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Govt to take measures to rebuild breached embankments: Himanta



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Technology, transparency key for urban cooperative banks to stay competitive: Shah



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Drone explodes near gas pipeline close to Romanian border: Radev



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SPORTS

Padikkal seals spot with stylish hundred as Jaiswal, Pant fail



AGENDA



Keep curiosity alive, PM tells students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Reaching out to the young generation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday urged students to keep national interest at the centre of their decisions and ask themselves how their actions can benefit the country and address their needs.

This exhortation came in the aftermath of the Jantar Mantar protests and Modi's renewed efforts to connect with Gen Z and gain their confidence. The appeal on Saturday was made to the graduating students of the premier Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi. He laid special emphasis on the achievements and breakthroughs made by the young professionals, indicating that the Government is determined to go all the way to retain its appeal amongst the new generation.

The Prime Minister told them to question things that are accepted without a thought, and stressed that they should not stop at questioning but have the courage to also find their solutions. He asked students to keep



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing the 57th Convocation Ceremony of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in New Delhi on Saturday

curiosity alive in life and keep their learning instinct awakened. Modi made these remarks while addressing the 57th Convocation of IIT Delhi. Over 3,000 students and 587 PhD scholars were present.

PM also said challenges will become opportunities for those who dare to find new solutions to challenges. He

stressed that the more empowered the youth of the country are, the more empowered the entire country will be. He said India is now working towards becoming self-reliant in every sector; whether it is economic self-reliance, technological self-reliance, or industrial self-reliance; this forms the strong foundation of 'Viksit Bharat'.

Reflecting on the whirlwind journey of the students, the Prime Minister vividly recalled their transition from orientation day to convocation, acknowledging the diverse aspirations, from landing first salaries and building startups to pursuing further competitive exams that fill their minds.

Encouraging the students

to deeply cherish their current moments, Modi humorously referenced beloved campus memories, including inter-hostel rivalries across Kumaon, Ara, Kara, Vindhy, Nilgiri, Kailash, and Himadri, alongside local culinary favourites like Jia Sarai's Poha and Satpura mess Parathas. "In the coming times when you will have massive responsibilities, the memories of this place will definitely energise you," remarked PM.

Highlighting the profound emotional resonance of the ceremony, he reflected on the vibrant, dream-filled atmosphere of the campus.

Congratulating the students and their families on their academic achievements, the Prime Minister emphasised that their degrees represent much more than academic success, serving as a mandate to contribute to the nation.

He extended special praise to the medal recipients and celebrated the launch of new AI initiatives at the institute. "You are stepping out from here with a dream of doing a lot for the country," he said.

Govt vs Meta: Can it still be called an 'Intermediary'?

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

The Indian Government and Meta are currently engaged in discussions over the company's status as an intermediary under Indian law. What began as calm talks has turned into a major legal question that could reshape the digital world: Can a platform that influences content and promotes paid posts still be called an "intermediary"?

Government sources say recent meetings have focused on Meta's recommendation systems and paid content promotions. The main question is whether these features mean Meta is no longer a neutral messenger but is acting as a publisher. Section 79 of the Information Technology Act gives intermediaries a "safe harbour," protecting them from being held responsible for third-party content. This protection is based on the idea that they only carry user content without controlling or choosing what appears.



Now, sources say the Government is asking a tougher question. If Meta's algorithms decide what content users see and give paid posts special placement, is the platform still neutral, or is it shaping what people see? If a company chooses what information users see, it is not just a passive channel. It is acting as a publisher. Unlike intermediaries, publishers are responsible for the content they share with the public. This is not just an old legal idea.

Safe harbour has protected platforms from lawsuits over user content, which has helped them grow. Without

this protection, they could face serious legal risks. Intermediaries that do not follow Section 79 and the IT Rules 2021 could lose this exemption. If that happens, they could be fully subject to the IT Act or the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), making even one viral post a serious issue.

