature was logged at 30.2 degrees Celsius, three degrees above the normal and a 0.8 degree drop from the day before.

Palam recorded a maximum of 37.4 degrees Celsius, 1.1 degrees lower than Friday and a minimum temperature of 28.8 degrees Celsius, a decrease of 0.3



degrees from the day before.

Lodhi Road recorded a minimum of 29.2 degrees Celsius, 0.9 degrees less than Friday’s minimum; Anagar recorded a minimum of 29.4 degrees. The IMD has issued a yellow alert for Sunday.

“There is a possibility of very light to light rain at isolated places accompanied by strong surface winds of speed 20-30 kmph, gusting to 40 kmph during the morning or forenoon hours of Sunday. Hot and humid conditions are likely to persist,” an IMD official said. According to the IMD forecast, the maximum temperature is likely to be around 36-38 degrees Celsius on Sunday.

The Pioneer Classified

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Omaima Ansari, wife of Abhishek Sharma, resident of E-615, Near Petrol Pump, Shastri Nagar, Ghaziabad, hereby declare that after my marriage, I have adopted my husband’s surname “Sharma”. Henceforth, I shall be known and identified as Omaima Sharma for all purposes.

PD(20)3C I, ARVIND KUMAR YADAV s/o BHAGWATI PRASAD YADAV r/o H-41-A, Khasra No. 26, Gali No. 13, Shiv Ram Park, Nangloi, Delhi 110041 declare that name of my wife has been wrongly written as PREMAWATI YADAV in his minor son namely AYUSH YADAV aged 13 years in his Birth Certificate Registration No. MCDOLIR-0112-005290143. The actual name of my wife is PREMAVATI YADAV.

PD(20)4C I, Ramandeep Singh S/O Gurdeep Singh Anand R/O 2016, Outram Line, Delhi-110009 have changed my name to Ramandeep Singh Anand.

PD(20)4C

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given on behalf of Mrs. Nisha who is purchasing Part of Property No. 679/B New No. 1919-C, Plot No. 21, Khasra No. 27/11/28227, Second Floor Without Roof Rights, Gali No. 3, Village-Chandrawali, Alias Shahdara, Kabool Nagar, Shahdara, New Delhi, National Capital Territory Of Delhi, New Delhi, 110032, (E/LH) Shahdara, India New Delhi New Delhi New Delhi Kabool Nagar National Capital Territory Of Delhi India, from Mr. Ajeet Kumar S/o. Mr. Jagveer Singh who had owned the subject property vide Relinquishment Deed Dated 22.06.2022 bearing Document No.4376, Volume No.4771, Book No.1, Page No.16-22, SRC IVA, Shahdara, Delhi executed by Mr. Abhishek Tanwar S/o. Mr. Ajeet Kumar, now Mrs. Nisha intend to purchase and mortgage the subject property with VASTU HOUSING FINANCE CORPORATION LTD. So, to comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any person having any type of claim/right/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, within 07 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP N-161, Ground Floor, Saira Tower, Gautam Nagar Near Yusuf Sarai Community Centre New Delhi-110049 Contact# 011-40046316 & 41667327

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to all concerned that my client **Mrs. Tanisha Amarpuri @ Jaishree Rawal**, W/o Shri Ravi Kant Amarpuri, has sold her **Property No. X/1277, admeasuring 209 Sq. Yards, situated at Satsang Marg, Rajgarh Colony, Delhi-110031 to Mrs. Fizza Fatma W/o Mr. Hasan Haider @ Hasan Haider and Mr. Hasan Haider S/o Mr. Mansoor Abbas.** If any person has any claim, right, title or interest in the aforesaid property, he/she may intimate the undersigned within **15 days** from the date of publication of this notice, failing which no claim shall be entertained. **Deeksha Jain (Advocate) Off: IX/623, Shubhash Road, Gandhi Nagar, Delhi-110031, Mob:+91 8375869489**

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given on behalf of **Ajit Kumar Singh & MISHALA DEVI** who is purchasing PROPERTY BEARING PLOT NO 332, AREA MEASURING 120 SQ YDS, OUT OF KHASRA NO 44/17/1 AND 44/1/4, SITUATED IN THE REVENUE ESTATE OF VILLAGE BAPROLA, DELHI STATE DELHI COLONY KNOWN AS NANGLI VIHAR EXTN BLOCK C-S, NEW DELHI, from Mrs. Radha Mishra who had owned the subject property vide Notarized General Power of Attorney, Agreement to sell and Will dated 02/05/2026 executed by Mr. Om Prakash Mishra, now Ajit Kumar Singh & MISHALA DEVI witness not available intend to purchase and mortgage the subject property with **Ummeed Housing Finance Pvt. Ltd** So, to comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim/right/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 15 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP N-161, Ground Floor, Saira Tower, Gautam Nagar Near Yusuf Sarai Community Centre New Delhi-110049 Contact# 011-40046316 & 41667327

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client Yoginder Singh S/o Shri Budh Singh, and his wife, Preet Wati, both R/o House No. B-76, 20 Futa Road, Budh Vihar, Mandoli Village, North-East Delhi, Delhi-93, have disowned their son Nitin Kumar and his wife Preeti Kumar, from all their movable & immovable properties and severed all relations with them. My client will not be responsible for their any acts and civil or criminal liabilities. **K.P. Chauhan (Advocate)Chamber No. 533, Saket Court, New Delhi-17**

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform general public that Mr. Rishabh Yadav S/o Mr. Mukesh Kumar has acquired Plot no. 15-A, area measuring 50 sq. yds, out of total land area measuring 50 sq. yds., part of Khasra no. 15/5, situated in the revenue estate of village Kamal Pura Buzurg, Delhi-110084 by way of POA documents GPA, ATS & Will dated 16.01.2026. Now, we are given to understand that above said owner intends to sell Ms. Krishna W/o Mr. Satish Kumar on Sale Deed basis and further Ms. Krishna and Mr. Satish Kumar are availing loan on above said property from Shubham Housing Development Finance Co. Ltd. & in case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 7 days of this publication to Advocate Ajit Sharma or Advocate Pramod Kumar Singh partner of Acculaw Source LLP, Office No. 363, Second Floor, Sector-1, Vajshali, Ghazipur-201010 or contact -+91 9560309999 (M)

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Axis Bank Ltd., Axis House, Tower T-2, 2nd Floor, I-14, Sector-128, Noida Expressway, Jaypee Greens Wishtown, Noida (U.P.)-2013 Registered Office : "TRISHUL" - 3RD Floor Opp. Samartheshwar Temple, Near Law Garden, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad - 380008 Telephone No. 079-26403322 Fax No. - 079-26403321 CIN: L65110GJ1993PLC020769 Website - www.axisbank.com

APPENDIX IV [Refer Rule – 8(i)] POSSESSION NOTICE (For Immovable Property)

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of Axis Bank Ltd. under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued demand notice dated 17-Apr-2026 calling upon **Late Mr. M.S. Nair** through its Legal Heirs - **Mrs. Radha M Nair, Mr. Sujit Kumar Nair & Mrs. Sumita Nair** (All are legal heirs of **Borrower/ Mortgagee of Late Mr. Madhu Sudanan Nair** to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being **Rs. 83,42,459/- (Rupees Eighty Three Lakh Four Thousand Four Hundred Fifty Nine Only)** against as on **08-Apr-2026** and interest and cost thereon within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s)/Mortgageor(s)/Guarantor(s) above said having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s) / Mortgageor(s) / Guarantor(s) and the Public in General that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13 (4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on **17-07-2026**.

The Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s)/Mortgageor(s)/Guarantor(s) above said in particular and the Public in General is hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties and any dealings with the properties will be subject to the charge of the Axis Bank Ltd. for an amount of **Rs. 83,42,459/- (Rupees Eighty Three Lakh Forty Two Thousand Four Hundred Fifty Nine Only)** as on **08-Apr-2026** together with further interest thereon at the contractual rate of interest till the date of payment & expenses thereon.

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

Description of immovable property

All that Flat No- 5-A in Block-5, Ground Floor, Co-Operative Group Housing Society in Neethi Apartment, 84-I.P. Extension Patparganj, Delhi-110092 and bounded as under- East: As Per Title Deed, West: As Per Title Deed, North: As Per Title Deed, South: As Per Title Deed

Please Note That As Mention In Sub Section 13 Of Section 13 Of The Aforesaid Act, You Shall Not Transfer By Way Of Sale, Lease Or Otherwise Any Of The Assets Stated Under Security Referred To In This Notice Without Prior written Consent Of Our Bank.

Date: 17-07-2026
Place: DELHI

Sd/- Authorized Officer,
Axis Bank Ltd.

ESAF
ESAF SMALL FINANCE BANK

REGD. OFFICE: ESAF Bhavan, Mannuthy, Thrissur- 680 651, Kerala

GOLD AUCTION NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the public that gold ornaments pledged with ESAF Small Finance Bank Ltd. against various loan accounts and remaining overdue unredeemed despite repeated notices will be auctioned for recovery of the Bank's dues, in accordance with applicable banking regulations and policies.

DETAILS OF AUCTION	
Mode of Auction: Off-line (Physical Auction through Branches)	
Date of Auction: 20-08-2026	Time: 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
Auction Venues: The auction will be conducted at the following ESAF Small Finance Bank branches in Haryana	
Interested bidders are requested to visit the respective branches for participation. For detailed branch addresses and contact numbers, please visit the Bank's official website	
BRANCH NAME - LOAN ACCOUNT NUMBER	
Faridabad: 75260000044519.	

Important Instructions: Borrowers may redeem their pledged gold ornaments by clearing the total dues along with applicable charges at least two days prior to the auction date. Interested bidders must carry valid KYC documents. GST Registration Number is mandatory for firms/companies, wherever applicable. Bidders are required to deposit an Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) of Rs.2,500 before participating in the auction. The auction will be conducted on an "as is where is" and "as is what is" basis. The Bank reserves the right to cancel/postpone the auction or reject any bid without assigning any reason. Participation in the auction shall be deemed acceptance of all terms and conditions of the Bank. The Minimum Reserve Price will be fixed by bank on the basis of IBAJA Rate as applicable on the basis of purity of Gold.

Place: Thrissur
Date: 18-07-2026

(Sd/-) Authorized Signatory
ESAF Small Finance Bank Ltd.

Police step up security ahead of CJP’s planned *Chalo Sansad* march

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Police have increased surveillance, vehicle checks, and personnel deployment across the capital in anticipation of the Cockroach Janta Party's planned 'Chalo Sansad' march to Parliament on Monday. The security measures follow the recent transfer of activist Sonam Wangchuk, who was on a hunger strike, to a hospital by authorities.

Key entry points into the New Delhi district have been designated as high-security zones. Barricades, vehicle checks, and reinforced pickets have been established to

maintain law and order. Additional personnel from various units have been deployed to support the existing arrangements.

A senior police source confirmed that the arrangements are directly linked to the proposed march, which coincides with the opening day of the Monsoon session of Parliament on July 20.

"Elaborate security arrangements have been put in place in view of the proposed 'Chalo Sansad' march," the source stated. The official also noted that the Cockroach Janta Party has not sought permission for the march so far.

As the organisers have not obtained official permission,

police are treating the proposed gathering as an unauthorised assembly. In such situations, standard protocol includes increased vigilance, readiness for crowd control, and deployment of rapid-response teams at sensitive locations. Vehicle checks at entry points involve document verification and monitoring for suspicious activity.

The recent transfer of Sonam Wangchuk to a hospital following his hunger strike has raised concerns among supporters. Police have stated that such interventions are intended to safeguard the health of individuals on prolonged fasts. The incident occurred shortly before the



Security personnel stand guard at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi

PTI

planned march. The planned 'Chalo Sansad' march is expected to attract participants from various regions. In

the absence of prior approval, organisers may face legal action if the event takes place. Police are preparing for pos-

sible scenarios, including traffic disruptions, crowd buildup near the Parliament complex, and attempts to

enter restricted areas. The Monsoon session, scheduled to begin on July 20, is expected to see significant attendance by lawmakers, staff, and visitors. Security in the Parliament area has been prioritised accordingly.

Large unauthorised protests during this period may create logistical challenges. Police have set up control rooms for real-time monitoring, placed additional forces on standby, and are coordinating with central agencies.

Commuters have been advised to plan their travel, as routes to central Delhi may be subject to restrictions and delays due to security arrangements. Marches to Parliament

are a regular occurrence in Indian public life, often organised to highlight grievances.

The current situation, involving an unauthorised march, the recent hospitalisation of an activist, and the start of the parliamentary session, has resulted in increased security measures. The police have appealed to the public for cooperation and urged organisers to maintain peace.

While the right to peaceful protest is recognised, authorities emphasise that it must be exercised within the framework of law, especially during high-stakes national events. As Monday approaches, the Capital remains under close watch.

Protesters rally after Wangchuk’s removal; Dipke starts indefinite hunger strike

KHUSHI MEHROTRA
■ New Delhi

A heavy sense of anxiety settled over Jantar Mantar on Saturday, hours after Delhi Police removed activist Sonam Wangchuk from the protest site and shifted him to Safdarjung Hospital early that morning on the 21st day of his indefinite hunger strike. Protesters remained shaken but determined to continue their agitation, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over repeated examination paper leaks.

By the afternoon, the protest venue had transformed from a site centred around Wangchuk's fast into one defined by uncertainty and anger. Protesters described the atmosphere as tense, with many fearing further police action after personnel allegedly attempted to detain students who are also on a relay hunger strike.

Sloganeering demanding the Education Minister's resignation continued, with protesters, including Cockroach



Security personnel detain supporters of the CJP as they raise slogans after activist Sonam Wangchuk is shifted to a hospital from Jantar Mantar in New Delhi

PTI

Janata Party founder Abhijeet Dipke, questioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi's silence and calling the police action "dictatorial."

The student hunger strike organised by the All India Students' Association (AISA) remained on high alert throughout the day after police reportedly tried to remove the students during the morning operation. Volunteers kept a close watch

around the makeshift camp, anticipating another intervention. Neha Bora noted that the students were "fine" and were continuing their hunger strike. Outside the tent are health cards for each student, noting their daily vitals.

Several people who had planned to join the agitation on Monday arrived on Saturday instead after news of Wangchuk's removal spread, swelling the gather-

ing despite the early-morning police action. Darshan (name changed) said, "I was joining the CJP's march on Monday, but I was angry when Sonam sir was removed from Jantar Mantar, so I came today instead." Darshan is a resident of Ghaziabad.

For many protesters, the biggest source of frustration was that Wangchuk was shifted to the hospital against his wishes. Police said the

activist was moved on expert medical advice and in compliance with directions from the Delhi High Court after his health deteriorated. Wangchuk, however, has reportedly refused intravenous fluids, medication and any medical intervention, insisting on continuing his fast as of Saturday, 3:30 pm.

The operation also marked what several protesters described as the first instance of force being used against a movement that has remained largely peaceful since it began nearly three weeks ago. Police removed Wangchuk during an early morning operation, citing concerns over his deteriorating condition.

Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke, who was not present when Wangchuk was removed, appeared visibly emotional throughout the day. Fighting back tears while addressing supporters, Dipke announced that he would begin an indefinite hunger strike in Wangchuk's place, calling the police action an attempt

to suppress a peaceful democratic protest.

The police action comes just two days before Parliament's Monsoon Session, on the opening day of which the CJP has announced a "Sansad Chalo" march towards Parliament.

Meanwhile, Wangchuk's wife, Geetanjali Angmo, alleged that the family was being denied access to his medical reports and had not been allowed to seek an independent medical opinion. She said the family wanted him shifted to a hospital of their choice and maintained that no treatment should be administered without their consent. Angmo is expected to participate in Monday's Parliament march.

The police action has also drawn criticism from several Opposition leaders, who termed the removal unconstitutional. Over the past week, leaders from multiple Opposition parties have visited Wangchuk at Jantar Mantar, expressing solidarity with the protest while urging him to end his fast.

Ink thrown at Abhijeet Dipke at Jantar Mantar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Hours after Delhi Police shifted activist Sonam Wangchuk to Safdarjung Hospital following a deterioration in his health, dramatic scenes unfolded at Jantar Mantar on Saturday afternoon when a woman allegedly hurled an ink-like liquid at Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke while he was addressing supporters.

The incident briefly disrupted the gathering as supporters rushed toward the stage, causing a commotion at the protest site. Police detained the woman, but her identity and motive were not immediately known. However, several social media users identified her as "Barkha Trehan," reportedly a men's rights activist.

The episode came against the backdrop of heightened tensions at Jantar Mantar earlier in the day, when Delhi Police shifted Wangchuk to



Safdarjung Hospital after his health reportedly deteriorated during his indefinite hunger strike. The early morning operation saw brief resistance from protesters, with some attempting to obstruct the police action.

Wangchuk had been on an indefinite hunger strike since June 28 in support of the CJP-led agitation over alleged irregularities in the NEET examination. According to doctors monitoring his condition, he had lost nearly 9.5 kg during the fast, while his blood pressure and blood sugar levels were being closely monitored.

DU admissions: Over 79,000 aspirants accept UG seat allotment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

More than 79,000 candidates have accepted the undergraduate seats allotted to them by the University of Delhi till 6 pm on Saturday, the final day for accepting seats under the first allocation list of the Common Seat Allocation System (CSAS).

According to the admission data shared by the university, 79,404 candidates had accepted their allotted seats by 6 pm. Of these, applications of 26,061 candidates had reached the "Approved for Payment" stage, while 10,746 candidates had completed the admission process by paying the requisite fees.

The first allocation list for admissions to 221 undergraduate programmes across 67 colleges was announced on Thursday, with seats allotted to 93,033 candidates against more than 71,000 available seats for the 2026-27 academic session.

The allocations were made from among 2,08,043 candidates who completed Phase 2 of the admission process by submitting their programme and college preferences. Overall, 2,18,284



candidates completed registration on the CSAS portal.

According to the university, 93,033 candidates, including 42,019 male and 51,014 female applicants, received seat allocations in the first round, reflecting an overall allocation rate of 86.1 per cent. A total of 15.94 lakh unique programme-college preferences were considered during the allocation exercise. Among special category admissions, 1,243 single girl child candidates and 242 orphan candidates, including 109 male and 133 female applicants, were allotted seats.

Candidates allotted seats in the first round have until 11.59 pm on Saturday to accept their allocations. Colleges will continue verifying applications, after which candidates will complete the fee payment process.

The university has advised candidates wishing to be

considered for a higher preference in subsequent rounds to opt for the "upgrade" option.

The second allocation list is scheduled to be released on July 25.

Meanwhile, the Delhi University Sports Council has released the schedule for sports trials under the Sports Supernumerary Quota for undergraduate admissions. The trials will be conducted from July 29 to August 3 across various venues in Delhi for different sports disciplines.

The trials will begin on July 29 with events including archery, women's badminton, women's basketball, boxing, men's cricket, women's football, hockey, squash, table tennis and weightlifting. The remaining disciplines, including athletics, chess, fencing, kabaddi, shooting, tennis, wrestling and swimming, will be held over the following days.

Only 70 MCD licences for open dining as 1,500 eateries operate such spaces

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) currently has around 70 valid licences for open dining spaces, even as nearly 1,500 restaurants and cafes are estimated to be operating such spaces across the city. Officials and restaurant associations attributed the low number of valid licences largely to the high cost of obtaining and renewing permits.

According to MCD data, applications under the open dining policy have increased over the years after the policy was introduced in 2022. The figure dipped marginally to 202 in 2024-25 before climbing to 329 in 2025-26, the highest since the policy was introduced.

In the current financial year, 150 licences have been issued so far. However, the officials said the higher number of applications has not translated into an increase in valid licences, as many establishments either do not complete the licensing process or fail to renew their permits after expiry due to the high fee.

सत्यमेव जयते

दिल्ली सरकार

HOW TO APPLY FOR EV INCENTIVE Under DELHI EV POLICY 2026

A Simple Step-by-Step Guide for the Public

Bought an eligible EV in Delhi? Follow these steps to claim your incentive online

1. Buy an Eligible Electric Vehicle (in Delhi)
(Eligible under the Delhi EV Policy 2026)

2. Register the Vehicle In Delhi

3. Visit the Delhi EV Incentive Portal
evsubsidy.delhi.gov.in

4. Login Using Mobile Number & OTP

5. Verify Pre-filled Details

6. Upload Required Documents

7. Select Incentive Type & Submit Application

- Purchase Incentive
- Scrapping Incentive

8. Application Verified by Transport Department

9. Incentive Approved & Transferred (directly to your bank account)

This portal and application process covers both

Purchase Incentives

Scrapping Incentives

Documents Required for Individual Applicants

An individual applicant shall upload clear and legible copies of the following documents while submitting an application for incentive:

1. Aadhaar Card

2. Registration Certificate (RC)

3. Voter ID Card

4. Certificate of Deposit (CoD) (Required only if applying for Scrapping Incentive)

Note The name and other relevant particulars should be consistent across the application and the submitted documents.

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Go Electric Breathe Clean Move Delhi Forward

Important

The incentive is available only after successful purchase and registration of the vehicle in Delhi and is subject to eligibility under the Delhi EV Policy 2026

Transport Department, Government of NCT of Delhi

2,800 electric buses cleared to join Capital’s fleet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government approved inducting 2,800 new electric buses into the city's public transport fleet under the Centre's PM e-Drive Scheme. This move aims to strengthen public transport while reducing vehicular emissions in the Capital.

The decision, cleared by the Delhi Cabinet, is part of the Government's broader plan to expand Delhi's public transport fleet to nearly 14,000 buses by 2028-29. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said on Saturday. The new fleet will comprise 1,400 12-metre air-conditioned low-floor electric buses and 1,400

smaller 9-metre buses, with the latter expected to improve last-mile connectivity by operating on narrow roads and in rural pockets where larger buses face operational constraints.

According to the government, the buses are expected to begin operating on Delhi's roads starting in April 2027,

with the entire fleet slated for integration into the transport network by August 2028.

"The addition of 2,800 zero-emission electric buses marks an important step towards improving Delhi's air quality while providing citizens with more convenient, modern and sustainable public transport," Gupta said.

Officials said the Delhi Government had submitted its requirement for 2,800 electric buses to Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL) last year.

Based on operational experience with the Delhi Electric Vehicle Interconnector (DEVI) buses, the procurement plan was revised to include an equal number of 12-metre and 9-metre buses. CESL subsequently carried out a nationwide competitive bidding process for the project.

Under Phase I of the PM e-Drive Scheme, the Centre will provide financial assistance of up to ₹35 lakh for each 12-metre bus and ₹25 lakh for each 9-metre bus.

DIP/Shabdarth/Display/057/26-27



Centre issues advisory to protect Indian seafarers amid Gulf conflict

RAJESH KUMAR
■ New Delhi

Amid the heightened security situation in the Gulf region owing to the renewed fighting between US and Iran, the Centre has issued an advisory on precautionary measures for the safety and security of Indian seafarers operating in the conflict zone.

The advisory issued by the Directorate General of Maritime Administration, Mumbai under the ministry of ports, shipping and waterways said: "The safety, security and welfare of Indian seafarers, and the security of Indian ships, remain central to the mandate of the Directorate General of Maritime Administration. Recent incidents involving attacks on merchant vessels, including Mombasa B (IMO No 9739501), Al Bahvah (IMO No 9937799). GFS Galaxy



(IMO No 9401271). MT WEDYAN IMO No 9524970), and AL REKAYAT (IMO No 9397339), over the past few days have increased the risks faced by seafarers and commercial ships operating in the conflict-affected areas significantly."

It added: "In view of the heightened security situation in the Persian Gulf region, including incidents resulting in casualties among Indian seafarers and continuing attacks on merchant vessels during the ongoing conflict, the Directorate considers it necessary to adopt

enhanced precautionary measures to safeguard the interests of Indian seafarers serving on board ships operating in the region."

In line with the threat perception, it specified precautionary measures for compliance including "Heightened Security Vigilance" "Masters of vessels operating in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and adjoining waters shall maintain a heightened level of security vigilance, continuously monitor navigational warnings, security advisories and updates issued by the com-

petent authorities, and implement all applicable Ship Security Measures, Ship Security Plans (SSP) and Company Security Procedures in accordance with the ISPS Code.

Ship Owners, Ship Managers and RP&SL Companies have been directed to avoid deploying Indian seafarers on vessels undertaking voyages involving passage through the Strait of Hormuz until further orders. For any emergency assistance, seafarers and vessels shall immediately contact MMDAC (DG Communication Centre) and IFC-IOR.

The government on Tuesday had asked the shipping authority to set up a dashboard for providing real-time information about Indian seafarers on each vessel operating in the region, irrespective of the ship's flag.

Ayodhya donation row: Police places key accused in police custody for 39 hours

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

The Ayodhya Police have placed the key accused, Tinnu Yadav and Manish Yadav, in police custody for 39 hours in connection with the theft of donations at the Ram Temple. Concurrently, the residence of Tinnu Yadav, situated in the Swarg Dwar locality of Ayodhya Dham, remains secured and unoccupied.

This development occurs amid an ongoing investigation into alleged misappropriation of funds and valuables from donation boxes (*hundis*) at the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) previously submitted a preliminary report highlighting critical procedural deficiencies, including the absence of staff screening, inadequate preservation of CCTV footage (retained for only 45 days instead of the mandated 180 days), and violations in the handling of donation boxes.