At the same time, another concern is being discussed: deepfakes. In recent meetings, officials have asked Meta to do more to stop fake digital images and voices that can impersonate people, create false scandals, or quickly spread misinformation.

PIONEER IN SHORT

IMPROVED CONNECTIVITY BOOSTS LADAKH TOURISM

Better air and road connectivity has boosted tourist arrivals in the cold desert region of Ladakh this season. The Union Territory has already recorded 3,30,332 tourist arrivals between January and July this year, accounting for 98.35 per cent of the total footfall for the entire year of 2025. Ladakh became the most sought-after destination this season, with a rapid surge in June and July. More than 2.12 lakh tourists visited Ladakh, accounting for nearly 65 per cent of the total 3.30 lakh tourist arrivals recorded so far this year. According to official sources, Ladakh received 1,05,046 tourists in July 2026, compared to 67,273 in July 2025, registering a growth of 56.15 per cent. The July arrivals comprised 95,416 domestic and 9,630 foreign tourists.

FULL REPORT ON P6

3,323 Indians deported from Canada in six months

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Ottawa

Canada deported 3,323 Indian nationals in the first six months of 2026, putting the figure on track to surpass the last six years' record, according to official data.



According to data from the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), the number of Indians removed from the North American country in the first half of this year is already nearly 88 per cent of the 3,779 removed during the whole of 2025, which was itself a record high.

The data comes at a time when Canada has been tightening its immigration system and reducing the number of temporary residents, including international students and temporary foreign workers.



Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi interacts with students on stage during the 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' program in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

Indian youth potential unparalleled: Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Prayagraj (UP)

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said India's youths are the country's greatest strength, and their potential is unparalleled in the world. Addressing the 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' programme at KP Ground, Rahul Gandhi said, "You are the power and pride of India. When I say this, I am talking about every Indian citizen."

He added, "This evening I want to speak to you about *dard* (pain), *data*, and *daulat* (wealth)." The Congress leader said India's 40 crore youths constitute its "greatest strength." He

said that while there is much talk about America, China and Russia, "India's youths are unparalleled."

He also raised his concerns about the debasement of educational credentials in the country. "Today, education certificates have no meaning in India because they cannot give you a job," he said.

Rahul said all doors of employment are "closed" in the country. He said that a decline in manufacturing, difficulties in securing loans, exam paper leaks and artificial intelligence replacing jobs were hurting the youths' prospects.

SAD backs Delimitation Bill, signals BJP alliance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A day after meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal announced the party's support for the Women's Reservation Bill and the Delimitation Bill. The SAD, at a meeting of its senior leaders in Chandigarh on Saturday, demanded the immediate implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill, SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal said in a post on X.

The support for the Delimitation Bill is a clear indication that an SAD-BJP alliance for the



upcoming Punjab elections is in the works.

"The Shiromani Akali Dal draws inspiration from the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, who championed the dignity, equality and equal rights of

women. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (@SGPCAmritsar) has already set an example by providing for women's reservation in its House," he said.

MHA bans new renewable projects near borders

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH ■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has issued comprehensive national security guidelines that prohibit any new solar, wind and hybrid renewable energy projects within one kilometre of the Line of Control (LoC), Line of Actual Control (LAC), and the International Border.

The internal security division has set strict rules for hiring workers from countries that share a land border with India and added extra clearance steps for projects in larger sensitive zones. Any area within 50 km of the LoC, LAC, or International Border is now called a "sensitive area."

All new solar, wind, and hybrid pro-



jects in these zones must get security clearance from the MHA before starting.

No project work is allowed within the first kilometre of these borders. Proposals for projects between 1 km and 50 km will be reviewed by both the MHA and the Ministry of Defence

on a case-by-case basis. Projects within 20 km of the International Border also need a separate No-Objection Certificate from the Defence Ministry.

The guidelines say applicants "should not engage engineers, staff, employees and labour from land border countries, especially Pakistan, Bangladesh and China," for project work unless they have permission from the Central Government.

This is not allowed without Central approval, including a new security clearance from the MHA. Officials said these "uniform transparent guidelines" were finalised after a memo on June 5 and discussions with stakeholders.

PANT SLAMS RED TAPE OVER UTTARAKHAND LAND PURCHASE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Star wicket-keeper and explosive batter Rishabh Pant wants to return to his roots in Uttarakhand. He is trying to purchase land in the State but has been deterred by red tape for the last three years. At last, the gritty cricketer who recov-



ered from a near-fatal road mishap a few years back took to social media to vent his frustration.

Currently touring Sri Lanka with the national team, Pant has sought Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami's help in purchasing land to build his first home in the State, saying procedural difficulties and a lack of clarity have stalled his efforts for nearly three years. Responding to Pant, Dhami described him as "the pride of Uttarakhand" and assured him of all possible assistance in accordance with the law.

Pasta, pizza, momos: Kanwar camps serve a fusion of modern flavours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Meerut (UP)/New Delhi

Undertaking the arduous Kanwar yatra calls for perseverance besides devotion. Regardless of the demanding schedule, Kanwariyas take part in this journey every year, and they are provided nourishing and tasty vegetarian fare along the route.

During the ongoing yatra, from pasta and pizza to momos and shahi paneer, and from traditional *puri-roti-sabzi* to contemporary snacks, all prepared without onion and garlic, are being served at several Kanwar camps between Meerut and Delhi — a striking blend of the traditional and the contemporary.

As per the menu, early morning snacks include tea, biscuits, *poha*, and *jalebi*. The breakfast spread includes *samosas*, *kachoris*, bread *pakor*as, vegetable hakka noodles, and honey chilli potatoes. Lunch features dishes like *shahi paneer*, *kadhai paneer*, *paneer lababdar*, *dal makhani*, and mixed vegetables, served with *chur-chur naan*, butter *naan*, jeera rice, and *rotis*. Sweet dishes such as *rabri-jalebi*, rasmalai, rasgulla and *gulab jamun* complement the main course. For evening snacks, pilgrims are served spring rolls, chilli paneer, manchurian, white and red sauce pasta, vegetable pizza, momos, macaroni, soup, and burgers.



Kanwariyas' carry Ganga water during the holy month of Shravan in Indirapuram

The dinner spread has *chhole-puri*, *matar paneer*, *pulao*, *dal and rotis*, along with *kheer*, *halwa*, fruit custard, and *gulab jamun*. The camps also ensure a continuous supply of lassi, buttermilk, juice, tea, coffee, and cold drinking water. At the Kankarkheda Vyapar Sangh camp in Meerut, a machine capable of kneading 20 kg of dough at once and an automatic roti-making machine have been installed, said coordinator Neeraj Mittal and operations manager Rajesh Khanna.

The machine produces approximately 16 *rotis* per minute and around 900 per hour, with a daily output of 6,000 to 7,000 *rotis*. Machines are also being used to chop

vegetables and prepare spices in bulk to help prepare meals for thousands of devotees in a short span of time.

Sudhir Rastogi, a member of the organising team at the Modipuram camp, said that special fasting-friendly meals (*falahar*) have been arranged for Kanwariyas who are fasting.

Dishes made from buckwheat (*kuttu*) and water chestnut (*singhara*) flour, potato curry, seasonal fruits, and other fasting-appropriate foods are being provided.

After their long journey, devotees are also served hot *kesar doodh* (saffron-infused milk) in traditional *kulhads* (clay cups) to help them replenish their energy.

Classifieds

BEDKHALI NOTICE

We, Jagir Singh S/o Sh. Bachna Ram and Sushma Devi W/o Jagir Singh R/o Vill Talheri Gujran, Post Office Thakurpura, Tehsil Barara, Distt Ambala hereby declare that our son, Deepak, and his wife, Swati Rawal, are completely beyond our control. Therefore, we are disinheriting and disown both of them from all our movable and immovable properties and severing all ties with them. Anyone engaging in any kind of transaction with them in the future shall be solely responsible; we shall bear no liability whatsoever.