The investigation uncovered approximately 70 suspected incidents of theft captured on CCTV footage, in which counting personnel allegedly concealed cash within their clothing, pockets, and other locations. Eight individuals have been



detained, including Ramashankar Yadav, also known as Tinnu Yadav, a former driver for the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust's general secretary, Champat Rai, who held keys to several donation boxes, and his relative Manish Kumar Yadav, employed in the cash-counting division. Other accused persons include Anukalp Mishra, Lavkush Mishra, and Subhash Srivastava.

Authorities have recovered approxi-

mately ₹79.85 lakh in cash and valuables from six of the detained individuals. Following the arrests and subsequent searches of their residences, Champat Rai and another trustee resigned amid growing calls for transparency in the temple's administration.

Tinnu Yadav, who advanced from modest origins to a position of significant access within the temple premises, and Manish Yadav are now undergoing further questioning. Their extended remand indicates that law enforcement aims to thoroughly investigate the scope of the criminal operation and identify any larger networks involved, which are reported to have operated for two to three years.

The locked residence in Swarg Dwar has attracted local attention, with neighbours and media representatives reporting no activity since the arrests. The case has ignited widespread discussion in Ayodhya about security vulnerabilities at one of India's most revered religious sites and underscores the need for enhanced oversight of devotional offerings. The investigation remains ongoing, with authorities reaffirming their commitment to ensuring accountability while preserving the sanctity of the temple.

Delhi CM visits Maa Vindhyavasini Temple

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Mirzapur

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta visited Maa Vindhya vasini Temple in Vindhychal on Saturday, offered prayers, and received a grand welcome from the BJP's Mahila Morcha. According to reports, Gupta arrived at Vindhya Dham in Mirzapur by road from Varanasi Airport at 1.35 pm.

In a post on X, Gupta said, "Jai Maa Vindhyavasini! At the Maa Vindhyavasini Dham in Mirzapur, I performed rituals and offered prayers at the sacred feet of the Mother

Goddess, seeking happiness, prosperity, good health, and a blessed life for everyone. This sacred abode of Jagat Janani Maa Vindhyavasini has long been a divine centre of reverence, spiritual power, and unwavering faith. May the Mother's grace always be upon everyone."

In another post on X, the chief minister expressed her heartfelt gratitude to her BJP colleagues for camaraderie shown to her during journey from Varanasi to Mirzapur.

"This affection of yours infuses greater energy and inspiration into the resolve to serve the people," she said.

Power line snaps, traffic comes to standstill on Delhi–Jaipur Highway

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Traffic on the Delhi-jaipur National Highway came to a halt for over two hours on Saturday after a high-voltage power line snapped and fell across the carriageway near Gurugram, narrowly missing vehicles and pedestrians.

The snapped transmission line fell across the main road, forcing the administration to immediately halt



traffic in both directions to prevent any untoward incident. The closure severely disrupted movement on the Jaipur-Delhi route, leaving commuters stranded in long queues under scorching heat.

Within minutes, a traffic jam stretching nearly 4-5 kilometres formed from Narsinghpur to the Kherki Daula toll plaza. With the incident occurring on a weekend, the disruption caused significant inconvenience to motorists and passengers, throwing traffic on the

highway into disarray. Senior district administration officials, local police and electricity department personnel rushed to the spot. Police cordoned off the area and asked people to maintain a safe distance from live transmission line while a technical team worked to remove it and make the power supply safe. Electricity department employees took nearly two hours to clear the snapped wire from the highway, after which traffic returned to normal.

India's private space era takes off with Mission...

Soon after the successful mission, Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally called Skyroot Aerospace co-founders Pawan Kumar Chandana and Naga Bharath Daka, congratulating the team for achieving a landmark in India's private space journey.

The Hyderabad-based company, which carries the slogan — "Redefining access to space. Your fast track to the orbit. On-demand launch vehicle for rapid, precise, and customisable small satellite deployments" — on its website, described Saturday's mission 'Aagaman' (arrival) as a "grand success".

According to the company, Vikram-1 also carried several symbolic payloads, including an 18-karat gold miniature rocket, an artistic laboratory-grown diamond, postcards from engineers and astronauts, and a handwritten postcard by the Prime Minister bearing the message "Vande Mataram." A micro-art payload featuring miniature sculptures of Vikram Sarabhai, Sir CV Raman and former President APJ Abdul Kalam was also placed in orbit as a tribute to the pioneers of India's scientific and space programmes. Speaking to the founders over the phone, Modi described the mission as proof that India could become truly Atmanirbhar in advanced technologies. "The growing participation of our private sector is opening new frontiers and accelerating innovation. This achievement will encourage countless youngsters to dream bigger and innovate fearlessly," the Prime Minister said.

For Skyroot Aerospace, the successful mission represents a leap from its earlier achievement in 2022, when it launched Vikram-S, India's first privately built suborbital rocket. Saturday's mission validated several advanced technologies, including an all-carbon composite rocket structure and 3D-printed engines, both of which the company says are first-of-their-kind developments for an Indian orbital launcher.

The engineering data gathered during the mission will now be analysed to validate the rocket's guidance, navigation and control systems before future commercial satellite launches. The payloads onboard also showcased emerging technologies. Grahaa Space's Solaras mission demonstrated new capabilities in low Earth orbit, while Cosmoserve's Embrace tested robotic arms designed for future space debris removal missions. Skyroot's SCOPE satellite carried experimental technologies for upcoming launches, while German firm DCubed flew deployable space hardware aboard the vehicle.

Both Chandana and Daka, former ISRO scientists, were present at Mission Control along with ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan. Former ISRO chiefs, astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla and Andhra Pradesh Minister Nara Lokesh also witnessed the launch. Calling the achievement a direct outcome of India's space sector reforms, ISRO Chairman Narayanan credited the government's decision in 2020 to open the sector to private players and establish the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACE).

"Within six years of the reforms, a startup has successfully placed satellites into orbit on its very first attempt. It is a truly satisfying moment," he said, while also praising the youthful Skyroot team. Chandana said the mission reflected what Indian startups could accomplish when given the opportunity. "We are very proud that the government enabled private participation. Today we stand as India's first private company to launch a rocket into orbit with a fully Indian team and a vehicle built 100 per cent in India," he said.

His co-founder Daka noted that the mission placed India alongside the United States and China in demonstrating private orbital launch capability. Beyond its technological significance, Vikram-1 is expected to strengthen India's position in the fast-growing global market for launching small satellites. The mission is widely seen as validation of the country's efforts to build

a vibrant commercial space ecosystem, where private companies work alongside ISRO to expand India's footprint in the global space economy. Several chief ministers and leaders across political spectrum congratulated the private company on its achievement.

The payloads that piggybacked on Vikram-1 include Cosmoserve Space's Embrace (mission name), an in-orbit demonstration of robotic arms capable of removing space debris, and Solaras by Grahaa Space, which is a compact satellite mission developed to demonstrate new capabilities in LEO. German test payload uD3PP and mD3RN by DCubed also reached space on Saturday.

Shah inspects BSF outpost near Siliguri

During his visit, the Home Minister stressed the importance of staying alert and taking proactive steps. He praised the BSF for their hard work in guarding a difficult border. He also said the Government is committed to providing the BSF with what they need to modernise border management, including smart fencing, floodlights, CCTV cameras, drones, and real-time monitoring, as part of the "smart border" plan.

To help secure India's border with Bangladesh, the West Bengal Government has handed over more than 1,024 acres of land in nine districts to the Border Security Force (BSF). This land will be used for fencing about 172.6 km of the international border. The transfer, completed quickly by the new State administration, will boost security in key areas, including the Siliguri Corridor.

These new land transfers add to earlier progress in northern Bengal. In May 2026, the State granted land, allowing fencing to begin in the Phansidewa area of Siliguri, initially covering about 27 km. More land was also provided for Border Outposts and other needed infrastructure. Shah welcomed the handover of the Siliguri Corridor, which covers 121 hectares, calling it an important step for national security. The Home Minister's visit comes as border fencing projects in West Bengal are making good progress. After the new State Government took office, large areas of land were granted to the BSF for building fences and outposts. In the Siliguri subdivision, especially in Phansidewa, fencing has started after land was handed over. Similar work is happening in other districts, with over 1,000 acres given for almost 173 km of new fencing. These efforts are part of a bigger plan to close gaps along the 4,096-km India-Bangladesh border, which faces problems like illegal immigration, human trafficking, and smuggling. Officials say that using technology alongside physical barriers has helped reduce unauthorised crossings in other areas. Security experts see Shah's visit as a sign that the Government is taking a hands-on approach to border management. These visits help leaders understand the situation on the ground, raise morale, and improve coordination between the Central and State agencies.

As India works to make its borders more secure and modern, the Siliguri sector remains a top priority. The Home Minister's review is likely to lead to further upgrades to the BSF's infrastructure and operations here. "The visit underscores the importance of protecting India's eastern borders as security challenges evolve. With fencing progressing and surveillance intensifying, the Government wants to build a strong, layered defence along the Bangladesh border," a senior official said.

Morning drama: Police remove Wangchuk

CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke, who had briefly left the area, was reportedly detained during the incident. He later announced an indefinite hunger strike in protest. Meanwhile, Delhi Police strong-

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ly denied using a lathi charge or excessive force.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), New Delhi, Sachin Sharma, said the action followed Delhi High Court directions for regular health checks and expert advice, due to Wangchuk's worsening condition. He said protesters tried to block the process, causing "a slight commotion," but police used "maximum restraint". Police said that no one was detained and that the remaining protesters were asked to leave peacefully. Afterwards, there was a heavy police presence, including deployment of the Rapid Action Force (RAF). Wangchuk was shifted to Safdarjung Hospital around 7:40 am and admitted for observation and treatment. Hospital sources and officials said he is conscious and his vital signs are stable. Doctors are treating mild dehydration and electrolyte imbalances from his prolonged fast. He has reportedly lost about 9.5 kg since starting his fast on June 28. His wife, Gitanjali J Angmo, expressed concern, stating he appeared fine on Friday and asserting that no treatment should proceed without their doctors' consent.

Wangchuk started his hunger strike on June 28 after joining the CJP's sit-in at Jantar Mantar, which began around June 20. He said he was fasting to support students, demand accountability in the education system, and draw attention to problems in Ladakh. Some reports say Wangchuk has refused intravenous fluids. Students, farmers, and other supporters plan to hold a peaceful "Chalo Sansad" march to Parliament on July 20.

The Delhi High Court has been closely watching Wangchuk's health, stressing that every citizen's life is important. Police say they removed him for medical reasons, not for an arrest. The incident has led to strong reactions. Opposition leaders called the hospitalisation "forced" and "undemocratic."

Supporters view it as an attempt to break a peaceful, constitutionally protected protest. Organisers insist the July 20 march will proceed. As the day unfolded, Jantar Mantar saw heavy security, with police clearing the area after Wangchuk was taken away. Throughout the day, Jantar Mantar had heavy security, and police cleared the area after Wangchuk was taken away.

Ayodhya row: 30 more staff members face SIT...

This recruitment pattern may have made the thefts easier, leading to the arrest of eight people in late June 2026. Six of those arrested worked directly in cash counting through an outsourced agency, while the others were supervisors. The SIT, set up by the Uttar Pradesh Government on June 13 at the Trust's request, first focused on these workers after its initial report found irregularities in handling offerings. But with nearly 50 people involved, including private agency staff, Trust supervisors, SBI verifiers, and technical support, the investigation is now looking more closely at possible weaknesses in the system. After submitting an interim report on June 23 that recommended steps such as appointing a chief executive officer, holding weekly audits, and retaining CCTV footage for 180 days instead of 45, the team received an additional 15 days to continue its work on July 1. Now, the focus is not only on the accused individuals but also on the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust's entire financial system since 2020. The inquiry is looking for possible problems throughout the system, not just the thefts.

A key part of the expanded investigation is how staff were recruited. Nearly 40 of the 50 counting staff were reportedly hired on the recommendations of Trust officials. The SIT is checking if this led to weak oversight or possible collusion. Investigators are looking into whether standard checks, like background verification, were skipped. This could lead to more people being named, since the FIR mentions 'others' and early findings suggest up to 150 possible suspects, with action expected against about 25. Police say the investigation now has

three main parts. First is the financial trail, where teams match daily collection records with bank deposits from recent months to determine how much money may have been taken. Second is the human trail, with nearly 30 counters questioned about how they were hired, their training, and who they reported to in day-to-day operations. Investigators are also checking if any of them had past cases or connections with each other. Third is the institutional trail, which looks at the roles of supervisors and Trust officials who made hiring recommendations.

No Trust office-bearer has been accused yet, but statements have been taken to understand the hiring process. CCTV footage from the counting and strong rooms is being reviewed closely. A senior officer said, "More arrests are possible. We are not ruling out the involvement of more people in either the theft or in facilitating it by bypassing norms."

Raids and searches are still going on as the investigation widens. Ayodhya police have carried out several operations at homes linked to the accused and at places involved in counting donations, during which cash, valuables, and documents were found. The team is also reviewing land deals, material purchases, and daily reports sent to the Chief Minister's Office for any signs of problems related to the handling of donations.

Trust officials have been told not to leave Ayodhya while the investigation continues, indicating greater focus on administrative responsibility. The investigation has shifted from looking at single crimes to possible failures in the system. The SIT is comparing donation patterns with visitor numbers and reviewing five years of Trust accounts to see whether the thefts point to bigger problems, such as not following procedures or weak security during counting. So far, eight arrests and the recovery of nearly 780 lakh are early results, but the main finding is that the thefts may be a sign of larger issues in hiring and oversight.

Monsoon Session: Speaker Birla approves...

This meeting, which will involve the floor leaders of all major parties, will discuss several pressing issues, including the alleged embezzlement of donations for the Ram temple in Ayodhya, and the forcible removal of activist Sonam Wangchuk from Jantar Mantar. Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju has extended invitations to NCPI Chief Whip Dr. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar to attend the government's customary all-party floor leaders' meeting, hinting at a broader shift in the political landscape before the legislative session commences on July 20.

These developments come against the backdrop of an intensifying numbers game between the ruling BJP-led NDA and the opposition bloc in Parliament. With the official induction of the six Maharashtra MPs into the Shinde faction, the BJP-led alliance has further strengthened its legislative arithmetic.

Additionally, the government has announced five new bills that will be introduced in the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha during the upcoming Monsoon Session. These include Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026: This bill amends the 1971 law to impose penalties for intentional disruptions during the singing of "Vande Mataram."

While the Speaker has sanctioned the request for separate seating away from the parent TMC block, official sources indicated that a final decision on whether to formally recognize the group under the NCPI banner remains pending as parliamentary and constitutional experts review the legal parameters.

Activist under urgent therapy: Hospital

Wangchuk was taken forcibly to Safdarjung Hospital by the Delhi Police on the 21st day of his hunger strike. He has been on an indefinite hunger strike since June 28 in support of the CJP-led protest over alleged irregularities in the NEET examination and the reported deaths of students linked to the controversy.

An independent expert from AIIMS, Delhi, examined Wangchuk and concurred with the treating team's assessment that urgent fluid and electrolyte therapy is medically indicated. An AIIMS doctor has also joined the treating team and will remain continuously available for monitoring and clinical management.

"Despite repeated counselling by the treating team and the independent expert regarding the urgent need for treatment, the patient has declined intravenous fluids, oral rehydration solution and all medications. The patient's family has also not yet provided consent for the recommended medical intervention," the hospital said.

The hospital said Wangchuk has refused intravenous fluids, oral rehydration solution and all medications despite repeated counselling by the treating team and an independent AIIMS expert, while his family is yet to provide consent for the recommended medical intervention.

"His pulse, blood pressure and oxygen saturation are currently within normal limits. However, he is exhibiting clinical signs of dehydration, and in view of his prolonged fasting, his condition warrants immediate medical intervention to prevent further deterioration and potentially serious complications," the statement said.

It added that Wangchuk continues to remain under close medical observation.

"The treating team is making every effort to counsel the patient and his family to provide consent and accept the recommended treatment at the earliest in the interest of safeguarding his health and preventing avoidable complications," the statement said.

"The patient continues to be under close medical observation. The treating team is making every effort to counsel the patient and his family to provide consent and accept the recommended treatment at the earliest in the interest of safeguarding his health and preventing avoidable complications," it stated.

Wangchuk and the three activists from AISA have been on an indefinite hunger strike since June 28 in support of the CJP-led protest demanding Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over alleged irregularities in NEET and deaths of students linked to the controversy. Soon after the police action, CJP founder Abhijit Dipke alleged that the protesters were subjected to a police crackdown.

Iran warns US of unforgettable lessons

There was no new word on mediation efforts. The most significant damage from Iranian strikes on Saturday occurred in Kuwait, where a water desalination plant and an oil facility were hit, according to the Kuwait authorities and the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. Both declined to provide locations.

The strikes injured several people at the oil facility and caused a fire at the desalination plant, forcing several power generation units offline. It was the second attack against a desalination plant in two days in the tiny desert nation that depends on desalination for 90 per cent of its drinking water.

Several firefighters and a worker were injured while battling two other blazes sparked by Iranian strikes, according to the Kuwait Fire Force. Kuwait briefly closed its airspace due to missile threats, and Kuwait Airways said it was rescheduling most flights to and from the capital.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 Ahmedabad

■ Ahmedabad

Police and forensic team members conduct investigation after at least nine persons were killed and six others injured in a blast and fire at an illegal firecracker factory at Ramol area in Ahmedabad

Jaipal Singh Rathore said.
Personnel from the Rapid

City Crime Branch is carrying out further investigation. In a post by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), PM Modi said, "Extremely saddened to

"The news of the accident that occurred in a firecracker factory in Ahmedabad is extremely heartbreaking. I pray to God that the souls of the deceased who lost their lives in this tragedy find peace. I express my deepest condolences to their family members," Patel stated in the post on X. All necessary assistance and treatment are being provided to the affected by the local administration, he said, wishing a speedy recovery for the injured persons.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Sriharikota (Andhra Pradesh)

■ Sriharikota (Andhra Pradesh)

Hailing the successful flight of Vikram-1 by private startup Skyroot Aerospace as a milestone, the ISRO chief lauded



ISRO Chairman Dr V Narayanan addresses a press conference following the launch of Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 rocket from the first launch pad at the SDSC SHAR in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh

"We are just like parents

companies and private sector were allowed to carry out the activities in the space area. Today, for the first time in the country, a private rocket successfully placed the satellite in orbit," he said, adding that the milestone will drive substantial economic growth and foster a

“Initial launches will go from here. Then we are also building the second launch complex in Kulasekarapattinam. That is getting ready. Within this financial year, we are going to commission [it],” Narayanan stated, adding that the facility is currently in its final phase.

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
 New Delhi/Hyderabad

Officials say more assets may be seized and more arrests could happen as they try to recover as much money as possible.

– Prime Minister Narendra Modi





States Focus



Mizoram, Assam pledge to strengthen tourism partnership

Mizoram and Assam have agreed to strengthen cooperation in the tourism sector, with the two neighbouring States seeking closer coordination to boost footfalls and promote the northeast as a premier travel destination, officials said. The discussions took place during a meeting between Mizoram Tourism Minister Lalnghinglova Hmar and his Assam counterpart Ajanta Neog at the latter's official residence in Guwahati on Saturday.

Highlighting Mizoram's growing tourism potential, Hmar said the state has witnessed a significant rise in tourist arrivals since being connected to the railway network in September last year. He said that a majority of visitors to Mizoram came from Assam, making closer collaboration between the two states essential for the growth of the tourism industry.

"Most tourists visiting Mizoram come from Assam. This underscores the need for stronger cooperation between our states in tourism-related activities, and I am confident that our partnership will continue to grow," Hmar was quoted as saying in an official release.



Indian Air Force (IAF) aircrafts en route to Australia to participate in the biennial multinational air combat exercise titled 'Pitch Black 2026'

IAF's Rafale to be part of Pitch Black exercise in Australia

Multiple Rafale aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) will be part of the mega international air exercise 'Pitch Black' being hosted by Australia from July 20 to August 7, officials said. The exercise will sharpen operational synergy and facilitate the exchange of best practices, the Indian Air Force (IAF) said on Friday.

Pitch Dark is the Royal Australian Air Force's (RAAF) largest international exercise featuring complex, combat-like scenarios across one of the largest military training areas in the world over a three-week period in Darwin, according to the RAAF's website.

MP Govt imposes austerity drive as State debt crosses ₹5 lakh crore

UMESH NIGAM ■ Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh Government has unleashed a comprehensive austerity drive across all departments, corporations, boards and Government institutions, imposing stringent curbs on expenditure as the state grapples with a cumulative debt burden exceeding ₹5 lakh crore—a fiscal reality that has compelled the administration to undertake what officials describe as one of the most far-reaching belt-tightening exercises in recent memory.

The Finance Department has issued detailed guidelines for the financial year 2026-27, mandating immediate compliance across every tier of the state's administrative machinery. The directives apply uniformly to all Government departments, corporations, nigrams, mandals, universities, divisional commissioners, commissioners, revenue divisional officers, collectors and district-level officials.

Among the most striking provisions is an outright ban on foreign travel by officials. Domestic air travel has been



restricted to economy class for all categories beyond the specifically exempt top tier.

Two officers will henceforth share a single Government vehicle—a measure designed to halve the state's fleet-related expenditure at one stroke. Additionally, no new vehicles will be procured for the next two years unless the existing fleet is demonstrably insufficient.

Welcome ceremonies and reception events—a deeply entrenched feature of bureaucratic culture in the state—have been categorically prohibited. Festival celebrations and commemorative functions organised by Government departments will also cease, eliminating a significant drain on depart-

mental budgets. The austerity drive extends to the physical trappings of official life. Interior decoration of Government offices has been expressly forbidden, and the use of hired vehicles by officials and Government institutions will be sharply curtailed. Only those vehicles that have completed their full operational lifespan will be considered for replacement, and even then only after rigorous justification.

In a move targeting the sprawling network of state-owned corporations and public sector undertakings, the Government has directed that maximum dividends be compulsorily deposited into the state exchequer's

account—ensuring that profits generated by public enterprises flow back to the consolidated fund rather than being retained or deployed at the discretion of individual entities.

The culture of lavish corporate-style events has also been targeted. Calendar and diary printing—a perennial expenditure item across departments—has been discontinued. Official events and conferences will no longer be held in private hotels and banquet halls but will be mandatorily organised at Government premises, institutional campuses and official venues, eliminating costly venue hire and hospitality bills.

The Government has further directed that all autonomous bodies, corporations and allied institutions functioning under state control conduct an immediate review of their recurring expenditure and identify areas for reduction. Senior officials at the division and district levels have been instructed to ensure strict compliance and to submit periodic reports on implementation.

'Love Jihad' accusation triggers alleged threat to Aamir Khan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Mumbai

Bollywood actor Aamir Khan has allegedly received a threat from individuals claiming links to jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, accusing him of promoting "love jihad", with Mumbai Police examining the authenticity of a social media post and a voice note, officials said on Saturday.

City police commissioner Deven Bharti said the police are verifying the authenticity of the social media post and the voice note. "We are examining the veracity of the social media post and voice clip," Bharti added. No formal complaint has been lodged by Khan or his representatives regarding the alleged threat so far.

The purported threat was issued through a social media post and an accompanying voice clip allegedly shared by two men who identified themselves as Arzu Bishnoi and Tyson Bishnoi. They described themselves as associates of Lawrence Bishnoi, a police official said, citing the viral clip. They accused Khan of pro-



moting "love jihad", an allegation linked to the actor's recent third marriage with Gauri Spratt, and warned that those perceived to be encouraging such behaviour would face consequences.

The voice note also referred to the recent case of a 13-year-old girl in Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar district who was allegedly abducted, trafficked and sexually assaulted, while warning political leaders against shielding any of the accused.

Bishnoi and his syndicate allegedly targeted actor Salman Khan for years. Driven by a 1998 blackbuck poaching case in Rajasthan, the conflict has escalated to the 2024 shooting at Khan's residence in Mumbai, ongoing death threats, and international indictments.

SC to examine Uttarakhand HC's quashing of FIR in Modi Bhawan demolition dispute

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court is set to examine a challenge filed by businesswoman Dr Bina Modi against the Uttarakhand High Court's decision quashing an FIR registered over the alleged demolition of Modi Bhawan number 1 on Camel's Back Road in Mussoorie.

The petition raises the question of whether a criminal investigation can be halted solely because civil proceedings concerning the same property are pending.

The dispute relates to Modi Bhawan number 1 where rival claims over ownership and possession are already pending before civil courts. Dr Modi has sought possession of the property, compensation and damages for its

alleged illegal occupation, while the Radha Soami Satsang Beas (RSSB) claims rights over the property based on a 2001 transaction wherein they have purchased Modi Bhawan number 2 which is a separate property and has obtained interim protection in the pending civil litigation.

Rajinder Singh, Advocate representing Petitioner—Dr Bina Modi before Hon'ble Supreme Court, stated to The Pioneer: "I am representing Dr Bina Modi in the matter before the Supreme Court. The case is listed for hearing on Monday and beyond that I cannot comment on anything further before the hearing."

According to the Special Leave Petition, the controversy escalated on the night of 14 February 2025, when Ajay Kumar Sikri, Secretary of RSSB,



Mussoorie, along with others allegedly acting in concert with him and Hari Ram Sharma, proprietor of M/s Rajputana Security Services Pvt. Ltd., and his employee, Mr. Surendra Sharma, entered Modi Bhawan number 1 without authority.