I Mahabir Singh S/O Sadhu Ram Permanent Address R/O House No. 659, Adrash Nagar, Hisar (Haryana) Now Present R/O House No. 300, FF, Sector -56, Phase-VI, Mohali Punjab inform that my daughter Simran is out of my control. I disown her from my all moveable and immoveable Properties. Anybody deal with her will do at their own Risk.

I, Hari Singh S/O Kundan Singh # 2941/1 Sector 47-C, Chandigarh, declare that Kamal Singh Rawat is my son. That Kamal Singh Rawat and his wife Renu are out of my control. I disown them from my moveable/ immoveable properties. Anybody deals with them shall do at their own risk. I and my other family members will not responsible for their acts in future.

I, Parkash Kaur W/o Darshan Singh R/o Bilga Teh & Distt. Ludhiana declare that my son Butta Singh and his wife Rani and his two sons Lakhvir Singh & Harmandeep Singh and daughter Simranjit Kaur is out of my control. So I disown with them from my moveable/immovable property. If anybody dealing with them at his/her own risk.

I Bhola Singh S/O Ajab Singh R/O Ward No.-22 H.No.-935 Lal Singh Road Ram Nagar Moga Distt. Moga Declare that My Son Ranjeet Singh Alias Geeta And His Wife Love Kaur Alias Labhe Are Out Of My Control. So, I Disinherit Them From My All Movable And Immoveable Property. Anybody Deals With Them At Their Own Risk And Responsibility. Now I And My Family Have No Concern With Them. Concerned Please Note.

I Gurmeet Kaur W/o Baldev Krishan R/o Vill Bhedwal Teh Rajpura Distt Patiala declare that my son Gaurav Krishan Verma and his wife Sapna Rani is out of my control So I evict them all my moveable immovable property anyone dealing with them at their own risk.

PUBLIC NOTICE

I, Shyam Lal is Legally Father of Army No. 3015363K Rank: L/NK Name: Vikash Unit 24 Rajput C/o 56 APO R/O Village Danoda Kalan Tehsil Narwana District Jind-126152 (Haryana) have declare that my son Service record Wrongly mentioned Sham Lal but my actual & Correct Name Shyam Lal vide affidavit dated 31.07.2026 attested by Notary Public Narwana.

I, Baljeet Kaur W/o Kamal Singh r/o Chunia Farm, Sandholi Tehsil Pehowa, District Kurukshetra, my husband Kamal Singh is beyond my control and does not listen to me and does not obey me, hence I and my family are breaking all ties with him. He will be responsible for any immoral acts or transactions done by him in future.

I, Mithlesh Singh S/o Ram Lakshman Singh R/o H. No. 1257 Sector -52, Chandigarh declare that I debar my son Harjeet Singh, his wife Reema Devi from my movable/ immovable property by the pioneer (Chandigarh edition) dated 27 April 2024. Now my son & his wife Reema Devi are in my control. I cancelled this debar notice.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Keshav s/o Sh. Chiranjil Lal, resident of House No. 2311, Mauli Jagran Complex, Mauli Jagran, Chandigarh 160102, have changed my name from Keshav to Keshav Parwana.

I, VIJENDER KAUR, W/o RANDEV SINGH HUNDAL, R/O Kothi No. 2903, Phase-7, Sector-61, S.A.S. Nagar, Mohali, Punjab-160062, have changed my name from VIJENDER KAUR to VIJENDER PAL. Henceforth, I shall be known and recognized as VIJENDER PAL for all purposes. VIJENDER KAUR and VIJENDER PAL are one and the same person.

I, Kanika Attri, D/o Virender Kumar Sharma, R/o Plot No. 3, Gali No. 2, Chandulal Garden, Mahaveer Colony, Hisar, Haryana - 125001, hereby declare that in my educational documents, my mother's name has been recorded as Pinky Attri, whereas her actual and correct name is Neeraj. Her name is recorded as Neeraj in all her other official documents. I hereby declare that Pinky Attri and Neeraj refer to one and the same person, i.e., my mother. I wish to get my mother's name corrected in all my educational documents from Pinky Attri to Neeraj for all purposes.