The petition alleges that the residential bungalow was demolished overnight using heavy machinery and that the debris was removed soon thereafter. It further claims that furniture, paintings,

antiques, personal belongings and original title documents worth several lakhs of rupees were taken away from the premises. Dr Modi also alleges that security personnel and bouncers were subsequently deployed to prevent her and her representatives from accessing the property, despite official records continuing to reflect her ownership of Modi Bhawan number 1.

The petition states that repeated complaints to the police did not result in registration of an FIR. It was only after the Judicial Magistrate, Mussoorie, passed an order under Section 175(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, that FIR number 18 of 2025 was registered on 22 April 2025 at Police Station Mussoorie under various provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita relating to alleged criminal trespass, theft, conspiracy and other offences.

The accused subsequently approached the Uttarakhand High Court seeking quashing of the FIR. By its judgment dated 26 May 2026, the High Court allowed the petitions, observing that the dispute primarily concerned property rights already pending before civil courts. The Court held that permitting criminal proceedings to continue alongside the civil suits could affect their

adjudication and relied on judicial precedents cautioning against invoking criminal law in disputes that are predominantly civil in nature. It further observed that any evidence of criminality could be examined after the civil litigation reaches its conclusion.

Challenging the High Court's ruling, Dr Modi contends before the Supreme Court that the existence of civil proceedings cannot by itself prevent the investigation of cognisable criminal offences. The petition argues that allegations of unlawful trespass, demolition of a residential building, removal of valuables and original title documents, and forcible occupation disclose independent criminal offences requiring a full police investigation irrespective of the pending civil suits.

DMK cannot win on its own, relies on allies: TN Minister Nirmal Kumar



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Madurai (Tamil Nadu)

The DMK relied heavily on its allies to secure past electoral victories and is not capable of winning on its own, Tamil Nadu Minister R Nirmal Kumar said on Saturday.

Asking the Dravidian major to give up its attempt to poach ruling TVK legislators in a bid to destabilise the Government, the minister claimed that the Congress and the Left parties, now with the TVK, had moved away from the DMK as they were uncomfortable with its political manoeuvre towards the AIADMK.

He was responding to a question from reporters on the TVK MLA bribery case, in which ten persons were arrested by the Chennai police.

In his complaint, TVK legislator N Elaiyaraja had said that he was offered ₹35 crore to vote against the Government during a proposed no-confidence motion against the Assembly Speaker.

Police claimed that the highly orchestrated political horse-trading was initiated under the codename 'Meghalaya project' to destabilise the C Joseph Vijay-led TVK Government. The target was to make 15 TVK legislators resign to bring down the Government, police said.

1st LoC firing since Operation Sindoor as Pakistan targets Rajouri posts

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Shattering peace along the Line of Control (LoC), for the first time after 'Operation Sindoor', the Pakistan Army late Friday night resorted to 'unprovoked' firing on the forward Indian posts in the Tarkundi sector of Rajouri district.

Unconfirmed reports claimed that some of the forward Pakistani posts provided cover fire to a heavily armed group of infiltrators sneaking inside the Indian territory. However, alert Indian troops responded swiftly and retaliated after noticing the suspicious movement in the forward areas.

According to local reports, the small arms firing which started around 10.00 pm continued in the forward areas for over one hour. No injuries were reported



during the firing.

Senior army officers of the Nagrota-based White Knight Corps were closely monitoring the prevailing security situation and have directed the local field commanders to stay in a state of high alert. The security forces were already conducting regular searches in Rajouri

after movement of suspected terrorists was recorded in the CCTV cameras.

Massive combing and search operations were launched early Saturday morning to maintain a tight vigil in the area and prevent anyone from sneaking inside the Indian Territory.

Till late evening, the Indian Army had not issued any official statement. Official sources claimed it was, for the first time, a major incident of cross-border firing reported post Operation Sindoor in the Rajouri sector.

Last week, Indian Army Chief General Dhiraj Seth visited forward areas along the Line of Control in Poonch, Rajouri & Sunderbani to take stock of the prevailing security situation. Senior commanders briefed the Army Chief on the security situation in the Jammu region.

SC to hear pleas seeking probe into Ram temple donations theft row on July 20

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court is set to hear on July 20 a batch of pleas seeking a fair and time-bound probe into the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

As per the apex court's cause list for July 20, four separate pleas related to the issue would come up for hearing before a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana.

On July 13, the top court agreed to hear these pleas and directed the Special Investigation Team (SIT), constituted by the Uttar Pradesh Government to probe the matter, to submit a status report before it.

The bench had also issued



notice to the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust seeking its response in the matter.

"Since it is averred in some of the writ petitions that some FIRs have already been registered and an SIT has been constituted to investigate the matter, we direct the SIT constituted by the State of Uttar Pradesh to submit a status report before this court," the top

court had said. Narendra Kumar Goswami, one of the petitioners in the case, moved the top court seeking a CBI probe in the case. He has also sought a Comptroller and Auditor General audit of the finances of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, which manages the affairs of the Ram temple.

Ajay Kumar Rai and Dinesh Kumar Yadav, who have filed

one of the pleas in the top court, have said that a CBI-led multi-disciplinary SIT should investigate the alleged financial irregularities and other purported illegalities concerning the affairs and administration of the temple trust.

Besides seeking a Supreme Court-monitored CBI probe, the third petition filed by RJD MP Sudhakar Singh has sought a forensic audit of the entire finances of the Trust. Another petition filed by 'Hindu Dharma Parishad' has sought an apex court-monitored investigation into the allegations.

On June 13, the Uttar Pradesh Government constituted the SIT on a request from the temple trust following allegations of misappropriation of donations received at the Ram temple.

Amtala TMC office demolished illegally, will move HC, says Abhishek Banerjee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kolkata

Senior Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee on Saturday asserted that the party's Amtala office, which was demolished by the local administration, was built legally on purchased land and after clearing all permissions.

Alleging that the administration acted in collusion with the ruling BJP, he also said that the TMC would move the Calcutta High Court against the demolition of the party office.

The South 24 Parganas district administration on Saturday demolished the party office of the TMC MP at Amtala after it was found to be constructed allegedly without an approved building plan and in violation of applicable



Security personnel clears traffic amid the demolition of the party office of Trinamool Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee in Amtala, South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal on Saturday

rules, a senior official said.

Banerjee told reporters that the action was politically motivated and warned that if there was a change in the Government after the 2031

Assembly elections, the BJP's party offices in the state would also meet the same fate.

"A party office is like a temple to us. If someone has constructed a party office illegally, the authorities should certainly take action. But this is not Government land. The land was purchased, and the building was constructed according to an approved plan. It has all the valid permissions and documents. We will place all these documents before the Calcutta High Court," Banerjee said.

He also said that the party wrote to the Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to the Chief Justice of India, enclosing videos which he claimed showed BJP workers vandalising the premises during the demolition of the party office.

"We will apply for an urgent hearing on this

matter in the high court. We will also move the Supreme Court," the Diamond Harbour MP said.

Those who were seen in the videos would not escape legal action, he said.

"If you think BJP leaders will shield you, then I will tell you that you will be proved wrong. The hand of the law is long enough to catch them," Banerjee said.

"Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. If I remain alive, I promise to give you back all this with interest after the 2031 elections, using the same law," the TMC leader said.

Alleging that the BJP was using the administration to target TMC workers, he claimed that the TMC has secured bail for around 1,000 party workers in the last two months.

CPI condemns destruction of Rahul Sankrityayan statue in West Bengal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Communist Party of India (CPI) on Saturday strongly condemned the destruction of a statue of Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayan at Raniganj in West Bengal, describing the incident as an attack on India's progressive and democratic heritage.

In a statement issued on Saturday, CPI General Secretary D. Raja termed the vandalism a "reprehensible act of political and ideological vandalism" targeting one of India's leading scholars, freedom fighters, Marxist thinkers and public intellectuals.

The party noted that Rahul Sankrityayan was not only a renowned literary figure but also a prominent leader of the CPI. It highlighted that he had served as the National President of the All India



Kisan Sabha in 1940 and had dedicated his life to the struggles of peasants, workers and other marginalized sections of society.

The CPI alleged that the incident reflected a broader pattern of attacks on the country's progressive traditions. In its statement, the party blamed the political climate under the BJP-led Government for creating an atmosphere in which such incidents occur, alleging that there are attempts to undermine India's rationalist,

secular and Left traditions and replace them with a communal narrative.

Calling the destruction of the statue part of this larger ideological campaign, the CPI demanded the immediate arrest of those responsible and sought exemplary punishment for the perpetrators. It also called for the statue to be restored without delay.

The party further appealed to democratic, secular and progressive organisations, as well as writers, artists, intellectuals and citizens, to unite in opposing what it described as efforts to erase the legacy of leaders who worked for freedom, scientific temper, social justice and equality.

Authorities in West Bengal had not issued an official statement on the incident at the time of publication.



HPCL ranks among India's top 20 most valuable brands

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) has been ranked among India's Top 20 Most Valuable Brands in the Brand Finance India 100 Rankings 2026, reaffirming the Company's strong brand equity and leadership in the country's energy sector.

Compiled by Brand Finance, one of the world's leading independent brand valuation consultancies, the annual rankings evaluate brands using the internationally recognised Royalty Relief methodology. The assessment measures brand



value by considering financial performance, brand strength, and consumer perception, making it one of the most credible global benchmarks for brand valuation.

HPCL's inclusion among India's Top 20 Most Valuable Brands reflects the Company's sustained focus on operational excellence, customer-centric innovation,

and delivering reliable energy solutions. The Company had also featured among the Top 20 Most Valuable Brands in the 2025 rankings, demonstrating the consistency and resilience of its brand.

As India accelerates its energy transition, HPCL continues to strengthen its portfolio through investments in cleaner energy, digital transformation, and technology-driven solutions. Backed by decades of customer trust and a commitment to sustainable growth, the Company remains focused on creating long-term value while supporting the nation's evolving energy needs.

Indian Army-supported NIEDO achieves outstanding success in NEET 2026

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

The Red Shield Division, under the aegis of Spear Corps, continues to make a meaningful difference in the lives of underprivileged youth by supporting the National Integrity and Educational Development Organisation (NIEDO), Tinsukia.

NIEDO provides free residential coaching to meritorious students from economically weaker families, preparing them for NEET and enabling them to pursue careers in the medical profession.

The initiative has achieved a remarkable milestone in NEET 2026, with 30



out of 45 students from the Tinsukia centre successfully qualifying the examination, thereby becoming eligible for admission to medical colleges across the country. Among the successful candidates, Roshan

Kujur, a resident of Dighaltarrang Tea Estate, Tinsukia, secured an impressive 402 marks in NEET 2026. Having lost his father at a very young age, Roshan faced life's challenges with remarkable resilience, while

his elder brother, who runs a small shop in Tinsukia, became the sole breadwinner of the family. His achievement is a true reflection of grit, sacrifice and perseverance, and stands as an inspiration for countless young aspirants striving to overcome adversity through education. His success reflects the dedication and perseverance of the students, the guidance provided by the faculty and mentors, and the sustained support extended by the Indian Army.

The achievement stands as a testament to the Indian Army's unwavering commitment to education, youth empowerment and nation-building.

Assam Govt CMAAA scheme empowers 99,971 entrepreneurs

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

In a major boost to self-employment and the State's entrepreneurial ecosystem, the Government of Assam has covered a total of 99,971 beneficiaries across the State through the first two phases of the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhijan (CMAAA).

Launched on September 23, 2023, the flagship entrepreneurship promotion initiative provides crucial financial assistance, Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) training, and continuous hand-holding support to aspiring entrepreneurs to foster sustainable livelihood opportunities, officials said on Friday.



extended the first tranche of financial assistance to 74,694 beneficiaries. This cohort includes 74,144 general category candidates, 206 professionals, and 344 Operation Black Board (OBB) teachers, with the latter group receiving one-time financial assistance of ₹2 lakh each.

To strengthen entrepreneurial capacity, mandatory EDP training has already commenced across all districts for all 74,694 beneficiaries under CMAAA 2.0 and is slated to wrap up by July 31, 2026. While 75 per cent of the approved financial assistance has already been disbursed as the first tranche, the remaining 25 per cent will be released upon successful completion of this training.

The initiative is also actively driving financial inclusion. So far, 1,325 beneficiaries have applied for institutional finance under various Government-sponsored credit-

linked schemes like PMEGP, PMFME, and PM MUDRA, with 329 beneficiaries already successfully availing the credit.

Senior officials emphasised that the effective convergence of CMAAA with institutional credit remains essential for transforming beneficiaries into sustainable entrepreneurs capable of expanding businesses and generating jobs. In line with this, the Government has directed all banks to accord the highest priority to the initiative to ensure tangible outcomes.

An official release from the Department of Industries, Commerce and Public Enterprises stated that the progress achieved under both phases marks a significant milestone toward creating an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, aimed at turning Assam's youth into "job creators rather than job seekers" to realise the vision of a self-reliant 'Atmanirbhar Asom'.

Kotak Mahindra Bank Q1 profit up 22.6% to ₹5,480.46 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Private lender Kotak Mahindra Bank on Saturday reported a 22.55 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to ₹5,480.46 crore in the first quarter of the financial year 2026-27.

In the year-ago period, Kotak Mahindra Bank's net profit stood at ₹4,472.18 crore. On a standalone basis, net profit of the bank stood at ₹4,122.96 crore in the June 2026 quarter, as compared to ₹3,281.68 crore in the year-ago period.

The bank's core net inter-



est income increased by 9 per cent year-on-year to ₹7,928 crore in the reporting

quarter, from ₹7,259 crore in the first quarter of the financial year 2025-26.

However, the bank's net interest margin has reduced to 4.53 per cent in the June quarter, from 4.65 per cent in the year-ago period and 4.67 per cent in the quarter-ago period.

In the reporting quarter, the bank's fee and services income increased by 11 per cent to ₹2,500 crore, from ₹2,249 crore a year ago. On a sequential basis, it was down 10 per cent.

Total deposits of the bank grew by 14 per cent year-on-year to ₹5.59 lakh crore in Q1FY27, from ₹4.92 lakh crore in Q1FY26, according to the investor presentation.

Kotak Mahindra Bank's current account deposits increased by 15 per cent year-on-year to ₹78,107 crore.

The bank has seen a 15 per cent year-on-year jump in its advances to 5.28 lakh crore in the June quarter, from ₹4.59 lakh crore in the same period a year ago.

The bank's asset quality also improved in the reporting quarter, with the gross non-performing asset (NPA) ratio at 1.18 per cent as on June 30, 2026, from 1.48 per cent as on June 30, 2025, and 1.20 per cent as on March 31, 2026.

Axis Bank Q1 net profit jumps 22% to ₹7,632 cr

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Axis Bank on Saturday reported a 22.23 per cent jump in consolidated net profit for the June quarter at ₹7,632.31 crore.

The bank had reported a consolidated net profit of ₹6,243.72 crore in the year-ago period. On a standalone basis, the third-largest private sector lender's net profit jumped 23 per cent to ₹7,114 crore.

Its core net interest income grew 8 per cent to ₹14,646 crore, on the back of a 19 per cent jump in advances and a decline in net interest margin to 3.46 per cent from 3.80 per cent in the year-ago period. The bank's net interest margin in the January-March quarter stood at 3.73 per cent.

A 38 per cent growth in corporate loans led the advances growth, while retail loans grew by just 8 per cent during the April-June period, the bank said.

The overall non-interest income comprising fee, trading and miscellaneous income stood at ₹6,735 crore, down 7 per cent from the year-ago period's ₹7,258 crore, mainly due to a 62 per cent drop in trading income. From an asset quality perspective, the



gross slippages declined to ₹5,566 crore in the reporting quarter from ₹8,200 crore in the year-ago period, but were higher than the ₹4,675 crore in the quarter-ago period.

The overall provisions declined to ₹2,223 crore in the quarter under review from ₹3,948 crore in April-June 2025.

The gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio inched up to 1.28 per cent on a quarter as compared to March-end's 1.23 per cent.

Axis Bank's overall capital adequacy stood at 16.67 per cent as of June 30, 2026.

Minister Mallabaruah reviews Kaziranga wildlife tourism plans



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

Forest Minister Jayanta Mallabaruah on Saturday chaired an extensive review meeting with tourism stakeholders at Kaziranga National Park to discuss preparations for the upcoming wildlife tourism season and long-term conservation.

Addressing the media, Mallabaruah asked stakeholders to submit their written recommendations within 10 days to finalise the upcoming tourism roadmap. He stressed that the Forest and Tourism

departments will work together to ensure balanced development while keeping ecological integrity the foremost priority.

While ruling out year-round tourism in core area due to annual flood cycle, the Minister said department will explore off-season activities to sustain local livelihoods. He also noted that boosting revenue through better hospitality infrastructure would directly fund habitat management.

Cabinet Minister Keshab Mahanta, MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa and of Forest and District Administration officials were also present.

ICICI Bank Q1 profit jumps 13.8% on high loan growth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

ICICI Bank on Saturday reported a 13.88 per cent jump in June quarter consolidated profit at ₹15,440 crore, up from ₹13,558 crore in the year-ago period on the back of faster credit growth.

In an exchange filing, the second-largest private sector lender said its standalone net profit grew 15.95 per cent to ₹14,804 crore for the April-June quarter on a standalone basis, up 15.95 per cent from ₹12,768 crore in the year-ago period. The net interest income (NII) increased 12.7 per cent on-year to ₹24,384 crore in the quarter under review, on the back of a nearly 20 per cent jump in advances and a slight widening in the net interest margin to 4.36 per cent.

Its Executive Director, Sandeep Batra, said the bank was able to buck a system-wide trend and report an expansion in NIMs courtesy of an income tax refund and also the repricing of term deposits. Going forward, channelling in flows from the FCNR(B) will be "dilutive" on the NIMs front, he said, but the bank is confident of keeping it "range-bound" for FY27.

Declining to share a target on the FCNR(B) front, Batra said the bank has activated its international network and is also looking for partners to ramp up and make the FCNR



(B) a success. The bank did not offer guidance on its comfort level with the maximum leverage that it is planning for, saying that it depends on a number of factors, including the call taken by its local partners as well. In the quarter under review, the other income, excluding treasury income, increased by 16 per cent on year to ₹8,425 crore for the reporting quarter, and the bank also reported a treasury gain of ₹151 crore.

The deposit growth came at 14 per cent for the lender. From an asset quality perspective, the gross non-performing assets ratio improved to 1.38 per cent from 1.67 per cent a year ago and 1.40 per cent at the end of March this year.

Fresh slippages came at ₹5,500 crore, which was down from ₹6,200 crore in the year-ago period but higher than the preceding quarter. Bank officials explained that there is seasonality every year, where the first quarter tends to have higher stress primarily because of the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) accounts.

NHPC chief calls for collective green action

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Faridabad

With the aim of promoting environmental conservation, sustainable development, and public participation, a grand 'Van Mahotsav' was jointly organised on Saturday in the campus of PM SHRI Kendriya Vidyalaya No. 2, Faridabad, by NHPC Limited and the school management. The event was held under the aegis of the 'Mission LIFE' and 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam 3.0' campaigns, focusing on the theme "One Child – One Sapling."

Bhupender Gupta, CMD-NHPC, graced the event as the Chief Guest. The occasion was also attended by Director (Projects) Sanjay Kumar Singh, Director (Technical) Suprakash Adhikari, Director (Finance & Personnel) Mahesh Kumar Sharma, Chief Patron of the NHPC Mahila Kalyan Samiti Shikha Gupta, Samiti Patrons Soma Adhikari, Rinku Sharma, and Kendriya Vidyalaya Principal Mamta Shekhar, along with other senior NHPC officials, school teachers, and students.

In his keynote address, Bhupender Gupta congratulated the school community on the successful organisation of the programme. He stated that 'Mission LIFE,' launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, inspires citizens to make environmental conservation an integral



part of their lifestyle. Emphasising that protecting the ecosystem is a shared collective responsibility, he called upon everyone to plant more saplings and pledge to conserve trees. Gupta remarked that instilling a sensitivity towards nature in children is crucial, as these values will shape them into responsible future citizens. He also appreciated the creativity displayed in the environmental artworks and presentations created by the students.

In her address, the school Principal, Mamta Shekhar, stated that the objective of the event was to inspire students to adopt practices related to environmental conservation, sensitivity towards nature, and the core principles of 'Mission LIFE'. She remarked that "One Child-One Sapling" is not merely a campaign but a collective pledge to ensure a clean, green, and safe future

for upcoming generations.

A comprehensive target has been set to plant a total of 2,000 saplings on the school premises as part of the forest festival.

In line with this, approximately 600 saplings were planted during the event, featuring diverse species such as Pilkhan, Ashoka, Indian Willow, and Nurgundi. The remaining 1,400 saplings will be planted in a phased manner over the coming days.

The event featured a variety of cultural and educational activities, including impressive performances by the school's Cub-Bulbul and Scout & Guide units, a sapling plantation drive, songs, group singing, Bharatanatyam, short plays, group dances, instrumental music performances, student speeches on environmental themes, and a prize distribution ceremony.

Panel calls for a national day to commemorate colonialism victims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A public dialogue examining India's colonial history alongside its newly signed free trade agreement with Britain has culminated in a call for a National Day of Commemoration for Victims of Colonialism.

Titled "Terms of Trade: India, Britain, and the Long Shadow of Empire," the dialogue was convened by Urzu Media at the India Habitat Centre on Friday. It brought together economists, historians, trade policy experts and a senior human rights lawyer to discuss how nearly two centuries of colonial rule shaped India's economy, institutions and collective memory, and how that history still informs policy choices today.

Closing the event, participants said they would begin wider consultations with historians, academics, museums, civil society



groups and policymakers to finalise a date. The day is envisioned as covering economic exploitation, famine, displacement and the freedom struggle as connected chapters, rather than isolated episodes such as Jallianwala Bagh or Partition.

The panel included Charan Singh of the EGROW Foundation, trade expert Abhijit Das, economist-historian Prasenjit K Basu, Delhi University's Prabhu Mohapatra, advocate Colin Gonsalves, and Chandini Jaswal of the Museum of British Colonialism, moderated by Richa Jain Kallra. Vijay Kumar Sundaresan of the India Pride Project also spoke on repatriating India's stolen artefacts.

YES Bank posts 32.5% rise in Q1 profit to ₹1,071 cr

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Private lender YES Bank on Saturday reported a 32.54 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to ₹1,071.80 crore in the June quarter, aided by growth in the core net interest income.

In the year-ago period, net profit of the bank stood at ₹808.65 crore. However, on a sequential basis, net profit fell 0.96 per cent.

The core net interest income of the bank increased 17.5 per cent year-on-year to ₹2,786 crore, from ₹2,371 crore.



Net interest margins of the bank improved to 2.70 per cent in June 2026 quarter, from 2.5 per cent in the year-ago period. It remained stable on a sequential basis.

Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Vinay M Tonse said margins are expected to improve over

the medium term as rural infrastructure development fund (RIDF) balances are expected to come down further and retail credit has picked up.

"The RIDF balance is run down, which are currently at about ₹27,000 crore. As we look to exit March 2027, that's likely to become more like ₹21,000 crore of RIDF. So, that will certainly add to margins. With retail growth coming back, we do expect that that should also start supporting margins," Tonse said during the post-earnings conference call.

FROM THE WORLD

NORWAY

Fire destroys 100 homes

A major fire in southern Norway destroyed more than 100 homes and forced hundreds of people to evacuate the area, according to police and the country's public broadcaster. The blaze started in a townhouse in the city of Drammen around 3.30 pm Friday, police said. It then spread through the area and into nearby forests. Firefighters continued their efforts Saturday morning to bring the blaze under control.

NRK, Norway's public broadcaster, said hundreds of people went to an evacuation centre. No residents have been reported missing, police said. It was not immediately clear what caused the fire.

Drammen is roughly 34 km southwest of Oslo. (AP)

PAKISTAN

Army kills TTP militant

A wanted militant was killed in an operation in northwest Pakistan on Saturday, an official said. According to the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) official, the militant belonging to the banned terror outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) was gunned down in Dera Ismail Khan district of the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. He was wanted in multiple terrorism-related cases.

Acting on credible intelligence inputs, the CTD Special Weapons and Tactics division launched an operation during the early hours of Saturday in the Korai area of the province. The official said that the CTD team surrounded the suspect and ordered him to surrender, but he allegedly opened fire, triggering a fatal exchange of gunfire. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in northwest Pakistan has faced recurring unrest over the years, driven by militant violence, cross-border movement of fighters from Afghanistan and repeated military operations. (PTI)

Rebels attack army convoy, killing scores of soldiers in Mali

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bamako (Mali)

Jihadi militants and a separatist group ambushed a Malian army convoy in the country's hard-hit north on Saturday, resulting in the killing or capture of scores of soldiers, the rebels said.

The Malian army confirmed the attack, saying in a statement that armed groups ambushed the convoy of Malian soldiers and their partners in a remote part of the northern Gao region. It did not give further details, only saying that "a counterattack is underway."

Both the regional al-Qaida affiliate JNIM and the separatist Azawad Liberation Front, or FLA, claimed responsibility for the attack in separate statements that spoke about "great human losses" and "serious material damage" on the side of the Malian army.

It is the latest such partnership between the two groups that observers say poses great risks to Mali's stability and its ruling junta. "There were many soldiers killed, others captured alive. Army cars including armoured cars were destroyed and others seized in good condition," said FLA spokesperson Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadan. The rebels shared



videos purportedly showing the soldiers lined up as they appear to be surrendering while surrounded by the militants and Malian military vehicles.

In one of the videos, the rebels were seen opening fire on some soldiers lying on the ground. The Associated Press could not independently verify the videos. It is the latest in a series of militant attacks against Malian security forces in recent months as armed groups compete for influence and territories in the Sahel region. Landlocked Mali is part of the Sahel, a vast strip of land south of the

Sahara that has become the epicentre of extremist violence in recent years.

In northern Mali, Tuareg-led separatist groups have been fighting for years to create an independent State named Azawad. In 2024, they merged into the Azawad Liberation Front, or FLA. Both the FLA and the JNIM have increasingly worked together in their attacks against Malian forces, including the largest coordinated attack in over a decade in the West African nation, which took place in April.

Israeli strikes in Gaza kill 9 including 3 children: Officials

WAFAA SHURAFa ■ Deir Al-Balah

Israeli strikes in Gaza City on Saturday killed at least nine Palestinians, including three children, hospital officials said.

A strike on an apartment in the Nasr neighbourhood killed at least five people, including the children between the ages of 8 and 18, said Mohammed Abu Selmiya, director of Shifa Hospital where the bodies were taken. Six other people were wounded, including four children between the ages of 8 and 16, he said.

Israel's military said it



targeted Hamas infrastructure and had located Hamas militants in the area, without elaborating. Another Israeli strike hit a group of people in the Zeitoun neighbourhood, killing four and wounding another critically,

health officials said.

The Israeli military said it targeted a "Hamas terrorist" and it was looking into the results of the strike. Palestinians have reported an increase in the scale of Israeli strikes across the enclave

over the past few days. Despite a ceasefire agreement reached in October between Israel and the Hamas militant group, Israel still carries out near-daily attacks across the territory.

It says it is targeting Hamas and other militants who pose a threat. Hamas and Israel have traded accusations of violating the ceasefire. At least 1,127 Palestinians, including at least 260 children, have been killed since the ceasefire, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Five Israeli soldiers have been killed in that time. The October 7, 2023, attack by

Hamas-led militants that sparked the war killed some 1,200 people in Israel and saw 251 others taken hostage. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed 73,250 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

The ministry is part of the Hamas-led government and is staffed by medical professionals who maintain detailed records viewed as generally reliable by United Nations agencies and independent experts. It does not distinguish between civilians and militants but says women and children make up around half of all deaths. (AP)

Pakistan extends airspace ban for Indian aircraft

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ■ Islamabad/Karachi

Pakistan on Saturday extended the closure of its airspace to Indian aircraft until August 23, according to the country's airports authority.

Pakistan and India imposed matching airspace restrictions on each other's airlines after the Pahalgam terrorist attack in April 2025.

"Pakistan airspace not available for Indian-registered aircraft and aircraft operated or leased by Indian airlines/operators, including military flights," said a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) issued by the Pakistan Airports Authority.

According to the NOTAM, the restric-



tion will remain in force until 11:59 pm on August 23. The decision was taken ahead of the expiry of the previous ban on July 24. The country's airspace is

divided into two flight information regions (FIRs) - Karachi and Lahore, according to a Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority document from 2022. The NOTAM applies to both the Karachi and Lahore FIRs.

The ban has been extended monthly since last year, causing financial problems for airlines and extended travel time for passengers. India has also maintained a reciprocal airspace ban on all Pakistani-registered aircraft, airlines, and military flights as part of measures taken against Pakistan in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 people last year.

Both countries closed their respective airspace to each other's airlines after the attack. (PTI)

Indian-origin woman sentenced to 2 years for fraud in UK



Rupali Wagh

ADITI KHANNA ■ London

An Indian-origin woman, who pleaded guilty to fraud over illegally obtaining five loans being offered by the state to support businesses at the height of the Covid pandemic, has been sentenced to over two years jail by a UK court.

Rupali Wagh, 50, applied for a total of 216,250 pounds in Bounce Back Loans for her four companies between May and September 2020 by inflating the turnover of her businesses. She used some of the funds to buy stocks and shares and paying off personal finance, in clear violation of the terms. She was sentenced to two years and three months imprisonment in Wales on Friday.

"Rupali Wagh systematically targeted a scheme designed to help genuine businesses survive the pandemic," said David Snadell, Chief Investigator at the Insolvency Service UK.

"She lied about her turnover, obtained duplicate loans for the same businesses, and used the funds to pay off personal debts and buy stocks and shares. When confronted with the evidence, Wagh initially tried to blame someone else before admitting she had acted alone," he said. "These are serious crimes and the Insolvency Service remains committed to bringing COVID fraudsters like Wagh to justice no matter how long it takes," he added.

The businesswoman, based in Wales, pleaded guilty to five counts of fraud when she appeared at Cardiff Crown Court in November last year and was sentenced at Merthyr Tydfil Crown Court on Friday. (PTI)

Indian truck driver found dead in Canada

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ottawa

An Indian man working as a truck driver was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Canada's Hamilton, according to media reports.

Taranpreet Singh Sidhu, 29, was found dead on Wednesday in a culvert in the Hamilton community of Stoney Creek, about 500-odd kms southeast of Ottawa. Sidhu had immigrated to Canada from India in 2022 and was living in Brampton, a CBC News report update on Friday said quoting Hamilton police news release. Sidhu had also lived in Halifax.

The circumstances surrounding Sidhu's death remain under investigation,



the CBC News said. Police said they are confident Sidhu "was not killed in the area where he was found."

Hamilton Police Service said it's working closely with Peel Regional Police as part of the homicide investigation. Investigators have done a video canvass in the area

where Sidhu's body was found and are interviewing witnesses, the CBC News said.

CP24 news portal, in a report on Thursday, quoted police officer Robert Dillani as telling reporters during a news conference that a civilian found Sidhu on some rocks, partially submerged

in shallow water. On Thursday, following an autopsy, investigators said they suspect Sidhu was murdered. However, the exact cause of his death has not been released as the investigation is ongoing, police said.

"While detectives continue to pursue all investigative avenues, they are not prepared to release information regarding the vehicle believed to have been used to transport Mr Sidhu," the CBC News said quoting a police release.

The police have not given the cause of death and the investigators are asking anyone who had contact with Sidhu leading up to his death to contact police, it said.

Venezuela earthquake death toll surpasses 5,000

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Caracas

The death toll from the two powerful earthquakes that shook Venezuela last month rose to 5,069, local authorities said.

The interim Government of President Delcy Rodriguez added in a statement that the number of injured remains unchanged at 16,740, as in the past 11 days. Ongoing recovery and debris-clearing operations have led to the increase in the death toll, particularly in the coastal state of La Guaira, the hardest hit by the quakes close to the



Caribbean Sea. A total of 1,331 aftershocks had been recorded by Friday.

Venezuela's Government says 856 buildings are damaged and 190 col-

lapsed completely since the 7.2 and 7.5 quakes on June 24. Hundreds of other types of structures, such as bridges and roads, were also affected. (AP)

Trump shifts tone on Jimmy Carter while grappling with Iran, inflation

WILL WEISSERT ■ Washington

Jimmy Carter used to be one of President Donald Trump's favourite political targets, a catch-all foil for feckless Democrats that he could jeer at to make himself look strong and decisive.

But lately, Trump's sentiments on the 39th president have become more wistful as he faces some of the same challenges the late Carter did.

Those include the war in Iran with no end in sight — and now escalating as the US moves to control the Strait of Hormuz — and inflation, a drag on the economy Trump hasn't tamed despite long insisting that his business background would wipe it out. The comparison seems to be on Trump's mind, too. Asked last month why he didn't dispatch US

Special Forces into Iran to forcibly remove its enriched uranium, he responded, "I didn't feel like being Jimmy Carter."

That recalled the failed 1980 raid to free US hostages that killed eight American servicemen. Trump also said in March that the unsuccessful mission "cost them the election" against Ronald Reagan in 1980, sounding cognisant of political realities in a way he didn't when using Carter as a punchline. The shift in tone coincides with Trump's increased focus on his personal legacy and comes as the parallels between the two presidents become harder to ignore.

"I think it is dawning on him -- it's getting through even his thick skull — that he's kicked over a hornet's nest and his presidency might be remembered for some of



the same things Jimmy Carter's presidency is," said Johnathan Adler, author of "His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, A Life."

Asked about Trump's change in tone on Carter and the two facing overlapping challenges, White House spokesperson Olivia Wales said, "Trump will never allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon" and "remains laser-focused on implementing his proven economic agenda to lower costs."

"The president is a one-of-a-kind leader who will always unapologetically advance America's interests," Wales said in a statement. "The only legacy he is concerned with is making America greater than ever before." Kori Shake, a former member of George W Bush's National Security Council, said she doesn't think Trump is

reassessing Carter. "He doesn't stitch facts together and create theories," she said.

Still, Trump's more recent comments are a long way from his 2024 reelection campaign, when he routinely called Joe Biden "the worst" president who made Carter look "brilliant" by comparison. Trump still frequently mentions Carter, who died two years ago at age 100, but usually to incorrectly suggest that he was wary of mail-in ballots. Other disparities between the two are legion.

Carter was married to his wife, Rosalynn, for 77 years, was deeply religious and pledged to "never knowingly lie to the American people." Trump is twice divorced, relishes cursing publicly and offers a never-ending onslaught of falsehoods. (AP)

China: Rescuers race to find survivors after landslide

ANDY WONG ■ Chongqing

Rescue crews on Saturday raced to find survivors from a landslide in the south-western Chinese city of Chongqing that killed at least eight people and left 34 missing.

The landslide occurred in Pengshui County on Friday morning on the outer edge of the Chongqing municipality, when massive amounts of rocks and soil washed down a slope, burying more than 10 residential buildings, State broadcaster CCTV said. Ten people were rescued but sent to the hospital, while more than 1,100 people have been relocated.

Photos and Associated



Rescuers standing by along the bridge as they prepare to conduct a search and rescue operation at the scene of a landslide in Pengshui County in southwestern China's Chongqing on Saturday

Press videos showed that one of the fallen rocks appeared to be larger than a multi-storey building, with ruins scattered across the steep terrain. One of the damaged buildings had its top part crushed, and a car was seen half-buried near another building.

The landslide contained about 18,000 cubic meters of rocks and debris, and the largest single rock was around 3,000 cubic meters, Wang Chuanjun, head of Planning and Natural Resources in Pengshui County, told a news conference on Friday.

CCTV said persistent rain hit Pengshui from Friday night to Saturday morning,

and 19.2 centimetres (nearly 8 inches) of rainfall was recorded at a weather station. The unstable weather made the rescue operation more challenging, it said. As the rain eased slightly, rescue teams entered the site to conduct on-the-ground inspections of the collapsed buildings and riverbank areas.

While rescue operations were being carried out on one side of the massive rocks, teams will later need to look beneath the rocks, where they may face the risk of injury from the boulders becoming unstable and sliding, CCTV reported. Once the search around the rocks is complete, officers will drill

into the boulders and fill the holes with explosives to break them apart, it said.

China's National Development and Reform Commission on Saturday allocated a relief fund of 30 million yuan (\$4.4 million) to support the restoration of infrastructure and public services facilities following the disaster.

The rain-triggered landslide occurred near a section of the Wujiang River, which cuts through karst mountains peppered with small towns and terraces.

Pengshui County is located in the southeast part of Chongqing, bordering the provinces of Hubei and Guizhou. (AP)

US lets Hong Kong emergency lapse, lifts some sanctions



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Hong Kong

The United States said on Saturday it did not renew a national emergency declaration over Hong Kong, leading to the lifting of partial sanctions, but it said an executive order that revoked Hong Kong's special trading status remains in place.

Hours ago, China said the US recently confirmed to China that the President's Executive Order on Hong Kong Normalisation would end, the ministry said in a statement responding to media questions. That announcement had appeared to be a sign that the city's preferential privileges might be restored. But a statement from a State Department spokesperson sent to the AP said that US President Donald Trump "allowed the national

emergency to end, but Executive Order 13936 otherwise remains in effect."

As the order states, Hong Kong is no longer sufficiently autonomous to justify differential treatment in relation to mainland China under certain laws and provisions, it said. The US Office of Foreign Assets Control said in a statement Friday that the national emergency declared in the executive order had expired and that it delisted people who were sanctioned under the order. But it said people who remain sanctioned under the Hong Kong Autonomy Act of 2020 have been added to a different sanction list.

The statement showed Hong Kong leader John Lee and his predecessor, Carrie Lam, were removed from the first list but added to the second one.

9 killed, over 60 wounded in Ukrainian attack on Russian

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Moscow

Nine people were killed and more than 60 others were wounded in Russia by overnight Ukrainian drone attacks, Russian officials said on Saturday.

Kyiv's forces are continuing their relentless aerial campaign against energy infrastructure and military targets inside Russia, aiming to undermine Moscow's war effort and make Russians feel the consequences of the Kremlin's all-out invasion of Ukraine that is well into its fifth year.

Two sprawling warehouses of Russia's major online retailer, Wildberries, were hit by Ukrainian drones overnight, according to Russian officials: one in the town of Kotovsk in the Tambov region, some 360 km from the border with Ukraine, and another one in the city of Elektrostal, about 50 km east of



Moscow. Both caught fire, but Wildberries founder Tatyana Kim said later on Saturday morning that the fire in Kotovsk has been put out. Images and footage released by Russian online outlets showed a fire raging at the Elektrostal facility,

with massive plumes of smoke towering over it.

A Ukrainian drone also hit an oil depot in the city of Noginsk, just north of Elektrostal, sparking a fire and prompting evacuations of a nearby maternity hospital and a residential building, according to the governor of the Moscow region, Andrei Vorobyov.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a Telegram post on Saturday that Ukrainian long-range strikes hit two "significant logistical facilities in the Moscow and Tambov regions." "These facilities were used by the aggressor to supply sanctioned components for the production of drones and navigation equipment," he wrote. An oil facility was also hit, he said.

Seven night shift workers were killed at the warehouse in Kotovsk, and 25 others were wounded, Tambov regional governor Yevgeny

Pervyshov said. A total of 37 people were wounded in the Moscow region, Vorobyov said, adding that one of those later died in the hospital. In Elektrostal, drone debris also hit a kindergarten building, Vorobyov said, sparking a fire that has since been put out.

In the city of Vladimir, some 180 km east of Moscow, a Ukrainian drone hit a residential building, sparking a brief fire, Vladimir governor Alexander Avdeyev said. There were no casualties, he added.

Ukrainian special operations also conducted strikes against targets in the Sea of Azov and in occupied territory, Zelenskyy said.

Overall, the Russian Defence Ministry said its air defences overnight intercepted 379 Ukrainian drones over 19 Russian regions, as well as the illegally annexed Crimea, the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. (AP)

Pakistan, China to tighten border security, say officials

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
■ Islamabad

Pakistan and China have officially agreed to deepen bilateral ties by strengthening cooperation in immigration, border management, and institutional frameworks.

A delegation from China's National Immigration Administration, headed by Director General Qi Jingyang, held a meeting with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Friday to discuss bilateral matters. Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry was also present in the meeting.

The new bilateral agreement aims to boost the efficiency of joint operations against illegal immigration, weapons smuggling, and cross-border crime, according to a statement issued by the interior ministry.

Both parties agreed to finalise an agreement soon to expedite the immigration process, and a Pakistan-China joint working group on border management and security will be established.

Naqvi said cooperation with China on land borders, seaports and immigration management would be further enhanced. (PTI)



US advocacy groups express solidarity with Wangchuk



SAGAR KULKARNI
■ Washington

Activists from the US-based advocacy groups gathered to express solidarity with Sonam Wangchuk, who has been on a hunger strike in New Delhi over alleged irregularities in the examination system, including the NEET.

Activists from the Hindus for Human Rights and the Azadi Project gathered at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi near the Indian Embassy in Washington on evening with placards carrying slogans in support of Wangchuk.

The activists also raised slogans against the Indian Government and demanded the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Climate activist Wangchuk, on June 28, began an indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar demanding the resignation of Pradhan over alleged irregularities in examinations. Earlier this week, Hindus for Human Rights urged the Indian Government to reach out to Wangchuk and other protesters who are on a hunger strike.

"The Government must meet with the protesters, provide a substantive response to the examination and governance failures they have identified, and establish a credible, time-bound process for accountability," the group said in an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Government must meet the protesters now, answer the failures that brought them here, and act before indifference takes a life," Sunita Viswanath, Executive Director, Hindus for Human Rights, said in a statement. It also appealed to Wangchuk and the fasting students to place their health and lives as a priority.

"Their concerns have been heard by people across India and around the world. They should not be required to sacrifice their health to demonstrate the seriousness of their demands," the group said. (PTI)

US lawmaker seeks review of arms sales to India

SAGAR KULKARNI ■ Washington

A US lawmaker and national security experts have urged Congress to review arms sales to India over alleged transnational repression during a briefing at the Capitol Hill.

Congressman Jim McGovern, co-chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, also called on Congress to pass the bipartisan and bicameral Transnational Repression Policy Act.

McGovern urged Secretary of State Marco Rubio to review India's eligibility for US arms sales under the Arms Export Control Act.

The congressional briefing titled "India's Transnational Repression: Implications for US National Security," held on July 14, was organised by Equitas Forum USA in partnership with Hindus for Human Rights, the Sikh Coalition, the Sikh American Legal Defence and Education Fund



Congressman Jim McGovern

(SALDEF), the New York State Council of Churches and the Dalit Solidarity Forum, with support from the office of Congresswoman Summer Lee.

Daniel Stanton, a former senior officer with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, warned that hostile states increasingly use organised criminal networks as instruments of state power. "They intimi-

dade and coerce diaspora communities, threaten family members at home, recruit criminal proxies, and facilitate lethal violence against individuals living in democratic countries," he said.

"Transnational repression must be recognised early as a pattern, not as a series of isolated incidents," Stanton said. Stephen Schneck, former Chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, said that USCIRF's 2026 Annual Report, for the seventh consecutive year, recommended designating India as a Country of Particular Concern.

India had rejected the USCIRF's report, asserting that it misrepresents facts and "peddles a motivated narrative". Allison, Managing Director of National Security and International Policy at the Centre for American Progress, said strategic partnerships should not shield Governments from consequences. (PTI)

UN experts express concern over detention of five indigenous rights activists in Assam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Geneva

A group of UN experts has expressed concern over the detention of five indigenous human rights activists in Assam, saying the charges against them could undermine the legitimate work of those defending indigenous peoples' rights.

In a statement issued, a UN Working Group on business and human rights and four UN Special Rapporteurs said they were "deeply concerned" by reports that the activists had been deprived of their liberty in connection with their peaceful advocacy on behalf of indigenous communities' lands and rights. According to the statement, Assam Police arrested Pranab Doley, Rajib Pegu, Brijit Kutum, Amit Nag and Bhaskar Saikia in connection with protests on June 29



over the proposed construction of a luxury tourism project near the Kaziranga National Park.

The project is reportedly linked to an agreement between the Assam government and a prominent hotel group. The five were held by the police earlier this week reportedly under charges of criminal conspiracy, unlawful assembly, criminal trespass, rioting, causing

obstruction to public servant while they are carrying out duties, and criminal intimidation.

"Such arrests and prosecutions can have a chilling effect on civic space and discourage others from speaking out against abuses," the experts said in the statement.

They noted that threats, arrests, surveillance, retaliation and legal harassment could undermine the safety of indigenous communities and human rights activists, as well as their ability to participate freely in processes concerning business activities. "States must ensure human rights defenders are able to exercise their right to protect, defend and promote human rights and carry out their work safely and without fear of intimidation, reprisals or criminalisation," the experts said.

UN human rights agency voices concern over wave of unrest in PoK

YOSHITA SINGH ■ United Nations

The United Nations (UN) human rights agency has voiced concern over the "wave of unrest" in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), calling for investigations into killings of protesters as well as members of security forces.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk on Friday appealed for calm in PoK amid a wave of unrest ahead of regional elections at the end of the month, a statement issued in Geneva said.

It added that dozens of people, mostly protesters but also law enforcement personnel, have reportedly been killed since June ahead of the vote for the legislative assembly on July 27.

The High Commissioner called for prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all deaths that have occurred due to the unrest, both amongst protesters and members of security forces. The Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) - a movement behind the protests comprising



traders, transporters, students, lawyers, activists and others - has been banned under anti-terrorism laws for allegedly threatening public order and security. Some of the group's leaders have subsequently been arrested.

The criminalisation of a civil society organisation and imposition of strict limitations on gatherings raise serious concerns about infringements on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, the statement said. (PTI)

SCO countries exchange information on situation along their borders

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ■ Islamabad

Officials of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) countries, including India and Pakistan, "exchanged information and assessments" on the situation along the international borders of the member states.

The 12th Meeting of the Heads of Border Services of the Competent Authorities of the SCO member states was held in Islamabad on under the chairmanship of Pakistan, according to a statement by the Foreign Office.

The meeting was attended by the heads and representatives of the border services of the competent authorities of Belarus, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Russia,



Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and the Executive Committee of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). "The participants exchanged information and assessments regarding the situation along the international borders of the SCO member states, as well as trends and forecasts relating to its development," FO said.

The participants discussed and approved the results of the Joint Border Operation "Solidarity-2025", conducted by the border services of the competent authorities of the SCO member states.

They considered and approved the plan for the preparation and conduct of the Joint Border Operation "Solidarity-2026", while also approving the Work Plan of the Group of Experts of the Border

Services of the Competent Authorities of the SCO member states for 2027. They supported the proposal of Tajikistan to host the Joint Border Operation "Solidarity-2027" in 2027 and also discussed proposals regarding the venue and timing of the next meeting of the Heads of Border Services of the Competent Authorities of the SCO member States.

The participants noted that the exchange of views and the development of common positions on countering emerging challenges and threats along the borders of the SCO member states would contribute to further strengthening cooperation among their border services, while enhancing security and mutual trust along their shared borders. (PTI)

BRIEFLY

Trump, Infantino give World Cup 2026 high praise

FIFA President Gianni Infantino deemed the World Cup a success on Friday, again lauding President Donald Trump for his role in the event and saying the tournament achieved its mission of uniting people from all corners of the globe. Infantino pointed to many numbers – sold-out stadiums and big television ratings – as proof that the biggest World Cup ever met expectations, as Trump nodded in approval. “The American dream, Mr. President, came to reality,” Infantino said as he stood alongside Trump in New York on Friday. “We united world.” Trump hosted a reception at Trump Tower in Manhattan for Infantino and international soccer stars. Trump and Infantino spoke next to the golden trophy Trump plans to award to the winner of Sunday’s final between Argentina and Spain. As he often does in Trump’s presence, Infantino was effusive in his praise: “You don’t need people to compliment you, Mr President, but this World Cup would not have been such an incredible success without you.” Trump called this World Cup “one of the all-time greatest sporting events in history,” adding that the tournament galvanized more than just the sporting world. “So good luck to Spain and Argentina on Sunday and may the best team win,” Trump said. Earlier Friday, Infantino spoke at the United Nations as part of a daylong session there about how the game can be a catalyst for youth mental health. He brought one of the official game balls that are to be used in Sunday’s World Cup final between Argentina and Spain to the stage, calling it “a magic object which has the power to unite the world.” (AP)

India has better chance if WC expanded to 64 teams, says Bhaichung

PHILEM DIPAK SINGH
■ New Delhi

A 64-team football World Cup, which the international governing body FIFA is mulling, will give India a better chance to qualify for the showpiece but such a move could compromise the quality of the games, Indian legend Bhaichung Bhutia said. An official proposal to expand the 2030 World Cup to 64 teams, from 48 in the 2026 edition, was put forward by South American governing body CONMEBOL in April last year. FIFA has not taken a decision yet but its president Gianni Infantino recently said his organisation will examine the proposal after this World Cup in the USA, Canada and Mexico. Defending champions Argentina face Spain in the final on Sunday in New York. The 2030 edition will be mainly co-hosted by Spain, Portugal and Morocco, with the three opening matches to be played in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay to celebrate the centenary of the tournament. Uruguay hosted the first World Cup, in 1930. “From the perspective of an Indian football fan, I think it’s a welcome move to have more teams. I’m not saying India will qualify but India will have a better chance to qualify if they increase to 64 from 48,” Bhutia said. “But that doesn’t mean that the country need not do any work. We have to still get our system, structure, grass-root development right and produce more players, bring more kids to football. “India needs to focus on qualifying for U-17, U-20 World Cups, then the senior



team, then only we have a chance like what Uzbekistan and Morocco are doing. They (Uzbekistan, Morocco) are qualifying for the U-17 and U-20 World Cups regularly despite being small nations.” On the flip side, Bhutia said, “But yes, from the perspective of overall football fans across the world and the value and the excitement of World Cup, the quality of football, I think, would definitely decrease if you have 64 teams playing in the World Cup,” said the former India captain. **‘Indian women’s team has better chance than men to qualify for World Cup’:** Bhutia, who was Indian football’s poster boy in the first decade of this century before his retirement in 2011, said the national women’s team can qualify for the World Cup sooner than the men’s side. The number of teams in the 2031 Women’s World Cup, likely to be co-hosted by USA, Mexico, Costa Rica and Jamaica, will be increased to 48 from 32 in the 2027 edition. The Indian women’s team is ranked 13th in Asia and 69th in the world, while the men’s side at 26th place among Asian countries and 138th globally. Asian countries will qualify for 2031 Women’s World Cup via a standalone qualifying round for the first time, and not through the Asian Cup as has been done earlier. (PTI)