I Sushila Devi W/o Rameshwar Rathi r/o Vill. Sahanpur Teh. Safidon Distt. Jind declare that in my passport my husband name is Rameshwar Rathee which is wrong the correct name is Rameshwar Rathi. I have to change for all future Purposes.

I Rameshwar Rathee s/o Prem Singh r/o Vill. Sahanpur Teh. Safidon Distt. Jind declare that I have changed my name from Rameshwar Rathee to Rameshwar Rathi for all future purposes.

I, Anuradha D/o Shyoram R/o Village Kishanpura Sub-Tehsil Partapnagar, Tehsil Chhachhrauli, Distt. Yamunanagar, states that the name of my father recorded in the ownership records is Bhimsain S/o Ram Kishan, which is incorrect. My father's correct name is Shyoram.

I, Ajay Walia S/o Shyoram R/o Village Kishanpura Sub-Tehsil Partapnagar, Tehsil Chhachhrauli, Distt. Yamunanagar, state that the name of my father recorded in the ownership records is Bhimsain S/o Ram Kishan, which is incorrect. My father's correct name is Shyoram.

I, Shagun W/o Ved Prakash R/o Guru Teg Bahadur Nagar, Garhshankar Road, Kallra Mohalla, Nawanshahr, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar, Punjab-144514 have changed my name to Shivani.

I Salinder Kumar S/o Ram Kishan Village Salola Tehsil Naraingarh Distt Ambala have changed my name from Salinder to Surender Kumar. In future I will be known as Surender Kumar.

I, Raman Kumar S/o Sh. Satpal Singh R/O H.No. 1157, Sector-4, Urban Estate Thanesar, Kurukshetra, Haryana-136118 has changed my minor son's name from Satpal Raman Ojas to S R Ojas.

I, Sonia Singla W/o Sh. Mukesh Goyal R/O House No. 661, Mahavir Market, Near Bansal Hospital, Uklana District. Hisar have changed my name from Sonia Singla to Sonia Goyal.

I, Jobanpreet Singh S/o Bajjit Singh Singh VPO Basrai (Gurdaspur) have changed my name Jobanpreet Singh to Singh Jobanpreet. Concerned note.

I, Bindu Kumari W/o No. 4476927F Ex NK Balwinder Singh R/O Village Rajekke, PO- Bolanke, Tehsil Dera Baba Nanak, Distt. Gurdaspur, Punjab, I declare change my name from Amanpreet Kaur to Bindu Kumari and Date of Birth from 07/08/1981 to 16/08/1976 in my husband army records.

I Rakesh Masih S/o Mukhtar Masih r/o village Lehal PO Fateh Nagal district Gurdaspur (Punjab) declare that in aadhar card of my son Garwin Lahoria, my name wrongly written as Rakesh Lehal. As per his birth certificate My correct name is Rakesh Masih. Concerned note.

I, Bonny Masih S/o Raju Masih r/o Village Balwanda, P.O. Chak Sharif DISTT Gurdaspur PIN 143528 have changed my name as Masih Bonny. In future Masih is my surname and Bonny is my given name. Concerned note.

I, NEEF S/O KAIADEEN, r/o VTC Jagowal Bangar PO. Bhattian DIST Gurdaspur Declare that in my matriculation certificate my name written as Neef. As per my aadhar card my name wrongly written as Haneef. I may please be known as Neef which is my correct name

I Army No JC781889A Rank NB SUB Name Vinay Kumar R/O 917 LT AD REGT (COMP) WKSP C/O 56 APO, presently posted with 917 LT AD REGT (COMP) WKSP C/O 56 APO Declare that my father name wrongly published in my service documents as Nanu Prajapati instead of Nunu Prajapati. Also his date of birth was wrongly published in myservice documents as 13-12-1944 instead of 01-01-1940. My father correct name is Nunu Prajapati and correct DOB is 01-01-1940.