WC: Argentines, Spaniards face divided loyalties

DEBORA REY
■ Buenos Aires

Cervantes and Borges. Tortilla and asado. Flamenco and tango. Argentines and Spaniards have long been united by blood ties and a relationship of mutual admiration, but the World Cup final between these two Spanish-speaking nations has placed many of them at a crossroads: Should they support La Furia or La Albiceleste on Sunday? “It feels like being caught between a rock and a hard place,” admitted Juan Manuel Posada, a 75-year-old Spaniard originally from Asturias who settled in Buenos Aires in 1968. The clash in New Jersey will mark the first All-Spanish-speaking World Cup final since the inaugural 1930 tournament, when host Uruguay defeated Argentina 4-2 in Montevideo. “It’s as if I’d arrived just yes-



Buenos Aires was founded by a Spaniard: It was a Spaniard, Pedro de Mendoza, who founded Buenos Aires in the mid-16th century. The battles for independence did not alter the strong cultural influence of the Iberian Peninsula on the young nation — an influence that deepened with the waves of Spanish migration in the first half of the 20th century. “I don’t think you’ve seen the same Spain across all the

terday. My heart is in Asturias, in Spain, and with the Spanish national team. Without a doubt,” said Posada, a fan of the Spanish club Sporting de Gijon who, in his adopted country, became a supporter of Independiente de Avellaneda. “If Spain wins, great, but if Argentina wins, I won’t be upset at all,” he added in the Asturian accent he still retains. Manuel Fernandez

Acevedo is 81 years old; he left Baiona, in Vigo, with his family when he was very young to settle in Argentina, where his daughter and granddaughter were born. Torn between the two countries, he said, “May the best team win. If Spain wins, that’s great, and if it’s Argentina’s turn, that’s fine, too.” **A deep relationship:** just as literature, gastronomy, and music were enriched by that bond of brotherhood, football also felt its impact, with Argentina’s Alfredo Di Stefano and Lionel Messi standing out as the greatest icons at Real Madrid and Barcelona, respectively. Surprisingly, there is no classic football rivalry between the two countries, partly because, in nearly a century of World Cup history, the Spanish and Argentines have faced each other only once. That encounter was during the group stage of the

1966 World Cup, resulting in a victory for La Albiceleste. Of course, a final is a different story altogether. Back to Posada. “I have an Argentine grandson who said to me the other day, Grandpa, if Spain wins, I’ll wear the Spain shirt and carry the flag, and we’ll celebrate. But if Argentina wins, you have to come wearing my country’s shirt and carrying its flag.” I told him that was fine, but I don’t think we could go out to the Obelisk to celebrate wearing a Spain shirt.” The laughing Posada was referring to the Buenos Aires monument that serves as the epicenter of celebrations for La Albiceleste’s victories. **On the other side of the Atlantic:** First, the military dictatorship from 1976-83, and later, consecutive economic crises starting in the 2000s, drove thousands of Argentines to settle in Spain in search of a better quality

of life. According to the most recent Spanish census figures (as of January 2025), 450,883 people born in Argentina were residing in Spain. For them, too, Sunday’s final is a special occasion. “I see them as just another rival but with respect — knowing we’re in their country and that, in the end, we’re all brothers,” said Nahuel Barreta, 19, who has been living in Malaga for a year. “It feels like home here. We’re going to watch the match at a downtown bar with friends — it’s our usual ritual. I’ve never experienced a World Cup like this.” In recent days, social media has seen a wave of viral posts featuring Argentine-Spanish couples temporarily parting ways until after Sunday’s match, as well as the amusing tactics they use to convince their children to root for one of the finalists. It really feels like a familia affair. (AP)

Argentina and Spain will play for World Cup trophy and, in first, winner gets rings

TIM REYNOLDS
■ New York

Argentina and Spain are playing for more than the World Cup trophy on Sunday. They’re playing for rings as well. For the first time, FIFA is awarding rings to commemorate a championship. Title-winning teams receiving rings is a tradition in North American sports that dates back to the late 19th century, but something that isn’t commonplace in other parts of the world. With this final in the US, the move by FIFA seems to be a nod to that tradition. Players on the World Cup-winning team will get gold medals, as usual, and the captain and coach of the winning team will get temporary rings as well shortly after the title match. Eventually, the winning



team will get 30 customised rings. The World Cup trophy will be on one side, while the other side will be created “to reflect the identity of the winning team,” FIFA said. Only 2,026 rings — a nod to the year — will be made, and each will be individually numbered, custom-fitted and delivered with its own certificate of authenticity. The 1,996

rings that will not go to the winning team will be on sale to the public. FIFA has not said how much those rings will cost. The tradition of championship rings is believed to go back to at least 1893 when the Montreal Hockey Club was awarded the Dominion Hockey Challenge Cup, the precursor to what is now

called the Stanley Cup. That team also commissioned simple bands with tiny hockey sticks attached at top. (AP) Major League Baseball teams began giving out championship rings in the 1920s, while NBA champions have received them basically since that league’s inception in the late 1940s and NFL teams have gotten them throughout the entirety of the Super Bowl era that dates to the 1960s. Some Halls of Fame give rings out to their members, and US Olympians and Paralympians have received rings as part of the perk package that comes with representing their country on the world stage. Rings are now commonly awarded in all US pro sports — along with a number of college, high school and even youth sports — to commemorate championships. (AP)

Spain has built its team for several years to reach World Cup final

STEPHEN WHYNO
■ New York

Spain reaching the World Cup final is still something of a novelty, given this is just the second time the country has gotten this far. Rodri sees it as the culmination of years building to this point. Winning the Nations League in 2023 and the European Championship in 2024 set the foundation for the success the team has achieved over the past several weeks. An even bigger challenge awaits against defending champion Argentina on Sunday, and Spain’s captain wants his teammates to be more eager to win than scared to lose. “We’ve been gradually growing,” Rodri said Friday. “We have to keep doing the same things we’re doing because it has been a process for all five years.” Spain has only allowed one goal through its first seven games, including a 2-0 win over France in the semifinals. Since a stunning opening draw against Cape Verde, La Roja has outscored its opponents 13-1. “Our goal when we



got to this World Cup was to win the trophy, and we were convinced that we could achieve this,” Rodri said. “We’ve shown that this national team has been able to defeat great opponents.” The path to the final included Mikel Merino breaking a tie and scoring late in the round of 16 and the quarterfinals. It has also including stifling defense and nine saves from goalkeeper Unai Simon. But Rodri, the 2024 Ballon d’Or winner as the best player in the world, bristled at the notion that Spain has just one defined brand and expressed a belief about handling any kind of style. “I don’t think you’ve seen the same Spain across all the

matches,” the 30-year-old midfielder said. “I think Sunday’s match will be quite different, as it will be a more physical one and we must be prepared. And I believe if we are known for something in this national team is that we know how to play different games based on the moment. So, we can adapt to having to defend, counterattacking, to attacking. We are a very complete team, and that is why we are here.” Sixteen years removed from Spain winning the World Cup for the first time, Rodri thinks the determination of that group can be an inspiration. But he is far more focused on the individual and team development that has

sparked this run to the final. “We can even do it better,” Rodri said. “I think against France, we do one of the best games we ever done as a team. But against Argentina, I think we have to rise a level because they are the champions. And I’m really confident that we can do it.” Spain coach insists Yamal is OK Lamine Yamal getting spotted at practice with his left thigh wrapped has caused plenty of concern about the 19-year-old budding star’s status. Coach Luis de la Fuente downplayed those worries when asked repeatedly about Yamal, who took a hit to that thigh against France. “Today he participated in the training with the other teammates, and he is fine,” de la Fuente said. “He is fine. He is in optimal condition.” Yamal, who was photographed as a baby alongside Messi in 2007, is considered the potential heir apparent to the title as the best player in the world. This final could be passing-of-the-torch moment, but Yamal’s coach does not want his player thinking like that. (AP)

Uncertainty clouds forecast on whether wildfire smoke will affect World Cup final



STEPHEN WHYNO
■ New York

Mikel Merino can smell and see the smoke from the Canadian wildfires that are making for hazy conditions across large parts of the US, including northern New Jersey where he and Spain are set to face Argentina in the World Cup final on Sunday. Merino is trying not to focus on it. It remains unclear how much, if at all, the smoke will affect the final. The World Health Organization forecast calls for an improvement to “moderate” air quality in East Rutherford. “For a game that is as important as a World Cup final, you have to be able to shut out external factors as much as possible,” Merino said Friday. “Luckily, we are being careful with every detail thanks to the federation and the organizers of the World Cup.” Spain practiced outside in hazardous conditions in East Hanover, New Jersey, on Thursday, alarming experts who thought the team should have held the session inside instead. Messages sent to FIFA and the Spanish Football Association asking whether that was considered or possible were not returned. Air quality improved Friday, but the uncertainty lies in what will follow what could be up to 1.25 inches (3.17 centimeters) of rain expected to fall Saturday. “Following that, it looks like there is another smoky air mass following in behind that system, but it’s not clear right now how much or how it might reach New York or New Jersey, when it comes to actually Sunday,” said Mark

Parrington, senior scientist at the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service. “If the fire intensity really picks up again through (Saturday), it’s possible it puts more smoke into the atmosphere that then might quickly follow that rain event.” Jonathan Belles, senior meteorologist for The Weather Channel app and weather.com, expects to have improved confidence in the forecast as game time gets closer. “The question is whether smoke behind that (rain) system reaches ground level over northern New Jersey on Sunday and, if so, how concentrated it becomes,” Belles said. “Current forecast models range from little to no ground level smoke to levels that could become more concerning for players and fans.” Smoke from wildfires — which are burning more of North America as Earth warms — attacks nearly every system in the body, killing tens of thousands of people a year, numerous medical studies show. It attacks the body immediately, spiking asthma cases with increased ambulance runs within hours. Smoke can trigger inflammation in different parts of the body, often attacking a person’s weakest points, which can then cascade into different effects of an immune system trying to fight a nasty irritant, doctors and scientists say. There could be an impact on players’ performance even if the air conditions are moderate, according to University of California, San Diego professor of medicine Chantal Darquenne. “It’s kind of a dose dependent effect,” Darquenne said. (AP)

Messi once held baby Lamine Yamal in his arms, now they will battle for World Cup title

JOSEPH WILSON
■ Barcelona

Almost two decades ago, photographer Joan Monfort didn’t think much of his photo shoot of a teenage Lionel Messi bathing a cute baby boy in a plastic bathtub. Not until the remarkable twist of fate became clear years later, when that infant blossomed into Lamine Yamal. Now those images of the long-haired Messi, his hands covered in soap suds as if anointing Yamal as soccer’s Next Big Thing, have become the most talked about — and gawked about — in the runup to Sunday’s World Cup final, when Messi’s Argentina will play Yamal’s Spain for the

biggest trophy in the sport. “I have never been a believer or thought that anything was destined to occur, but I am beginning to have my doubts. This is beyond all reasonable explanations,” Monfort told The Associated Press from his home in Barcelona on Friday. Monfort, who works as a freelance photojournalist for the AP, took the photos in 2007 as part of a charity calendar produced by local newspaper Sport and UNICEF. Luck dictated that Yamal’s mother, who appears in the calendar photo, won a raffle of families in the city of Mataro, near Barcelona, who wanted to participate. Soccer destiny then deemed that her baby boy, who

would become a star for Barcelona some 15 years later, was paired up with the Argentine who would become one of the greatest of all time. A tearful Messi left Barcelona in 2021 when the club was in financial trouble. Yamal erupted at the club two years later. The journey is now complete, from bathtub to World Cup final, where the 19-year-old Yamal will face a Messi who is 20 years his senior. “He is one of the best players in the world right now, so I wish him the best. He’s only 19 years old and he has all of his future ahead,” Messi said in Spanish on Friday. “That picture, it was crazy. Him as a baby, and now we are



facing each other. What a crazy picture. I just wish him the best of luck.” The famous photo was forgotten until ... Monfort had no recollection of the photos until Yamal’s father posted one on social media during the 2024 European Championship, when a teenage Yamal was enjoying his international breakout and led Spain to the title. The photo went viral then. But now, with the

World Cup final looming, Monfort said, interest in his photos has skyrocketed. “This has exploded all over the world, and the fact that the final is in the US has given it the extra push,” Monfort said. “And now this has culminated with the final between Messi and Yamal. It is better than any film script.” Monfort said he has been bombarded by queries for the photos by professional media outlets, while also seeing his images reproduced countless times on social media and the internet without any credit or compensation. Yamal’s Spain teammate Mikel Merino had the same reaction as most people who see the photos. “The first

time I saw it, I thought it was AI and that it wasn’t even real,” Merino said Friday. “It’s unbelievable that two of the best players to have played the game — and hopefully Lamine, in the future, will be one of those — share a picture like that. Hopefully we’re going to see a very bright final with those two protagonists at their best, playing and giving all the fans a great spectacle.” **Barcelona fans are torn by love of both Messi and Yamal:** Like many Barcelona fans, Monfort’s loyalty is split. It is common to see children wearing both Yamal’s Barcelona and Spain shirts, as well as any Messi shirt, whether from his Barcelona years or

Argentina or his current club, Inter Miami, on the city’s streets. Monfort, 58, is considering traveling to see the final in New Jersey, but whether he watches it in person or at home, he said he will have trouble cheering for one team or the other. “My heart is split. I don’t know if I want Messi or Yamal to win,” said Monfort, a lifelong Barcelona supporter. “I have an everlasting love for the best player of all time (Messi),” he said, but “Yamal has broken the mold here” and represents a new, diverse Spain, thanks to his parents from Morocco and Equatorial Guinea. “Maybe they can both win. I wouldn’t rule it out after everything we have seen.” (AP)

All eyes on Rohit Sharma in ODI series decider at Lord’s

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ London

All eyes of the cricketing world will be trained on Rohit Sharma when the India white-ball great takes the field for the series-deciding third ODI against England here on Sunday with speculation rife on his future.

Amid the intense speculation, the BCCI has asserted that the match will not be Rohit’s last in international cricket but the former India captain surely has a point to prove having struggled in the first two games.

Vintage Rohit is all about effortlessly executing his front foot pull shots off the

pacers and manoeuvring the spinners but the 39-year-old has not been been able to find any fluency thus far in the series, fuelling conversations about lasting till the 2027 ODI World Cup in South Africa.

The two-paced pitch in Cardiff made life tougher for Rohit who consumed as many as nine consecutive dot balls before getting out. A true batting surface at the “Home of Cricket” may just allow Rohit to regain his rhythm for a statement knock in the series decider.

As captain of the side, Rohit had led from the front by playing the high risk role of an enforcer in the power-play. His fans would want to



see that same Rohit turn up on Sunday.

The express pace of Jofra Archer would pose the biggest challenge for the veteran opener in the first 10 overs.

Current captain Shubman Gill has looked the part in the batting department and would be itching to get a big hundred after his soft dismissal at Sophia Gardens.

In contrast to Rohit’s struggles, another ageing superstar Virat Kohli continues to boss the ODI format. He was on course for another hundred on Thursday but fell to Archer, triggering a middle order collapse that cost India the game. The team would be

wiser from that experience going into the series decider.

Playing in place of an ill KL Rahul, Ishan Kishan succumbed to the short ball alongside a few other batters, showing that the visitors remain uncomfortable against rising deliveries.

Shreyas Iyer has played well in the middle order and the standout aspect of his batting has been his confident play against Adil Rashid and Co.

On the bowling front, the team may finally give Kuldeep Yadav an opportunity following a hamstring injury to Washington Sundar. The team manage-

ment wants batting till number eight but in the light of Washington’s on field injury at Cardiff, it might be forced to change their plans. In the absence of Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel has excelled in the role of a spin all-rounder.

The Indian bowlers will have to find a way to stop Joe Root, who like Kohli keeps piling on the runs.

Barring Root, England batters have not done much to write home about and would be looking to change that on Sunday.

England played an extra seamer in place of Liam Dawson in the second ODI. He may come back to the side if conditions demand.

A tap on Gavaskar’s shoulder for luck: Doshi recalls Sobers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Sir Garfield Sobers could dominate a cricket field like few others, but the West Indies legend also had a deeply superstitious side.

Commentator Sushil Doshi recalled how Sobers believed touching Sunil Gavaskar’s shoulder before batting would bring him fortune

Doshi, who had the privilege of sharing the commentary box with the West Indies great, spoke to PTI a day after Sobers’ death, recalling the man behind the cricketing genius. He was 89.

Among the many memories Doshi shared was an amusing anecdote from India’s famous 1971 tour of the West Indies, the series in which a young Gavaskar amassed 774 runs.

“Despite all his greatness, there were some things that showed Sobers was only human. And I remember a story that India was playing against West Indies. It was 1971. West Indies was behind 0-1 in the series and it was the last test match.

“West Indies had to make 262 runs to win. And it was not a difficult task for Gary Sobers. Such a big player he was.” Sobers, according to Doshi, was convinced Gavaskar was a lucky charm. He believed that a gentle tap on the Indian opener’s shoulder before batting would somehow bring him a century and win West Indies the match. “Having said that, Sobers used to believe that if he touched



Gavaskar’s shoulder, he would go on to score a century and win the game for his team. He thought Gavaskar was a very luck man.” However, Sobers was not able to locate Gavaskar and ended up getting out cheaply. Behind the unlocatable Gavaskar was India captain Ajit Wadekar, who locked the opener in the bathroom to prevent Sobers from his sight. “This (Sobers’ superstition) was not hidden from the Indian captain Ajit Wadekar. Gary Sobers was coming from the middle of the field to the Indian dressing room,” recalled Doshi.

“He immediately said, ‘where is Sunny? Where is Sunny?’ So someone said, he is in the bathroom. He is taking a bath. So he immediately closed the bathroom door and locked it and kept the key in his pocket. That was Ajit Wadekar.

“So without touching Gavaskar’s shoulder, Sobers left. And look at the game of fate. That day on the first ball Abid Ali bowled, Sobers got out on 0. This shows no matter how great a player you are, there are still some weaknesses,” Doshi said.

Mandaviya unveils Peacko, marking 30-day countdown to BWF World Championships

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Sports is not simply about winning medals; it is about nurturing talent, building a vibrant sporting culture and strengthening the ecosystem that enables athletes to thrive. Echoing this vision, the countdown to the BWF World Championships 2026 officially commenced with the unveiling of the tournament’s official mascot and official anthem on Saturday July 18 2026 at New Delhi.

The championship, scheduled to be held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium from August 17 to 23, 2026, will bring together the world’s finest shuttlers and mark the first time India will host badminton’s premier event.

The launch was attended by Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh



Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, Badminton Association of India General Secretary Sanjay Mishra and other dignitaries present during launch of official mascot and anthem for 30th BWF World Championships 2026 in Delhi, Saturday PIONEER PHOTO

Mandaviya, Badminton Association of India (BAI) President and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, BAI General Secretary Sanjay Mishra, DG, SAI, Hari Ranjan Rao, IAS, Indian badminton legend Pullela Gopichand, senior officials and members of the badminton fraternity, officially sig-

nalling the final phase of preparations for the Championships.

The highlight of the event was the unveiling of “Peacko,” the official mascot of the championship. Inspired by India’s national bird, the peafowl, Peacko blends elements of Indian heritage with the dynamism of the sport,

giving a distinctive visual identity to the tournament. The official anthem, featuring PV Sindhu, Lakshya Sen, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty and India’s entire 16-member World Championships contingent, captures the energy, ambition and unity of Indian badminton as it heads into its biggest stage.

Addressing the event, Dr Mansukh Mandaviya highlighted how India has emerged as a global sporting nation, and hosting the BWF World Championships 2026 in New Delhi reflects the country’s growing stature in badminton, world-class sporting infrastructure, and commitment to creating greater opportunities for athletes.

The event marks one of the final milestones before New Delhi hosts the global badminton.

PV Sindhu enters Japan Open final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Tokyo

Two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu entered her first final in more than two years after Tokyo Olympics champion Chen Yufei of China retired midway through their women’s singles semifinal at the Japan Open here on Saturday.

The 31-year-old Indian was leading 21-19, 15-10 when world No. 4 Chen was forced to pull out with a hamstring injury.

It will be Sindhu’s first final



since winning the Syed Modi International in Lucknow in 2024. She had also finished runner-up at the Malaysia Open Super 500 earlier that year. Her last major title came at the Singapore Open Super 500 in 2022. “I’m very

happy that I’ve gone to the final,” Sindhu said after the match.

“For me every match mattered a lot from the first match, especially today’s match. It was important from the beginning to be focused because when you play with the top-ranked players it’s important that every point matters so winning that first game really mattered a lot.”

In Sunday’s summit clash, Sindhu will take on Japan’s Akane Yamaguchi.

Yamaguchi enjoys a 14-10 head-to-head advantage over

Sindhu, having won 14 of their 24 meetings. While the two former world champions have shared one of women’s badminton’s most compelling rivalries, the Japanese star has dominated the recent contests, winning five of their last six clashes.

World No. 12 Sindhu had entered the contest trailing 6-8 in her head-to-head record against the fourth-seeded Chen, who had won each of their previous four meetings, including a straight-games victory at this year’s Indonesia Masters.

Plunkett giving baseball a try with Oakland’s minor league team

JANIE MCCAULEY ■ Oakland

Liam Plunkett leaned over the dugout rail at Raimondi Park with his arms crossed, looking every bit like a professional baseball player as he waited for his first chance to hit as a member of the Oakland Ballers.

Formerly a fast bowler for England’s cricket team, the 41-year-old Plunkett made his pitching debut in June. He faced one batter, striking out Yuba-Sutter’s Josh Duarte on five pitches - one of the best hitters in the independent Pioneer League.

Plunkett topped out at 77 mph and spun a breaking ball clocked at 63. “At first I wanted to be respectful and put it down the middle so he



could hit it, not throw something wild,” Plunkett said. “Then I realized I could throw in some skills. I expected to give up a hit.”

His career ERA stands at 0.00 - at least for now.

The appearance was part of a bigger effort by the 6-foot-4 cricketer to raise

awareness for his own sport. Plunkett has been dabbling in America’s pastime while visiting the Bay Area to broadcast Major League Cricket’s latest stop in Oakland, which includes the championship match for the fourth-year league Saturday at the Coliseum. The former San Francisco Unicorns player signed with the Ballers through a marketing exception. He has made two appearances so far, and that might be it.

“When he said, Shall I do it? I was like, Why not, what have you got to lose?” Major League Cricket CEO Johnny Grave said. “I think he surprised himself.” Plunkett hopes his endeavor can help grow baseball and

cricketCricket will return to the Olympics for the first time in 100 years at the 2028 Games in Los Angeles.

It is not a marquee sport in the U.S., but Grave is trying to generate interest beginning at the youth level with events leading up to those Olympics.

Plunkett is nearing the end of his competitive cricket career but will continue to stay involved as an ambassador, in the Bay Area and beyond. He is hosting four youth clinics this summer in Canada. Ballers manager Aaron Miles was open-minded when the idea came about, trusting co-founders Bryan Carmel and Paul Freedman to do something fun for the fans of the defending Pioneer League champions. (AP)

Neha wins gold medal in 59kg category at Budapest Ranking Series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Budapest

Former U17 World Champion Neha delivered a gritty performance to capture the gold medal in the women’s 59kg category on the third day of the Polyak Imre, Varga Janos & Kozma Istvan Memorial Senior Ranking Tournament.

Continuing her senior circuit breakthrough, Neha displayed exceptional tactical composure under pressure to overcome USA’s Abigail E. Nette in the championship bout.

The Indian wrestler edged out Nette 6-4 on points (VPO1) to stand atop the



podium and secure India’s second gold medal of the tournament, matching Olympic bronze medalist Aman Sehrawat’s opening-day triumph.

India’s medal rush continued in the 62kg women’s

wrestling division, with the contingent capturing both a silver and a bronze. Mansi fought her way into the gold medal match against Canada’s Ana P Godinez Gonzalez, but was forced to settle for a well-earned silver after an unfortunate injury curtailed her bout.

In the bronze medal play-off of the same weight class, Savita produced a high-scoring, dominant display to overpower Kazakhstan’s Irina Kuznetsova 14-5.

With these three podium finishes, the squad has now expanded its overall medal haul to eight medals, comprising two gold, two silver, and four bronze medals.

Sobers was the most complete cricketer: Farokh Engineer

SUMAN RAY ■ New Delhi

Sir Garfield Sobers was “the greatest and most complete cricketer” the game has ever seen, capable of doing virtually everything on a cricket field better than almost anyone else, said former India wicketkeeper-batsman Farokh Engineer. Sobers, whose remarkable versatility made him a once-in-a-generation cricketer, died on Friday, leaving behind a legacy that has inspired generations of players across the world. “He was most complete living cricketer of all time until this sad day. The cricketing world will mourn



a genius,” Engineer said. “He was a good friend and he’ll be very, very sadly missed, not only by the cricketing world but by everyone who knew him. I spoke to Wes Hall a little while ago. I spoke to Mrs Sobers and the mood is very sombre in

Barbados. “He was a great human being, an ambassador for Barbados and the greatest, the most complete cricketer the world has produced or I have seen or played against.”

A left-handed batter, who also could also bowl left-arm pace, wrist spin and orthodox spin, Sobers claimed 235 wickets in Test cricket. He played in a solitary ODI, taking one wicket. He was also a splendid fielder or Engineer, who kept wickets to Sobers in the World XI and shared countless moments with him, there was simply no comparison came to Barbadian’s all-round abilities. (PTI)

Sobers revolutionised cricket, he inspired all of us: Kapil Dev

SUMAN RAY ■ Greater Noida

Legendary Sir Garfield Sobers was a trend-setting revolutionary who altered cricketers’ mindset and approach to the sport, reckoned former India skipper Kapil Dev.

Sobers, 89, died at his home in Barbados on Friday. During an illustrious career, the West Indian had amassed 8032 runs in 93 Tests at an average of 57.78 with 26 hundreds along with 235 wickets.

“I think anybody who knows about cricket should know about Gary Sobers. One of the finest cricketers ever born on this earth,” Kapil Dev told PTI in an interview at the KDSG (Kapil Dev Sanjay Gupta) Hospital here on Saturday. “The way he played



cricket inspired people like us. Yeah, it’s a sad day. He’s no more, but he’s given us so much so much cricket and his talent and ability which we follow throughout our lives,” Kapil added. The 1983 World Cup winning skipper said Sobers’ sheer talent and love



for the game made him such a great player. “I think it’s the talent, the way he used to enjoy himself and the way he used to play. I think during that era, no doubt the West Indies team was one of the best, but he set records and shifted people’s mindset of

how to play and enjoy,” he said. Kapil then explained the impact of Sobers in traditional cricketing coaching methods. “The biggest thing I remember is that he changed the method of MCC (Marylebone Cricket Club) cricket coaching, what we used to call playing in ‘V’.

“And I think the first thing I came to know is not playing V, how you can get runs. I think that was the biggest statement stuck in my mind when I was growing up,” he recalled. The 67-year-old said Sobers was in a league of his own as an all-rounder.

“I think, well, we had all-rounders, but not on his scale. I don’t think anybody can come close to him, the way he played batting,

bowling, fast bowling, spin bowling, fielding.

“Everything — he had the ability and the knack for entertaining. At the end of the day, many cricketers will emerge, but very few will be true entertainers,” he noted. Kapil, himself a premier all-rounder in his playing days, said there was so much to learn from the Bajan.

“I think he was a brilliant cricketer, we lost him, but one can learn from the way he played cricket. Hats off to him, as he just enjoyed his life. “In the evening, he used to sit and talk and we were just good listeners.

He talked, but he used to talk more about other things in life rather than cricket,” he remembered. (PTI)

The human thread



Across rural India, master artisans are fighting to save centuries of Heritage from industrial extinction

SAKSHI PRIYA

Every wooden loom carries the deep soul of an entire community. As loud factory machines take over the market, the true masters of our traditional arts face a terrible forced silence. These incredibly gifted creators now have almost zero stage left to stand on. Walking through Bharat Tex 26 feels like watching centuries of heritage fight for survival. **From Nalbari's heavy silks spun along the Brahmaputra to the sacred Khandua drapes of Maniabandha created for Lord Jagannath, every textile tells a story of cultural resistance.**

Down in Gopalpur, a tradition spanning five hundred years and shaped by the Bhakti movement transforms ordinary cotton into art. These are tangible memories, sustained by families who surrender their days to the heavy wooden loom. Can a factory machine ever replicate the human spirit stitched into a handmade garment?

Real people shoulder the heavy weight of this fragile history. How many of us would actually dare to walk away from a secure, parent-approved future? Down in Srikalahasti, Andhra Pradesh, fifty-four-year-old B Chiranjeevi Krishna knows exactly what that sacrifice costs. While his father desperately pushed him to chase a respected medical degree, Krishna made a much harder choice, trading a safe career to

keep a fading local heritage alive. The young boy had other plans entirely and happily traded the absolute safety of a stethoscope for a simple carved bamboo stick. He found himself completely captivated by the ancient temple art of Kalamkari. Today, he commits to an exhausting fourteen stage routine. His raw materials sound almost mythical, relying on fermented palm jaggery, rusted iron, and buffalo milk. He washes his painted fabrics in a local river, letting the natural sand and harsh sunlight slowly bleach the cloth. Choosing this demanding life required immense courage, yielding four decades of loyalty to a childhood calling.

However, raw passion cannot halt the march of mass production. Akula Charan Nandi from Odisha highlights a brutal reality for today's weavers. His village spends weeks making complex weft ikat fabrics, a painstakingly slow technique shared between men and women. Now, cheap power loom prints flood local markets, copying their sacred patterns and confusing buyers about the true worth of handmade goods. A lifeline finally emerged through the Antaran initiative by Tata Trusts, which taught his community about modern marketing and design. Using this knowledge, he launched Tri Ratna Handicraft, stepping up

as an independent business owner rather than a daily wage worker. The fight to survive pushes families toward brilliant innovation. Pramod Kumar Sur, a Tussar silk master from Gopalpur, works in a circle with his state award winning father, his mother in law, and his young daughter. Handcrafting one single saree consumes forty five days of their collective lives. To outsmart cheap imitations, the family must constantly invent fresh designs. Their incredible patience finds a true reward when their entire stock clears out just as Ganesh Puja begins.

These artists possess rare magic but often lack access to the right audiences. As Mridula Tangirala of Tata Trusts observes, the survival of Indian handlooms depends entirely on helping rural artisans build sustainable companies. The goal is to see creators own their brands and control their destinies. Showcases like Bharat Tex offer that critical bridge, turning hidden rural talent into global opportunity so the voices of these masters will never face a forced silence.



PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

TANGALIYA: THE 700-YEAR-OLD DOT RETURNS

When Bharat Tex 2026 wrapped up its four-day run at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi this week, one of the smaller stalls carried an outsized story: Tangaliya, the 700-year-old dot-weave craft of Gujarat's Surendranagar district. Practised almost exclusively by the Dangasia community of Saurashtra, the technique involves twisting contrasting yarn by hand around warp threads to raise tiny bead-like knots, called "da-na", forming geometric patterns identical on both sides. The weaver counts every thread from memory, and a single miscalculation ruins the design.

Originally woven for the Bharwad shepherd community, Tangaliya now appears on dupattas, stoles, sarees and contemporary fashion. Government backing, fashion collaborations and Hollywood visibility have renewed interest. For National Award-winning artisan Baldev Mohanbhai Rathod and Surendranagar's weavers, such exposure is not just validation – it is survival for future generations.



PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

ART CORNER

Relics of a vanishing home



STUTHI NAIR

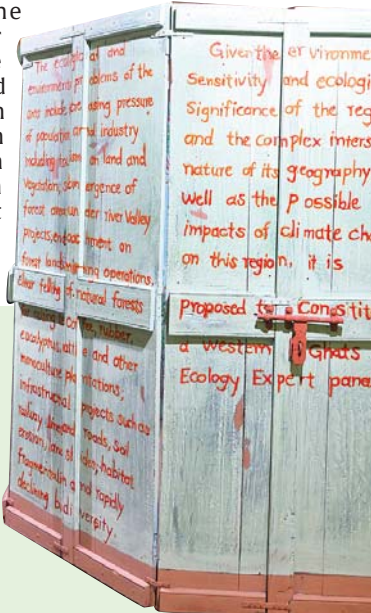
When a disaster uproots a home, memories and everyday objects become relics of a life that no longer exists. In *Umbartha* — *At an Ancestral Threshold*, artist Rohit Varekar transforms this quiet grief into a meditation on memory, ecology and inheritance.

Curated by Priya Pall at Gallerie Nyva in New Delhi, the exhibition reimagines Umbartha as a place where one generation quietly hands over the world to the next — a space of transition that sits neither inside nor outside.

Raised in the ecologically fragile valleys of the Western Ghats, Varekar reflects on a landscape altered by unchecked development. An immersive installation of reclaimed wooden doors is in-scribed with environmentalist Madhav Gadgil's writings, while its interior offers an intimate reflection on childhood memories and nature. Alongside the environmental concerns are sculptures capturing Varekar's family history: a carved kitchen shelf from his childhood home and a miniature recreation of his ancestral tiled roof. Through carving and layering materials, Varekar excavates memory and preserves the weight of what has been lost.

Umbartha invites visitors to stand at this ancestral threshold, contemplating the responsibility we inherit and the world we are preparing to leave behind

Umbartha invites visitors to stand at this ancestral threshold, contemplating the responsibility we inherit and the world we are preparing to leave behind.



PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

Painting July in Watercolour

TEAM VIVA

July steps forward as a brilliant midsummer explosion of human expression. Historians and lifelong creators alike crown this sweltering month to celebrate the unpredictable, watery fluidity of World Watercolour Month. Historically, pure colour dictated deep political power. Rare Egyptian lapis lazuli and vibrant Mexican cochineal red established absolute wealth centuries before modern fashion runways touched these textiles. Master painters deliberately utilise peak ambient summer heat to manipulate how wet washes evaporate across textured cotton fibres, turning the basic climate into breathtaking artistic drama.

The official celebration traces its modern roots to Charlie O'Shields, the visionary behind Doodlewash. Deep artistic devotion sparked a massive online movement that now connects watercolour painters across all seven continents. O'Shields champions the pure magic of this fluid medium, building a dedicated space for creators to elevate mutual talent and unite globally. Hue remains the definitive footprint of a civilisation. Honouring this



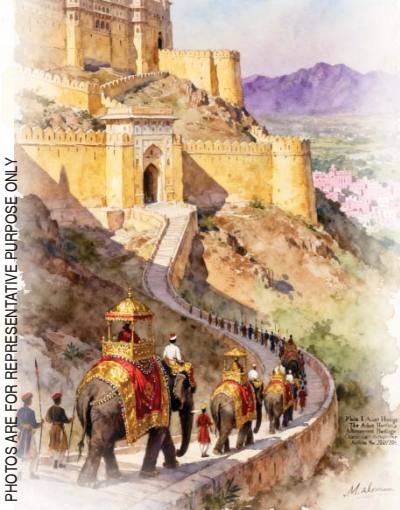
bright heritage keeps centuries of design alive. Sadly, modern societies often fail to support the very artists responsible for keeping history breathing. Countless traditional creators face shrinking cultural heritage spaces and a devastating forced silence. Dedicated art months stand as bold acts of creative survival, offering these quiet masters a necessary platform.

HOW TO OBSERVE

#WORLDWATERCOLOURMONTH

People honour this movement by putting serious financial muscle behind neighbourhood organisations that refuse to let cultural artistry fade into silence. Such help provides essential backing for kids to learn about watercolour art. There are many brilliant ways to get involved!

- Donate watercolour supplies.
- Volunteer to teach art classes both virtual and in person.
- Make monetary donations.
- Support art education and artists locally and around the globe.
- Host an auction, fundraiser, or another event to keep local children painting and creating.
- Share favourite watercolours.
- Enthusiasts showcase watercolour art by using #WorldWatercolourMonth on social media, broadcasting it for the entire globe to see!



PHOTOS ARE FOR REPRESENTATIVE PURPOSE ONLY



On Cultural Respect vs Commercialisation:

"Oxidised jewellery is rooted in India's tribal, nomadic, and regional craft traditions, preserved by artisans across generations. As designers, our responsibility is to honour this legacy, reinterpreting its artistry through a contemporary lens while paying homage to the past."

On Gen Z Layering Traditional Silver with Western Wear:

"Gen Z effortlessly blends cultural roots with global influences. Chunky oxidised jewellery makes a bold statement, adding character to contemporary looks. Its craftsmanship and connection to India's artistic traditions make heritage relevant and wearable for a new generation."

Designer Aditi Khandelwal, Co-founder, Kicky & Perky Jewellery

Wearing our Oxidised nomadic past

SAKSHI PRIYA

Open Instagram or YouTube, and massive oxidised jewellery hauls completely dominate the screen. Young women are eagerly stacking thick tribal rings, piling on heavy bangles, and wearing layers of chunky neckpieces all at once. This dark, tarnished metal carries a deep past, forged originally by nomadic tribes centuries ago. The frantic rush to secure the perfect oversized jhumka entirely consumes the crowded alleys of Sarojini Nagar, Dilli Haat, and Janpath. The same shopping madness takes over Mumbai's Colaba Causeway, Pune's FC Road, and Bangalore's Commercial Street. Pairing these raw, vintage finish ornaments with everyday street fashion requires genuine skill. It brings ancient Indian heritage right into the middle of modern city life.

You can't really grasp this modern obsession without tracing the dark metal straight back to the tribal belts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh. For nomadic communities like the Banjaras

and Rabaris, piling on these heavy, clinking pieces was never just a look; it was a bold, walking declaration of their wealth and rank. Their entire cultural identity was literally cast in silver. The original craftsmen sat in cramped workshops, using sulfur to burn a deep black tarnish onto bright metal.

They were the ultimate record keepers, carving the stories of their people into every heavy choker.

But as we see too often, societies eventually fail to support the very artists responsible for keeping their history alive.

True oxidised jewellery happens when sterling silver decays chemically. As

Uncovering how the heavy silver of nomadic tribes became today's boldest oxidised street style obsession



silver prices exploded over the decades, the market completely changed. Traditional artisans hit a wall. Facing shrinking heritage spaces and with almost zero stage left to stand on, they had to adapt fast to survive. They shifted to German silver, white metal, and brass, manipulating these cheaper metals to mimic that exact ancient finish. They refused to accept the forced silence that so many masters in artistic communities face. By fiercely guarding their old motifs, the peacocks, temple gods, and tribal geometry, they made sure their craft survived. When young women stack these vintage-finish pieces, they are literally keeping the pulse of those original creators beating.

CINEMA



Jayy Randhawa and Shehnaaz Gill

ISHQNAMA CELEBRATES LOVE BEYOND BORDERS

TEAM VIVA

Ishqnama, a Punjabi romantic drama, starring Jayy Randhawa and Shehnaaz Gill is set for a theatrical release on July 24, 2026. Inspired by a true love story, the film is set against the backdrop of the India-Pakistan border in the 1980s. A poignant love story of Nimma, a Sikh poet from Indian Punjab, and Naseema, a Muslim girl from Pakistan's Punjab, the film explores the wounds of partition that separated their love.

Speaking at an event, actor Jayy Randhawa described *Ishqnama* as a story of true love. He expressed his love for Punjab for shaping his identity and journey and added that while the film will debut in Punjabi, the makers hope to bring it to a larger audience in other languages. His co-star Shehnaaz Gill too expressed how the film goes beyond romance, portraying emotions that transcend borders. The cast further expressed how the film beautifully portrays love, sacrifice, hope and resilience while delivering a powerful message that emotions have no borders.

PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

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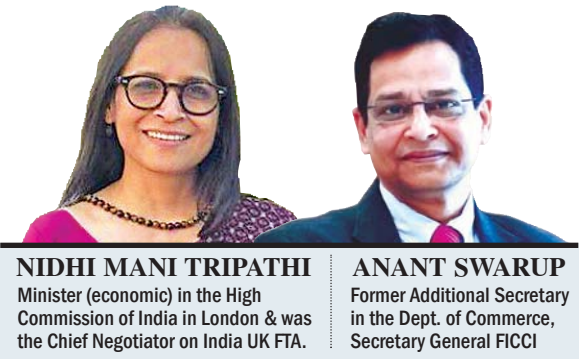
The Pioneer AGENDA

I'm not opposed to free trade if it's fair trade. But I am opposed to bad trade deals.
— Martin O'Malley

The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) marks the beginning — not the culmination — of India's latest trade journey. While the pact promises unprecedented market access, its true success will not be measured by tariff concessions on paper but by how effectively Indian businesses use it to expand exports, create jobs and move up the global value chain

DONE DEAL HARD WORK AHEAD

CETA: How the India-UK trade deal came of age



NIDHI MANI TRIPATHI
Minister (economic) in the High Commission of India in London & was the Chief Negotiator on India UK FTA.

ANANT SWARUP
Former Additional Secretary in the Dept. of Commerce, Secretary General FICCI

At the stroke of midnight on 15 July 2026, one of the world's most closely watched trade negotiations quietly entered a new phase. The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), together with the Double Contribution Convention (DCC) on social security, came into force, reducing tariffs on thousands of products, opening new services markets and establishing a modern framework for investment, mobility and innovation.

For a relationship once defined by history, the agreement marks a decisive shift towards a future anchored in commerce. Bilateral trade, currently valued at nearly US\$56 billion, is now expected to double to US\$100-120 billion by 2030.

A Five-Year Journey

The foundations of CETA were laid during the India-UK Virtual Summit in 2021, when Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson launched the Enhanced Trade Partnership and adopted the India-UK Roadmap 2030, elevating bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and committing to negotiate a comprehensive free trade agreement.

Formal negotiations began in January 2022 and unfolded over fourteen intensive rounds across New Delhi and London. Progress was often difficult. Sensitive issues-including mobility, Scotch whisky duties, automobile tariffs, carbon border measures and market access-repeatedly slowed negotiations. Elections in both countries effectively paused talks through much of 2024 before Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Keir Starmer agreed to revive them on the margins of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro later that year.

Negotiators concluded the agreement on 6 May 2025. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and UK Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds signed the treaty in London on 24 July 2025 in the presence of both Prime Ministers. As envisaged in a side letter to the agreement, the Double Contribution Convention followed on 10 February 2026.

Even then, implementation faced one final obstacle. The UK's proposed steel safeguard quotas threatened to undermine market access for Indian exporters. A negotiated compromise-providing duty-free access for roughly 85 percent of eligible Indian steel exports alongside an enhanced country-specific quota for the remainder-cleared the final hurdle, allowing both agreements to enter into force in July 2026.

CETA is widely regarded as India's most ambitious trade agreement to date and is increasingly described as the country's "gold standard" FTA. Spanning 30 chapters, it extends well beyond tariff reductions into areas such as services, innovation, digital trade, public procurement, intellectual property, labour, environment and gender.

It is India's first comprehensive free trade agreement negotiated from scratch with a G7 economy under its recalibrated trade strategy of engaging with complementary economies and expanding India's share in global trade.

Firsts in India's trade policy.

For the first time in any free trade agreement, India has agreed to provide tariff concessions on fully built automobiles-an area long sought by British and European negotiators. It also marks India's first calibrated opening of its public procurement market through carefully designed asymmetric thresholds that continue to safeguard MSMEs and the Make in India programme.

The agreement also contains dedicated chapters on Intellectual Property and Innovation, aimed at strengthening India's innovation ecosystem while preserving flexibilities on public health and reaffirming commitments under the Doha Declaration. Dedicated chapters on

INDIA, IN TURN, ELIMINATES TARIFFS IMMEDIATELY ON 64.1 PERCENT OF TARIFF LINES AND PHASES OUT DUTIES ON ANOTHER 21 PERCENT OVER TIME

MSMEs and Trade and Gender Equality recognise the challenges faced by smaller businesses and women entrepreneurs and establish institutional mechanisms for continued cooperation.

Equally noteworthy is the inclusion of Labour and Environment chapters-areas long regarded as sensitive in India's trade negotiations. Importantly, these chapters are collaborative rather than punitive and remain outside the agreement's dispute settlement mechanism.

Trade Gains Across Sectors

The commercial gains are substantial. The UK eliminates tariffs immediately on 99 percent of India's tariff lines, covering almost the entire value of bilateral trade. Labour-intensive sectors stand to benefit the most. Indian exports of textiles and apparel, leather and footwear, marine products, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, auto components,

chemicals, spices, tea, coffee and processed foods will now enjoy virtually duty-free access to the British market.

India, in turn, eliminates tariffs immediately on 64.1 percent of tariff lines and phases out duties on another 21 percent over time. British exports of Scotch whisky, gin, premium automobiles, cosmetics, chocolates, medical devices and advanced machinery are among the principal beneficiaries.

Scotch whisky duties will decline from 150 percent to 40 percent over ten years, while tariffs on automobiles will reduce from 110 percent to 10 percent under an expanding tariff-rate quota. The quota begins at approximately 20,000 vehicles annually before increasing to around 37,000 by the fifth year. Electric and hybrid vehicles become eligible only from the sixth year, providing domestic manufacturers valuable adjustment time. The quota is also divided across price bands, ensuring that most imports remain concentrated in luxury segments where domestic manufacturing is limited.

Services and Mobility: India's Competitive Edge

Services-India's greatest comparative advantage-feature prominently.

The UK has committed market access across 137 of 164 GATS subsectors, while India has undertaken commitments in around 108 subsectors covering information technology, financial services, telecommunications, engineering, accounting, education and healthcare. Dedicated chapters on Financial Services and Telecommunications further deepen cooperation in these sectors.

Mobility provisions facilitate the temporary movement of business visitors, intra-corporate transferees and contractual service suppliers for periods ranging from 90 days to three years without numerical quotas. An annual quota of 1,800 visas for chefs, yoga instructors and musicians also recognises India's growing cultural and creative economy.

The accompanying Double Contribution Convention is equally significant. By exempting temporary Indian workers in the UK from double social security contributions for up to five years-the longest exemption India has secured under any bilateral arrangement-it substantially lowers costs for Indian professionals and service providers.

Together, the mobility provisions and the DCC create a favourable environment for India's globally competitive services sector and reinforce India's position as a preferred destination for Global Capability Centres.

Protecting Sensitive Interests

Despite its ambition, the agreement reflects careful calibration.

India has excluded dairy, poultry, sugar, edible oils, apples, walnuts, gold bars, selected smartphone categories and certain

BRITISH FIRMS GAIN ACCESS ONLY TO SELECTED NON-SENSITIVE PROCUREMENT OPPORTUNITIES AS CLASS-2 SUPPLIERS UNDER CLEARLY DEFINED CONDITIONS

information technology products from tariff concessions, protecting vulnerable agricultural sectors and strategic manufacturing supported under the Make in India and Production Linked Incentive (PLI) programmes.

Sensitive concessions in automobiles and whisky are similarly moderated through tariff-rate quotas, price bands and long implementation timelines rather than immediate liberalisation. Nearly one-fifth of tariff concessions offered to the UK are phased over periods extending up to ten years, allowing domestic industry adequate adjustment while improving access to cost-effective inputs that strengthen India's manufacturing competitiveness.

India has also retained important policy flexibilities in intellectual property, particularly regarding public health safeguards, while maintaining a balanced approach to government procurement. British firms gain access only to selected non-sensitive procurement opportunities as Class-2 suppliers under clearly defined conditions.

Turning Market Access into Market Share

The agreement undoubtedly creates unprecedented commercial opportunities. Exporters in textile hubs such as Tirupur, Surat and Ludhiana, leather producers in Agra, seafood exporters along India's coastline and engineering manufacturers across the country now enjoy tariff advantages over competitors from Bangladesh, Vietnam and several other exporting nations.

Yet tariff preferences alone do not guarantee market success. Indian exporters must continue meeting stringent British standards on product safety, testing, certification, labelling and technical regulations. Encouragingly, both governments have committed to pursuing Mutual Recognition Agreements covering testing, certification and professional qualifications. Their successful implementation would significantly reduce compliance costs, improve regulatory certainty and facilitate smoother movement of professionals across sectors.

Looking back, CETA is as much a story of patient diplomacy as it is of trade liberalisation. Negotiating between two economies at different stages of development, with distinct regulatory systems, political priorities and domestic sensitivities, was never going to be straightforward.

CONTINUED ON >> PII

India-UK trade: From market access to market success



GOURAV VALLABH
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Trade agreements are usually celebrated when they are signed. Economics suggests that another date matters more: the day firms begin using them. The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which entered into force on July 15, 2026, should therefore be viewed not as the conclusion of a negotiation, but as the beginning of an institutional test.

The agreement is substantial. Negotiations began on January 13, 2022, and the pact was signed on July 24, 2025, after more than 3 years of negotiations. Bilateral trade in goods and services reached nearly £48 billion in 2025. For perspective, £1 billion (approximately ₹13,000 crore) provides a useful conversion benchmark. The UK is eliminating tariffs on about 99 per cent of tariff lines, covering nearly the entire value of India's exports. India has opened 89.5 per cent of its tariff lines, covering 91 per cent of UK exports, while only 24.5 per cent of UK export value receives immediate duty-free access; many concessions are phased over five, seven or ten years.

For India, the immediate opportunity is concentrated in employment-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather and footwear, marine products, gems and jewellery, toys and food processing, alongside engineering goods, chemicals and auto components. Growth in these sectors can generate broad-based employment. India's commitments also reflect calibrated openness. Duties on Scotch whisky and gin fall from 150 per cent to 75 per cent immediately and to 40 per cent after ten years. Tariffs on British cars can fall from as much as 110 per cent to 10 per cent, but only within a quota and through phased access. Meanwhile, sensitive sectors-including dairy, cereals and millets, pulses and specified vegetables-remain protected. Competition is introduced while domestic producers in strategic sectors receive time to build scale and technology. The transition should ultimately be assessed by whether it raises productivity.

Official modelling estimates that the agreement could increase annual bilateral trade

by £25.5 billion in the long run and raise India's GDP by about £5.1 billion annually. These are estimates relative to a no-agreement baseline, not guaranteed outcomes; the official assessment itself acknowledges significant uncertainty. Realisation depends on firms claiming preferences, satisfying rules of origin, meeting product standards and responding to new price signals. That makes preference utilisation the central metric. A tariff preference has value only when an exporter can claim it and deliver competitively. International evidence shows that rules of origin and certification costs weigh disproportionately on smaller firms. An MSME may find that paperwork and testing absorb much of the apparent tariff advantage.

The government has successfully completed the demanding work of negotiation. The next phase requires an implementation partnership among the Union government, states, export promotion councils, financial institutions and industry. India should consider a CETA Utilisation Mission built on its existing digital trade infrastructure. It should provide

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sector-specific rules-of-origin guidance, standard documentation, tariff calculators, certification support and rapid grievance resolution through a single interface. The mission should publish a quarterly utilisation scorecard. Aggregate trade values alone can mislead, as exchange rates, commodity prices, and the business cycle also affect them. A more useful dashboard would track preference utilisation rates, the number and size of participating firms, rejected origin claims, first-time exporters, and product diversification. The agreement asks customs authorities to endeavour to release compliant goods within 48 hours when no physical examination is required; actual clearance times should therefore also be reported.

The second priority is standards. The UK market places a premium on quality, traceability, safety and credible certification. Tariffs may fall to zero, but regulatory requirements remain. Testing laboratories in major export clusters should be aligned with UK accreditation requirements, while negotiations on mutual recognition should continue where regulatory objectives permit. Export credit, logistics support and design assistance should help firms move from low-value supply to branded and higher-value products.

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Major highlights CETA

Core Trade & Market Access

- Grants duty-free access for nearly 99% of India's exports by value, significantly boosting competitive pricing.
- Major tariff reductions apply to textiles, leather, marine products, chemicals, and engineering goods.
- India protects its strategically important and labour-intensive domestic sectors with phased tariff reductions.

PROFESSIONAL MOBILITY & SERVICES

- The UK provides access across 137 service sub-sectors, benefiting Indian IT, financial services, and healthcare.



- Creates a clearer path for temporary stays without numerical quotas or restrictive economic tests.

SOCIAL SECURITY & WORK VISAS (DCC)

Exempts eligible Indian professionals on temporary assignments in the UK from paying double social security contributions for up to five years.

INVESTMENT & NEXT-GEN CHAPTERS

Extends beyond traditional goods and services, embedding 30 chapters that cover digital trade, telecommunications, intellectual property, and government procurement.

“YOU MUST NOT FIGHT TOO OFTEN WITH ONE ENEMY,
OR YOU WILL TEACH HIM ALL YOUR ART OF WAR”
— NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

Ukraine war: NATO’s proxy war against
Russia hurts India’s interests



VLADIMIR LADANOV



A summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) from 7-8 July in Ankara has delivered an expected outcome: the allies reaffirmed their commitment to continuing their campaign against Russia in Ukraine. It was too much to hope that they would learn from their past mistakes of provoking that conflict in the first place by never-stopping NATO’s eastward expansion contrary to earlier understandings, supporting a bloody coup d’état in Kiev in February 2014 and the toppling of Ukraine’s legitimate President Viktor Yanukovich — all in an ongoing effort to turn Ukraine into a Western bulwark against Russia. NATO’s ambition to dominate the security space in Europe and its blatant disregard for Russia’s vital interests in its near abroad are at the heart of the current geopolitical conflagration. Described as “brain dead” by the French President Emmanuel Macron as recently as 2019, NATO has now found a new lease on life in its confrontation with Russia. But is this moment sustainable or a contrived unity of allies in Ankara is only fleeting?

After WWII, first Secretary General of NATO, an India-born British General Hastings Ismay, anecdotally formulated the alliance’s purpose as “to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down”. While his dictum had been respected in the past, nowadays all of its three pillars are being challenged.

When the Cold War ended with the breakup of the Soviet Union, the then US Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, one of the leading neocons of his time, developed a policy which came to be known as the Wolfowitz doctrine. In no uncertain terms it advised that to preserve America’s hegemony, Russia should never be allowed to rise again. Earnestly engaging with Moscow and integrating it with the West, like it was done before with the former American adversaries, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, was ruled out of the question. Yet Russia has re-emerged from the ruin of the Soviet collapse and re-joined the ranks of the great powers. It is evidenced by the fact that for over four years of the Ukraine conflict Russia has been tackling the combined might of the entire Western coalition and countering all its attempts at achieving escalation dominance. It is a fair assessment that after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe NATO had squandered an historic opportunity to re-engage with Moscow on equal terms. And since then by crossing the reddest of Russia’s geopolitical red lines it has now found itself embroiled in a proxy war against it in Ukraine. Instead of ensuring security in the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO’s leaders, in their folly, have provoked the bloodiest military conflict on the conti-

nent since WWII.

Having become entangled in a giant mess of their own creation, NATO’s leadership are now facing a real prospect of their alliance breaking up - not only because US President Donald Trump wants to take over Denmark’s Greenland but also because he seeks a radical redistribution of burden sharing in NATO by ending a long-standing European habit of freeloading at American expense. It is not unreasonable to imagine that President Trump may choose to hold in abeyance America’s defence commitment to those NATO countries that he considers underdelivering or politically at odds with Washington. A relevant example of the latter case is the suspension of the US’s obligation to New Zealand under the ANZUS security treaty after Wellington annoyed the Reagan administration with its anti-nuclear policy. The Trump



administration is no longer convinced in continuing its sizeable European military commitment and would like to be rid of the European problems irrelevant to America’s core interests. The European force posture review now conducted by US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth will likely result in the reduction of American troops stationed there. Ultimately, the Trump administration wants to geopolitically pivot to the Pacific and for that it needs to release the capabilities currently assigned to NATO and other resources wasted in the conflict in Ukraine. Worse still for the Europeans, Donald Trump favours negotiating a deal with Russia to end the bloodshed. European warmongers are aghast at this prospect because absent US support their own position vis-à-vis Russia becomes weak - America has traditionally provided a vital structural strength to NATO through its command and staff element, strategic enablers such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, precision deep strike, and extended nuclear deterrence. Deprived of these strategic assets, the Europeans will likely have to accommodate Russia.

Finally, what about keeping the Germans down? For the first time since the end of WWII Germany’s massive investment in its military outpaces both Britain’s and France’s expenditure: in the four years since 2022 German defence budget has risen twofold and by 2030 it is projected to again double to nearly 160 billion euros, which will be almost as much as what London and Paris spend combined. Should this happen, redistribution of power in Europe will inevitably follow. There is already an emerging discussion in the West about the long-term implications of Germany’s rapid rearmament. This question should be of particular interest to Germany’s neighbours some of which are still harbouring grievances dating back to WWII such as Warsaw’s demand (rejected

by Berlin) of paying wartime reparations. For the time being, the European elites mostly welcome Germany’s military buildup in the hope of directing it against Russia. Yet they tried the same tack in the 1930s and it blew up in their face. They have to be careful what they wish for.

There are two India-relevant observations arising from the geopolitical drama drama playing out in Europe.

First, with European states heavily committed to confronting Russia they make poor security partners for India because their capabilities are tied down thousands of miles away with little to nothing to spare for upholding balance in the Indian Ocean and beyond. Their continental strategy, as the British historian Michael Howard would have put it, is likely to have implications similar to what happened to the British Empire before WWII when it chose to bolster the defence of Europe at the expense of cutting back on its deployments in the Pacific. With the Ukraine conflict raging on, unfunded and unsubstantiated European Indo-Pacific strategies bring little of real value to India’s table.

Secondly, it is broadly accepted among India’s foreign policy and national security community that a strong, independent and prosperous Russia is vital for maintaining a balance of power favourable to India in Eurasia. Contrary to this, the dogged pursuit of Russia’s defeat by European elites pushes in the opposite direction thereby complicating New Delhi’s balancing act and reducing its options.

With these down-to-earth considerations in mind it is logical to assume that an early termination of the Ukraine conflict and the rebuilding of normalcy between Russia and the West would be conducive to India’s external strategy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s message that “today’s era is not the era of war” clearly articulated to European capitals would go a long way to achieving that objective.

Vladimir Ladanov is Chargé d'affaires of Russia in India

FROM AGENDA COVER

CETA: How the
India-UK Trade...

Many of the outcomes required India to venture into areas that had never featured in its earlier trade agreements while carefully preserving policy space in sectors critical to its developmental priorities. Equally, the United Kingdom had to accommodate India’s concerns as an emerging economy with priorities of inclusive growth and social justice keeping in view the substantial market access to one of the fastest growing economies of the world.

The negotiations have secured unprecedented market access for businesses of both sides. The realisation of full potential of the agreement’s promise will now depend on businesses, exporters, investors and innovators who can translate these new opportunities into sustained commercial success. If the negotiations were about opening doors, the next chapter will be about walking together confidently through them.

India-UK Trade:
From market...

The third priority is carbon competitiveness. The UK’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is scheduled to begin on January 1, 2027, covering specified goods in aluminium, cement, fertiliser,

hydrogen, iron and steel. This is not an argument against CETA; it is the next frontier of competitiveness. A zero tariff cannot indefinitely compensate for high embedded carbon.

Although the legal liability rests with UK importers, Indian suppliers will increasingly need verified product-level emissions data, cleaner energy and access to green finance. CETA implementation should therefore connect with India’s wider decarbonisation and manufacturing strategy.

Services and professional mobility offer another strategic gain. The companion Double Contributions Convention prevents double social-security contributions for eligible detached workers sent temporarily between the two countries for up to 60 months. It does not change immigration or settlement rules.

CETA also broadens access for contractual service suppliers, intra-corporate transferees and independent professionals, and provides a collective annual quota of 1,800 places for Indian chefs, yoga teachers and classical musicians. The number is modest, but the precedent is valuable: professional mobility is being treated as part of economic integration rather than as a peripheral issue.

Execution will finally be local. The agreement is national, but its gains will be realised in manufacturing and services

clusters, district export hubs, ports, testing centres and bank branches. State governments should identify products with immediate UK potential and establish cluster-level facilitation teams. This would align trade policy with employment policy because many beneficiary sectors are both MSME-intensive and labour-intensive.

CETA also signals a broader evolution in India’s trade strategy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi: from generalised defensiveness towards selective integration, backed by safeguards for sensitive sectors. This is a confident approach to globalisation-using external market access to strengthen domestic capability, not to substitute for it. As India advances towards Viksit Bharat 2047, trade agreements must become instruments for productivity, technology, formalisation and better jobs.

The text has opened the door; institutions and enterprises must now walk through it. The most meaningful measure of success will not be the number of tariff lines liberalised, but the number of Indian firms that export for the first time, move up the value chain and create durable employment.

If implementation receives the same policy attention as negotiation, the India-UK CETA can become a model of how India converts diplomatic access into broad-based economic capability.

Anger covers more ground than its
title suggests and delves deep

GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Anger: Why We Get Angry and How We Should Respond to Provocation isn’t the kind of self-help title that promises five easy steps to a calmer you, and that turns out to be the book’s real strength. Journalist Narayani Ganesh — her name is often misspelled “Ganeshan” online, worth flagging if you’re hunting for the book — spent years editing The Times of India’s Speaking Tree column, and it shows: she treats anger less as a problem to be fixed than a subject to be understood from every angle she can find. That range is the book’s defining feature. Buddha, Krishna, and Mohammed sit alongside the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, with philosophers and psychiatrists brought in to round things out.

But Ganesh doesn’t stop at scripture and sutra. She follows anger into distinctly present-day territory — incel culture and the kind of online radicalisation that shows like Adolescence dramatised, the mechanics of political trolling, and the everyday menace of road rage on Indian streets.

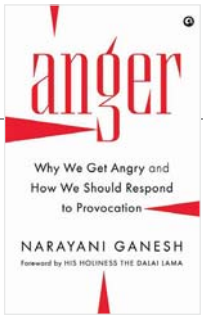
It’s an unusual and effective pairing: ancient counsel on wrath sitting next to an account of how algorithms and

comment sections manufacture it fresh every day.

The most memorable stretches, though, are the quietest. A conversation with the Dalai Lama and another with Shantam Seth — whose own journey from angry young man to Dharmacharya carries more weight than any of the book’s broader surveys — do more work than the wider sweep around them. Elsewhere, Ganesh gets pleasingly domestic, tracing how cooking or eating while furious can leave its residue on a meal, grounding a very old question in something as ordinary as dinner.

What the book resists is tidiness — it doesn’t rank traditions or hand out a winner, just lays out a spread and lets the reader pick what fits. The trade-off is that a book trying to hold scripture, psychology, and internet culture in one hand can read more like a well-curated anthology than a single sustained argument, and readers hoping for a deeper dive into anger’s constructive side — the fury that drives people to fight injustice — may come away wanting more on that front specifically.

Still, as an entry point for anyone confused about where to even start thinking about their own temper, it’s a generous, well-sourced, and surprisingly current one.



Author: Narayani Ganesh
Publisher: Aleph
Price: ₹699

WEEKLY MOON SIGN FORECAST | 19-25 JULY

Finding Balance, Building Trust
and Moving with Clarity

Dr Shanker Adawal
Astrologer, Author & Researcher

This forecast is based on your Moon Sign (Janma Rash), which often reflects day-to-day emotional and instinctive patterns more closely than general Sun-sign readings.

Moon Watch

The Moon’s quiet message for the week ahead. This week gradually shifts from practical organisation towards balanced relationships and deeper emotional understanding. Thoughtful choices, and quiet reflection help create lasting progress.

Weekly Overview

The week begins under the Virgo Moon, encouraging organisation, practical thinking and attention to detail. As the Moon moves into Libra, relationships, and balanced decisions become increasingly important. Scorpio deepens emotional awareness, encouraging stronger commitments

Aries (Mesh): Professional matters may require greater attention during the opening phase of the week. Practical planning and careful organisation will help you manage responsibilities more effectively. As the Moon enters Libra, discussions with colleagues or family members become easier and cooperation improves. Midweek encourages measured decisions rather than quick reactions.

Taurus (Vrishabh): Relationships and one-to-one interactions naturally move into focus during the beginning of the week. Listening carefully may resolve matters that recently appeared complicated. As Libra encourages balance, practical decisions involving finances or shared responsibilities become easier to manage. Midweek supports cooperation and meaningful conversations.

Gemini (Mithun): Daily routines, work responsibilities and practical organisation may shape much of the opening week. Small improvements introduced now are likely to produce lasting benefits. As communication gathers momentum, useful discussions could simplify pending matters. Midweek supports healthier routines and balanced decision-making.

Cancer (Karka): Creative interests, personal projects or family activities may provide a welcome change from routine during the opening days. Virgo encourages careful planning before beginning something new. Midweek strengthens friendships, cooperation and meaningful exchanges of ideas. You may discover that balanced discussions achieve more than emotional reactions.

Leo (Simha): Home, family matters or domestic responsibilities deserve thoughtful attention at the beginning of the week. Practical improvements within your surroundings may bring greater comfort later. Libra encourages understanding between different viewpoints, making this a favourable period for resolving minor misunderstandings. Midweek supports fairness in important discussions.

Virgo (Kanya): Communication, learning and careful observation become valuable themes while the Moon remains in Virgo. Conversations held during the opening phase may provide practical guidance for future decisions. As Libra energy develops, teamwork and professional discussions become more productive. Midweek encourages diplomacy where opinions differ.

Libra (Tula): Financial planning or practical responsibilities may require careful organisation during the first half of the week. A balanced approach helps prevent unnecessary complications. As the Moon enters Libra, confidence grows and relationships receive greater attention. Midweek supports cooperation, thoughtful communication and fair decision-making.

Scorpio (Vrishchik): Personal priorities and emotional well-being gradually move closer to the forefront during this week. The opening phase encourages quiet preparation rather than immediate action. Libra supports meaningful conversations that improve mutual understanding. By the weekend, the Moon enters Scorpio, increasing emotional strength, determination and clarity. This is a favourable period for focusing on personal goals.

Sagittarius (Dhanu): Future planning, learning or long-term ambitions may benefit from careful review during the beginning of the week. Practical organisation now can simplify responsibilities later. Libra encourages networking, useful meetings and cooperative efforts that support your objectives. Midweek may also bring opportunities through trusted contacts.

Capricorn (Makar): Professional responsibilities and long-term goals remain important throughout the opening days. Virgo supports disciplined work and careful planning, allowing steady progress without unnecessary pressure. Midweek encourages productive teamwork and balanced discussions. As Scorpio energy develops over the weekend, friendships, group activities or shared projects may become more rewarding. Trust built gradually is likely to produce stronger long-term results.

Aquarius (Kumbh): Professional responsibilities and long-term goals remain important throughout the opening days. Virgo supports disciplined work and careful planning, allowing steady progress without unnecessary pressure. Midweek encourages productive teamwork and balanced discussions. As Scorpio energy develops over the weekend, friendships, group activities or shared projects may become more rewarding. Trust built gradually is likely to produce stronger long-term results.

Pisces (Meen): Short journeys, learning opportunities or meaningful conversations may shape the opening phase of the week. Virgo encourages practical observation, helping you understand situations from a wider perspective. Midweek strengthens communication and mutual understanding, particularly within personal relationships. As the Moon enters Scorpio, intuition becomes stronger and emotional awareness deepens. This is a supportive period for thoughtful planning, meaningful reflection and preparing confidently for the next stage ahead.

“TO EAT IS A NECESSITY,
BUT TO EAT INTELLIGENTLY IS AN ART”
— FRANÇOIS DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

Flavours in a season of stillness



ANIL
RAJPUT

On most festivals, devotion gathers around abundance. Platters expand, kitchens grow fragrant with spice and ghee, and hospitality is expressed through generosity. Devshayani Ekadashi asks for something different. It turns the act of eating inward. The ingredients become fewer and the appetite more disciplined, yet the culinary imagination remains remarkably alive. In homes across India, ordinary grain is set aside and humble ingredients such as barnyard millet, amaranth, tapioca, peanuts, sweet potato, water chestnut, milk and fruit are transformed into dishes that nourish without overwhelming. The cuisine of this Ekadashi therefore does not contradict fasting. It reveals how restraint itself can acquire flavour, texture, regional identity and spiritual meaning.

Observed on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight of the Hindu month of Ashadha, Devshayani Ekadashi marks the moment when Lord Vishnu, the preserver and sustainer of the universe, is believed to enter yoganidra upon Shesha in the Ksheer Sagar. This divine sleep is not understood as ordinary rest, but as a state of cosmic meditation in which Vishnu continues to uphold creation while withdrawing from outward activity. The observance is therefore a reminder that stillness does not mean absence, and that spiritual strength is often renewed through contemplation. Known variously as Shayani Ekadashi, Hari Shayani Ekadashi, Padma Ekadashi and Ashadhi Ekadashi, the day holds particular importance for Vaishnav devotees, who worship Vishnu and his forms, including Vitthal, with fasting, prayer, bhajans, temple visits and the recitation of sacred texts.

The festival is celebrated to seek Vishnu's grace, cleanse the mind of excess and begin a period of greater spiritual discipline. The Ekadashi fast is not merely an avoidance of certain ingredients. It is intended to regulate the senses, reduce attachment and redirect the time and energy usually devoted to consumption towards devotion, charity and self-examination. Devshayani Ekadashi also inaugurates Chaturmas, the four sacred months extending until Prabodhini Ekadashi in Kartika, when Vishnu is believed to awaken. During this period, many devotees undertake personal vows, simplify their diets, avoid unnecessary indulgence, study scripture and intensify acts of service. Major Hindu ceremonies such as weddings are traditionally limited in many communities, allowing the season to become one of inward renewal. As the monsoon transforms the landscape outside, the devotee is similarly encouraged to cultivate humility, patience and moral clarity within.

The vrat katha traditionally linked with the observance tells of the righteous King Mandhata, whose kingdom suffered a devastating drought. Seeking relief for his people, the king was guided towards the disciplined observance of Ashadha Shukla Ekadashi. The fast was undertaken with faith, after which rain returned and the land recovered. The narrative connects zappetite with responsibility. The ruler does not respond to scarcity with personal excess, but accepts restraint on behalf of his people. This is especially meaningful in Ashadha, when the monsoon determines sowing, water security and the agricultural future of communities.

Nowhere does the day acquire a more visible public life than in Maharashtra. Here, Devshayani Ekadashi is inseparable from the Pandharpur Wari and the worship of Vitthal and Rukmini. Warkaris travel on foot in organised dindis, singing abhangas, carrying saffron flags and accompanying the palkhis that bear the padukas of saints such as Dnyaneshwar and Tukaram. The routes from Alandi and Dehu gather people from different regions and social backgrounds into a moving fellowship of devotion, eventually reaching Pandharpur on the banks of the Chandrabhaga.

The journey carries forward the Warkari emphasis on humility, collective discipline, remembrance of the divine name and equality before Vitthal.

Food along this spiritual landscape must sustain pilgrims during an arduous monsoon journey while respecting the control demanded by Ekadashi. Some devotees observe nirjala vrat without water, some consume only fruit and milk, while others eat one carefully regulated meal. Customs differ by family, region and sampradaya, but grains, cereals and pulses are widely avoided. Ordinary salt may be replaced by sendha namak, and onions, garlic and heavily stimulating spices are usually excluded. There is therefore no single compulsory Devshayani Ekadashi menu, but a family of regional fasting cuisines expressing the same principle: the body may be supported, but desire should not command the day.

In Maharashtra, the most meaningful place to begin is Varyacha Bhat, also called Bhagar. Despite its rice-like appearance, it is prepared from barnyard millet, known by several regional names including vari, samo and moraiyo. The tiny seeds are washed and lightly roasted or cooked in ghee with cumin before being simmered until tender. Some households keep it plain, while others add peanuts, green chilli or coconut within their vrat practice. Its gentle flavour makes it an ideal base for Danyachi Amti, a fasting curry made from roasted ground peanuts. The peanut powder is loosened with water and simmered with cumin, chilli, a little jaggery or sugar and sourness from lemon or kokum, depending on household custom. Together, bhagar and danyachi amti form a complete meal that is earthy, warming and unmistakably Maharashtrian.

The familiar sabudana pearl also takes on a more distinctive form in Sabudana Thalipeeth. Soaked tapioca is mixed with mashed potato, coarsely crushed roasted peanuts, cumin, green chilli, coriander and vrat salt. Instead of being stirred in a pan, the mixture is patted into a flat round, usually on a damp cloth or sheet, then transferred carefully to a hot griddle. A work small hole pressed into the centre allows ghee to spread as the thalipeeth cooks. The surface becomes crisp while the inside remains soft and pleasantly chewy. Served with plain curd or a cucumber and peanut koshimbir, it offers more character than the ubiquitous sabudana khichdi and remains closely associated with Maharashtrian fasting kitchens.



Another preparation

suited to the damp Ashadha season is Ratalyacha Kees. Sweet potato is peeled and coarsely grated, then cooked gently in ghee with cumin, green chilli and roasted peanut powder. Fresh coconut may be folded through at the end, while lemon brightens its natural sweetness. It occupies the appealing middle ground of fasting cuisine, with sweetness from the tuber, heat from chilli and crunch from peanuts. Sweet potato also helps produce Upvasache Ghavan, a thin savoury pancake made by combining raigira or another permitted fasting flour with water, cumin and chilli. Poured onto a hot pan like a delicate crepe, it cooks quickly and is eaten with curd, coconut chutney adapted for the vrat or a spoonful of danyachi amti.

A thicker griddle bread appears as Raigira Thalipeeth. Amaranth flour is bound with boiled potato or grated sweet potato because it contains no gluten, then seasoned with cumin, chilli and coriander. The dough is pressed directly by hand rather than rolled, and ghee gives the edges a nutty crispness. Amaranth moves easily between savoury and sweet forms, allowing one pantry staple to serve several ritual needs.

As the observance extends beyond Maharashtra, the vocabulary changes but the discipline remains recognisable. In Gujarat, Farali Patrice brings refinement to the fasting plate. Mashed potato forms the outer covering, while the centre holds a sweet, sour and mildly hot mixture of grated coconut, crushed nuts, raisins, green chilli and lemon. The stuffed patties are shallow-fried or fried until golden and served with vrat-friendly coriander or coconut chutney. Their contrasting textures make them festive without grain or pulses. A lighter Gujarati companion is Farali Chevdo, in which thin potato strips, peanuts, cashews, coconut chips and sometimes makhana are fried or roasted separately and tossed with rock salt, chilli and a touch of sugar. It stores well and travels easily, making it useful during fasting.

In northern and western Vaishnav households, Singhare ki Kadhi provides the comforting sharpness of a traditional kadhi without gram flour.

Water chestnut flour is whisked into curd until smooth, diluted and



simmered

gently with sendha namak and restrained seasoning. A tempering of ghee, cumin and chilli adds aroma without disturbing the simplicity of the dish. Some families add small singhara-flour dumplings. The kadhi can accompany raigira flatbread or sama, adapting a familiar dish to Ekadashi restrictions. Sweet dishes are not included merely as rewards after austerity. Many are made from the same ingredients that sustain the savoury meal, reinforcing the economy and coherence of the vrat kitchen. Varyachi Kheer transforms barnyard millet into a creamy dessert by slowly cooking it in milk until the seeds soften and the liquid thickens. Cardamom, saffron and a modest quantity of sugar or jaggery provide fragrance, while nuts add texture. Sabudana Kheer works differently. The translucent pearls swell in milk and create a softer, silkier consistency, often finished with cardamom and raisins. Both are gentle enough for the restrained meal yet festive enough for naivedya.

The dry sweets are especially useful when food must be prepared in advance. Raigira Laddoo is made by binding popped amaranth with warm jaggery syrup, producing light, crisp spheres with a deep caramel note. Shengdana Laddoo uses roasted ground peanuts combined with jaggery or powdered sugar and ghee. Its richness makes a small portion satisfying. Coarsely crushed peanuts may be left visible to preserve a rustic bite. Sweet potato returns in Ratalyacha Sheera, where it is boiled or grated, then cooked with ghee, milk and sugar or jaggery until it becomes soft and glossy. Cardamom and nuts give it the fragrance of a celebratory sheera without requiring semolina. North Indian fasting traditions contribute Singhade Ka Halwa, prepared by patiently roasting water chestnut flour in ghee before adding hot water or milk and sweetener. The flour develops a warm, nutty aroma, and the final halwa is dense, smooth and best served in a small portion.

Milk-based sweets further soften the day's menu. Makhana Kheer begins with fox nuts roasted in ghee, lightly crushed and simmered in milk until they absorb its sweetness while retaining some texture. In Maharashtra, Kelyache Shikran offers an almost effortless alternative:

ripe banana is sliced or mashed into milk, sweetened lightly and scented with cardamom.

Across coastal Karnataka, a related preparation called Balehannina Rasayana combines banana with jaggery and fresh coconut or coconut milk. It may be served as a pudding, fruit preparation or simple offering, showing how ripe fruit, dairy and coconut create sweetness without

elaborate cooking. Beverages remain equally mindful. For those not observing nirjala vrat, coconut water and diluted lemon water offer light refreshment. Milk may be warmed with saffron or cardamom according to household custom. Thin buttermilk, seasoned only with cumin and sendha namak, is preferred by some families, although others avoid it depending on their vrat rules. Kokum sharbat is particularly suited to western India during the humid monsoon, while fresh fruit drinks may be taken without packaged additives. Panchamrit, made from milk, curd, ghee, honey and sugar, belongs primarily to worship and is received in a small sacred portion rather than consumed as an ordinary beverage.

The fast is broken on Dwadashi through parana at the time prescribed by the devotee's tradition. The purpose is not to compensate with excess, but to receive nourishment with gratitude. That principle gives Devshayani Ekadashi cuisine its quiet power. Every substitution has meaning. Barnyard millet stands where rice would normally stand. Peanut becomes the body of a curry when pulses are absent. Amaranth replaces wheat, sweet potato replaces semolina, and fruit becomes both offering and dessert. Culinary skill does not disappear when the pantry is restricted. It becomes more attentive.

To preserve this heritage, we must do more than circulate lists of "foods allowed during fasting." We must learn which dishes belong to which regions, record the names used by grandparents, understand why one household eats bhagar while another takes only fruit, and recognise that the strictest fast and the carefully prepared farali meal can both arise from sincere devotion. Children should be invited into the kitchen to pat sabudana thalipeeth, stir danyachi amti, shape raigira laddoos and hear the story of Vishnu's yoganidra while the food is being prepared. Families and cultural organisations can document local variations before convenience foods erase them.

Devshayani Ekadashi teaches that civilisation is not sustained only through grand feasts. It is also sustained through the meals people willingly simplify, the ingredients they set aside, the discipline they accept and the recipes through which restraint is made nourishing. When future generations understand not only what was cooked but why it was cooked, the observance will remain more than a date on the calendar. It will continue as a living conversation between devotion, season, memory and the Indian kitchen.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)

The plant-based sunrise

Rethink Your Morning: Gut-Friendly and Flavour-Packed Vegan Breakfasts

TEAM AGENDA

Let's completely drop the old joke about vegans chewing on sad leaves. Plant-based breakfasts have gotten ridiculously good. Cooks are done with bland dairy substitutes and are leaning heavily into real food — rich grains, smart ferments, and serious spices that actually wake up the palate. Whether craving a massive, filling bowl or a fresh take on classic comfort meals, a vegan morning spread has turned into some of the best eating available right now for absolutely anyone sitting at the table. Here is how chefs bring these morning dishes to life.

A GUT-FRIENDLY START

A nourishing vegan breakfast begins with wholesome ingredients, balanced flavours and smart cooking techniques. Chef Ajay Chopra, *Paashh* Mumbai shares two millet-based recipes that are rich in nutrition, flavour and perfect for everyday mornings.

FOXTAIL MILLET UPMA

Method: Heat coconut oil and crackle the mustard seeds. Sauté the chana dal, urad dal and cashews until golden, then add curry leaves and vegetables. Stir in the turmeric, sambar masala and Hatcho miso. Pour in the water, season with salt and simmer. Add the boiled millet, cook for 3-4 minutes, garnish with coriander and serve hot.



- Ingredients:**
- 100 ml coconut oil
 - 20 g mustard seeds
 - 70 g chana dal
 - 45 g urad dal
 - 100 g cashew nuts
 - 20 g curry leaves
 - 250 g diced carrots
 - 150 g cauliflower florets
 - 250 g blanched French beans
 - 150 g edamame
 - 10 g turmeric powder
 - 20 g sambar masala
 - 60 g Hatcho miso
 - 300 g boiled foxtail millet
 - 750 ml water
 - Salt to taste
 - 50 g chopped coriander

Method: Soak the ragi, idli rice, urad dal and fenugreek seeds for 6-8 hours. Soak the poha separately for 10 minutes. Grind the ragi and rice into a coarse batter and the urad dal with poha into a smooth batter. Mix both, ferment until risen, add salt and pour into greased idli moulds. Steam for 12-15 minutes and serve warm.

CONTEMPORARY PLANT-BASED PICKS

A wholesome vegan breakfast combines plant-based protein, whole grains and fresh produce. Chef Saravanan Palaniappan, Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa shares three easy, flavour-packed recipes that are nutritious, satisfying and perfect for busy mornings.

CHICKPEA PANCAKES (BESAN CHILLA)



Method: Whisk chickpea flour and water into a smooth batter. Add onions, tomatoes, coriander, green chillies, turmeric and cumin. Cook on a lightly greased pan until golden on both sides. Serve hot with mint chutney or tomato salsa.

- Ingredients:**
- Chickpea flour (besan)
 - Water
 - Onion
 - Tomatoes
 - Fresh coriander
 - Green chillies
 - Turmeric
 - Cumin
 - Mint chutney or tomato salsa



RAGI IDLI

- Ingredients:**
- 350 g ragi
 - 350 g idli rice
 - 200 g urad gota
 - 5 g fenugreek seeds
 - 180 g poha
 - Water as required
 - Salt to taste
 - Oil for greasing



TOFU SCRAMBLE

Method: Crumble the tofu into a hot pan and cook with onions, tomatoes and spinach. Season with turmeric, garlic powder, black pepper and salt. Serve hot with whole-grain toast and sliced avocado.

- Ingredients:**
- Firm tofu
 - Onion
 - Tomatoes
 - Spinach
 - Turmeric
 - Garlic powder
 - Black pepper
 - Salt
 - Whole-grain toast
 - Avocado

OVERNIGHT OATS (BIRCHER MUESLI)



- Ingredients:**
- Rolled oats
 - Plant-based milk
 - Chia seeds
 - Maple syrup
 - Fresh berries
 - Banana
 - Almonds
 - Pumpkin seeds

Method: Mix the oats, plant-based milk, chia seeds and maple syrup. Refrigerate overnight. Before serving, top with berries, banana slices, almonds and pumpkin seeds.

When lunch becomes a culinary escape

GYANESHWAR DAYAL



Lunch has increasingly become more than just a quick break in the middle of the workday. For many urban diners, it is an opportunity to step away from the rush, savour thoughtfully prepared food, and recharge before returning to their schedules. Recognising this shift, a growing number of restaurants are curating menus that balance speed with quality, offering compact dining experiences without compromising on flavour. Blending signature dishes, efficient service, and inviting settings, these midday offerings are redefining the business lunch as a culinary experience in its own right.

OKO, The LaLiT New Delhi's Pan-Asian flagship, recently opened its doors for a media tasting of Oriental Express, its new midday menu spanning Japan, Thailand, and China.

The tasting opened with a Tom Yum Siam mocktail, sharp with lemongrass and chilli-an assertive start for something pitched as an efficient lunch. Thailand carried through in a bright som tam salad and a Thai green curry with jasmine rice; China showed up in neat, well-sealed veg-

etable dumplings, and Japan closed the savoury run with a udon donburi bowl, soft noodles in a soy-glazed broth that felt more comforting than showy. A scoop of lychee ice cream ended the meal on a light, floral note. Nothing overstayed its welcome—the whole sequence was clearly timed to fit within a one-hour window, and it largely lived up to its billing as polished yet quick, without the food ever feeling rushed. What lingered longer than any single dish was the room. Floor-to-ceiling glass wraps around three sides, with Lutyens' Delhi on one flank and Connaught Place on the other, while dark wood, brass accents, and Asian art keep the space warm rather than corporate. Service, unhurried despite the "Express" branding, was delivered with genuine warmth rather than rehearsed fine-dining polish.



The Poverty of Love

Why are we desperately searching for something that is already shining deep within our own hearts?

AMMA (SRI MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI DEVI)

Today 90 per cent of the ailments we suffer are due to mental strain and tension because love is fading from the human heart. Problems diminish when there is love, but a lack of love increases and intensifies our problems. Just as food is needed for the growth of the body, love is needed for the growth of the heart. Love is as valuable and precious as breast milk for a baby.

In the name of modernity and development, humans have become more and more selfish. We have become like isolated islands, cut off from the rest of creation, cut off from life, cut off from true joy.

Look at a tree. It gives shade even to the person who cuts it down. It gives its sweet, delicious fruits to the person who harms it. But our attitude is completely different. When we plant a tree, we are only concerned about the profit we will make from it. If a tree stops yielding fruit, we will cut it down and make furniture from it.

Selfishness reigns supreme. Selfless love cannot be found anywhere. Because of this selfishness, humankind today sees Nature as being separate. Individuals think that Nature has been created solely for them to use and exploit in order to fulfil their selfish desires. This attitude creates a separation and a distance.

Scientists have found methods to produce a hundred tomatoes from a plant that could otherwise bear only ten fruits. They have also succeeded in doubling the size of fruits and vegetables. While it is true that with this increased production, poverty and starvation have been reduced to a certain extent, we remain largely unaware of the harmful effects caused by artificial fertilisers and pesticides, which become absorbed into the body.



These chemicals destroy cells and make us more vulnerable to disease. The number of hospitals has also had to increase as the push continues to artificially force plants to yield fruit and seeds in quantities which are far beyond their limits. Science has reached unimaginable heights, but owing to selfishness, humankind has lost the clarity to see the truth of things and to act with discernment.

This understanding and vision that we are a part of the totality is the path to physical and mental well-being. Seeing unity in diversity through proper understanding and spiritual practices is the only way to heal humanity and Nature.

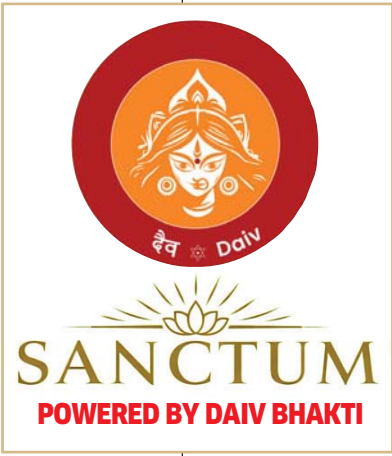
For true peace and happiness, ultimately people will have to embrace spiritual principles. Most people see life as a constant struggle just to get through the day. Such people believe in the theory of the survival of the fittest. They are satisfied with a normal way of living — for example, getting a house, a job, a car, a wife or husband, children and enough money to live.

Yes, these are important things, and we need to focus on our day-to-day lives and to take care of our responsibilities and obligations, small and big. But there is more to life, a

higher purpose, which is to know and realise who we truly are. In essence, we are love. It is through this knowledge alone that we gain everything — a feeling of complete fullness, with absolutely nothing else to wish for. That realisation makes life perfect.

Regardless of all we have accumulated or are striving to acquire, for most people life still feels incomplete — like the letter “C”. This gap will always be there. Only spiritual knowledge can fill this void and unite the two ends, which will make it like the letter “O”. The knowledge of the inner Self alone will help us feel grounded in the real centre of life.

(Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, known simply as Amma, is a spiritual master and humanitarian who has given her darshan in the form of a motherly embrace to more than 4 crore people. Listening to the cries of the suffering, Amma leads an NGO that reaches across more than 50 countries, working in the areas of healthcare, disaster relief, education, gender equality, and environmental restoration)



Don't Grow Old While You're Still Young

SADHGURU

Youth is life that is still in the making. It is still in a state where it is not too conceited and lost. Youth is a life that suggests hope, seeking and the longing to know the truth about life.

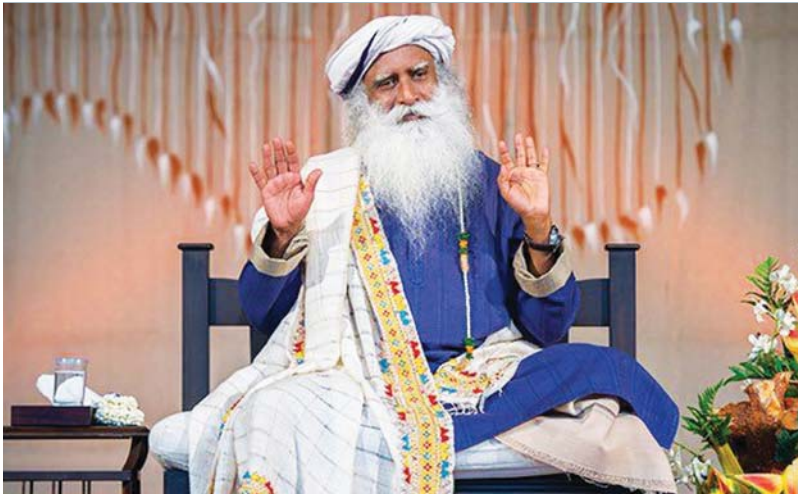
The word “truth” has been used in many ways, and most people think truth is some otherworldly stuff. So what exactly is truth? Look at it this way: what truly works is truth in any sphere of life. For example, if you want to walk, is it better to walk upon your feet or upon your head? If you walk on your head, you will not walk far — you will only end up bald.

Obviously, it is better to walk on your feet. I am giving a very simplistic example, but this is the essence of what truth means. In different dimensions of life, what is it that really works? Seeking this is seeking for truth.

Bharat has been a culture that has always been a land of seekers, never a land of believers. The question is: Do

you have assumptions and concretised ideas about everything, or are you willing to seek the truth about any aspect of life because you are interested that it happens in the best possible way?

India has the fortune that 50 per cent of the nation's population is below 25 years of age. No other nation on the planet has this fortune. But to make this into a true fortune and not a disaster, youth should become seekers of truth. They should not get adhered to some ideology, belief system or philosophy. This is what being a youth means: you are not willing to settle for that which is false. You want to find out what really works on the level of your body, your mind, your emotion, your life energy, your relationship with the rest of the world — in every sphere of life.



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If this search and seeking is given up, you will no longer be youth. You become old when you are young. You settle down and prepare for the grave. Your date of birth does not decide whether you are youth or old. Have you made conclusions about life or are you still open and seeking to know the nature of life — this is what makes you either youthful or old. It is important that every life stays youthful. Especially for the youth of this nation and the world, it is very important you are seekers of truth. Only then will you remain youthful.

It is time the populations of the world, particularly the youth, move from religion to responsibility. What you make out of your life is 100 per cent your responsibility. It is not the respon-

sibility of the stars, the planets or the powers above. It is in your hands to create this life the way you want it. This is the fundamental of being youthful - you are willing to take responsibility for everything that you are. You have not become a life that looks up at the stars about, “Why am I miserable? Why am I not successful? Why is my life not beautiful?” You are not looking up. You are willing to look inward and seek answers. That means you are in pursuit of truth.

Many years ago, Swami Vivekananda said, “Give me one hundred youth who are truly committed. I will change the face of this nation.” Are we so impotent that we cannot produce one hundred youth like this? We must be able to produce millions of youth who are truly committed to know what is the truth about our existence, what is the truth about our success and failures, what is the truth about the beautiful aspects and the ugliness of our life. If you do not seek, then you are not a youth. Do not become old when you are young.

(Ranked amongst the fifty most influential people in India, Sadhguru is a Yogi, mystic, visionary and a New York Times bestselling author. Sadhguru has been conferred the Padma Vibhushan by the Government of India in 2017, the highest annual civilian award, accorded for exceptional and distinguished service. He is also the founder of the world's largest people's movement, Conscious Planet- Save Soil, which has touched over 4 billion people)

Seva Dharma: The Glory of Selfless Service

When history fades and applause falls silent, it is selfless seva that continues to live on, in healed wounds, uplifted lives, and grateful hearts. For fifty years, inspired by the timeless ideal of seva, BAPS volunteers have transformed compassion into action across the globe. From disaster relief and humanitarian aid to education, healthcare, and moral upliftment, their silent sacrifices have touched millions of lives

DR SWAMI GYANANANDDAS

The word ‘seva’ originates from the Sanskrit tradition and signifies service performed without expectation of reward. However, in spiritual terms, even in helping others, seva is a sacred expression of devotion, a selfless offering performed not for personal gain, but out of love for God and reverence for the guru.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan elevated seva to a spiritual discipline and an important sadhna, teaching that true greatness lies in serving devotees and humanity.

Today, that same ideal continues to shine through the life of Mahant Swami Maharaj, the living spiritual successor in the Gunatit tradition of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. His life stands as a gentle yet powerful reminder that true greatness lies in serving others.

Long before he became the spiritual leader of a global fellowship, the young Mahant Swami imbibed the spirit of seva at the feet of Guru Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

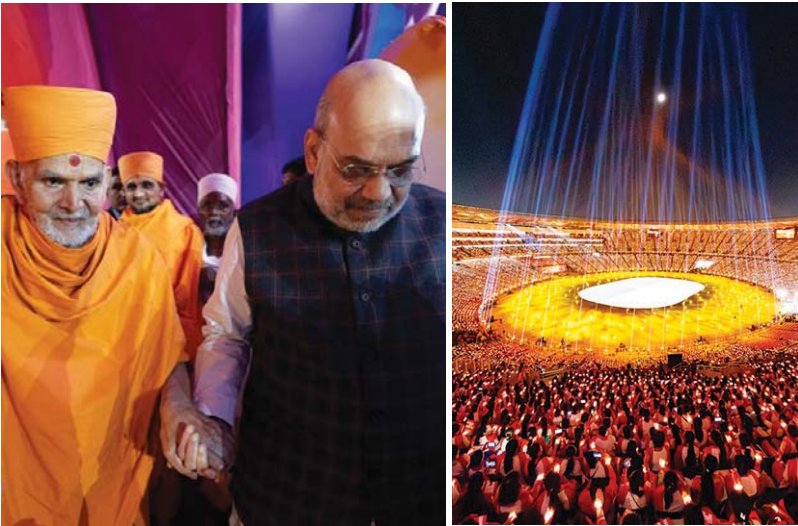
In those early years, the number of volunteers was limited, yet the demands of service were immense. During festivals and special occasions, thousands of devotees would flock to the mandirs, creating an endless stream of responsibilities that required attention.

Whether it was washing utensils late into the night, preparing facilities for arriving devotees, assisting in the kitchen, cleaning the premises, or attending to countless unseen tasks, young Mahant Swami embraced every responsibility with joy and enthusiasm. No service was too small, no duty beneath him. The greater the need, the greater was his eagerness to serve.

These seemingly simple acts of service became the foundation of a life dedicated to the service of the entire humanity. Through his own example, Mahant Swami Maharaj has inspired generations to embrace seva not as an occasional activity, but as a way of life. Under his guidance, selfless service has blossomed into a global movement, touching countless lives and demonstrating that when service is offered with humility and devotion, it becomes a pathway to both personal transformation and God-realisation.

Under his guidance, thousands have transformed their talents, time, and energy into instruments of service. Today, more than 100,000 registered BAPS volunteers form one of the world's largest voluntary service networks, united not by obligation but by a shared spirit of compassion and devotion.

For over five decades, these volunteers have worked tirelessly across the globe, serving day and night wherever humanity calls. They have rushed to the aid of victims during earthquakes,



floods, tsunamis, famines, and other natural disasters. They have provided relief and support in conflict zones, including during the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Their service extends far beyond emergency response, reaching into



healthcare, education, environmental conservation, tribal upliftment, women's empowerment, community development, and the promotion of moral and spiritual values.

Behind this vast movement of service lies a simple yet profound inspiration: the belief that serving humanity is serving God and Guru. What began as a seed of selfless service nurtured by the BAPS gurus has grown into a mighty tree whose branches touch millions of lives across the world.

That extraordinary journey of devotion, sacrifice, and selfless service reached a magnificent crescendo on the evening of December 7, 2024, when Ahmedabad's iconic Narendra Modi Stadium was transformed into a daz-

zling tribute to seva. Beneath the glow of thousands of lights and amidst an atmosphere charged with gratitude and inspiration, the grand finale of the BAPS Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav brought together more than 100,000 volunteers to celebrate fifty years of service to society and spirituality.

As inspiring presentations, vibrant performances, and heartfelt tributes unfolded across the vast stadium, the gathering became far more than a commemorative event. It was a living testament to the power of one timeless ideal, the ideal of selfless service. Every performance, every applause, and every moment echoed the silent sacrifices of countless volunteers who had dedicated themselves to serving others without seeking recognition.

To honour this remarkable legacy of selfless service and inspire the volunteers to continue their noble mission, the grand Mahotsav brought together several distinguished leaders and dignitaries. Addressing the gathering, Honourable Union Home Minister Amit Shah paid a heartfelt tribute to the spirit of BAPS volunteerism and reflected on his personal association with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In his video message, Honourable PM Shri Narendra Modi also praised the selfless spirit of the volunteers and offered his heartfelt wishes and respects for the occasion. He said, “It is a great achievement for any organisation to register and organise more than 100,000 volunteers to serve dedicatedly and faithfully for society. I congratulate and convey my well wishes to you all. My connection with Pramukh Swami Maharaj is an integral part of my life.”

Of course, every act of selfless seva leaves a footprint not on stone, but on human hearts.

(Dr Swami Gyanananddas is a dedicated follower of the Swaminarayan tradition and has earned a PhD from MS University)

The Journey out of Guilt

A gang member asked me if his karma would be forgiven...

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

A young man once stood before me to ask a question that had been troubling him for years. He was a gang member and drug dealer, and had hurt many people along the way. He wanted to know if those actions would follow him for the rest of his life. Would he have to pay for his wrongdoings? Would his karmas be forgiven? Such were his questions.

I told him, Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, whatever wrong a person might have done in the past, the moment they come onto the spiritual path, they are already moving in the right direction. Then only good things will happen to them.

The young man said, “Already, better things have started happening to me.” For this shift to stay, this knowledge has to be there in the mind. You have to come back to it again and again, until it settles in completely. When this knowledge resonates more and more in your mind, there is no way anything can go wrong.

He had made a real commitment, and that commitment mattered more than the years that came before it. It does not erase what happened, but it does change what happens now and in the future.

In the Srimad Bhagwatam, there is a similar story about a king named Ajamila, a man whose life was marked by many vices. But when he was on his deathbed, he called out for his son, whose name happened to be Narayana, one of the names of God. In that instant of calling out God's name, even though his intention was entirely personal, he found liberation. This story helps to build trust in people that, however their past has been, there is no need to waste time worrying, being tense and guilty about it. Even at the last moment, chanting God's name can help you attain liberation.

This does not mean that you do whatever you want in life and at the last moment chant God's name. It doesn't give you a license to indulge in vices under the assumption that everything is forgiven regardless. It only indicates that you don't have to be guilty of your past and continue repenting it. The past is gone, and what matters now is devotion and connection to the Divine in the present.

Carrying guilt for years is like the fire that burns you from inside. Guilt does have some purpose. It stops a person from continuing a cycle of actions that harm themselves or



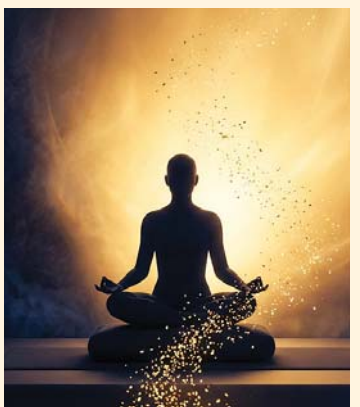
“A GURU CAN DEFINITELY RELIEVE A PERSON OF THEIR SINS, THOUGH THE PERSON MUST ALSO MAKE SOME EFFORT OF THEIR OWN” – GURUDEV

others, acting like a brake at the right moment. But once that purpose has been served, holding on to it further does nothing but weigh a person down. That person who made the mistake has packed their suitcase and left. What remains is a new person. Start believing in the innocence of the present moment.

This is where the role of a Guru becomes significant. A Guru can definitely relieve a person of their sins, though the person must also make some effort of their own. When you sin and you realise that you made a mistake, you cannot relieve yourself of sin, but the Guru can definitely do it for you. At the same time, you have to do Purusharth (self-effort). You need to do some good work. And the sense of love and devotion is equally proportionate to the amount of karma that gets released.

There is a simple way to understand how this works. If a room has been in darkness for twenty years, it does not take another twenty for a lamp to dispel the darkness in the room. In the same way, if negative karma is there, there is little darkness; there is no light there. Put the light on; darkness vanishes.

How to get rid of negative karma? With meditation, knowledge, and service. Meditation settles down the feverishness in the mind and makes you more aware. Through awareness, wisdom dawns in you and purifies you, burning all your karmas. Wisdom is the prevention, and meditation is the cure. The deeper you go in meditation, the urge to share increases. If you do some work for others, you gain merit for yourself. If someone is happy, just know that they have done some seva in the past.



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Conversely, if you are not happy now, do seva and gain more merit. It's like improving the bank balance. The more you give, the more strength will be given to you. The more we open ourselves, the more room we will have for God to fill us.

Know that the negative karma does not touch the true Self in you. The way a shadow does not touch a person standing in the sun.