I, Manmohan Kaur W/o Hardeep Singh Bedi, House No. 1337, Near British School, Sector 44-B, Chandigarh have changed my name from Manmohan Kaur to Manmohan Kaur Bedi.

I, Indu Kadayan W/o Sandeep Kumar R/o Near Govt. School, Village Ramana Ramani, P.O. Bakal, Tehsil Pundri, Distt. Kathail (Haryana) declares that I have changed my name from Indu Kadayan to Indu Kadyan. In future, I will be known by the name of Indu Kadyan. All concerned please note.

I, Shyam Lal is Legally Father of Army No. 3015363K Rank: L/NK Name: Vikash Unit 24 Rajput C/o 56 APO R/O Village Danoda Kalan Tehsil Narwana District Jind-126152 (Haryana) have declare that my son Service record Wrongly mentioned Sham Lal but my actual & Correct Name Shyam Lal vide affidavit dated 31.07.2026 attested by Notary Public Narwana.

I, Army No. JC 779660H Rank: Sub. Name: Kaarthikeyan S Unit: 2 Corps Zone Wksp C/o 56 APO, Resident of 18/32, Pulavar Khan Mohamed Lane, Thangamuthamman Kovil Street, Bodinayakanur, Tamil Nadu, Pin Code- 625513 have changed my Daughter's Name from Rakshikasri to K Rakshika Sri, due to wrongly entered in my service record. Vide Affidavit No. IN - PB36023493178686Y at District Court, Patiala.

I, Jai Bhagwan S/o Ramesh Chand R/o Near Gurudwara, Pharoli, Ambala have changed my Minor Son name Rajnish to Rajnish Kashyap.

I Manjeet Singh Warraich S/o Sinder Singh VPO Thaska Miranji, Distt. Kurukshetra have Changed my Name from Manjeet Singh Warraich to Manjeet Singh.

I Manjeet Kaur Warraich W/o Manjeet Singh VPO Thaska Miranji, Distt. Kurukshetra have Changed my Name from Manjeet kaur Warraich to Manjeet Kaur.

I, hitherto known as Harsh son of Somnath residing at VPO Arnaicha, Pehowa, District Kurukshetra Haryana-136128 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Harsh Gorsi

It is for general information that I, Sarmeet wife of Naresh Kumar residing at Balbehra, Cheeka, District Kathail Haryana-136034 declare that name of mine has been wrongly written as Sarmeet Kaur in my minor son Pardhum aged about 16 years in his 10th Class Certificate. The actual name of mine is Sarmeet, which may be amended accordingly.

I, Pawan Kumar son of Sanwar Mal residing at Ward No. 2, Village Dhani Swamiyan Dhani Swamiyan Bhangwa, PO Bhagwan, District Hanumangarh, Rajasthan-335501 have changed the name of my minor daughter Sarsti aged 16 years and she shall hereafter known as Srishti.

I, hitherto known as Sehajpal Singh son of Nishan Singh residing at Indra Colony, Miran Kot Kalan, District Amritsar Punjab-143101 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Satpal Singh.

I, hitherto Known as Karan Kumar Son of Mahinder Singh residing at Vishkarama Colony, Ward no. 12, Patti, District Tarn Taran, Punjab-143416 Punjab have changed my name and Shall hereafter be known as Karanbir Singh

I, hitherto Known as Manpreet Kaur wife of Kuldit Singh residing at Village Neshta, Attari, District Amritsar, Punjab-143108 have changed my name and Shall hereafter be known as Balwinder Kaur

I, Sandip Singh son of Satnam Singh residing at House No. 98, Indra Colony, Verka, District Amritsar, Punjab-143501 have changed the name of my minor son Abhi Singh aged 11 years and he shall hereafter be known as Ansh

I, hitherto known as Chamkaur Singh Son of Jaswant Singh residing at vpo. Bhinder, Tehsil Baba Bakala, Amritsar-143112 Punjab have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Chamkaur Singh.

I, hitherto Known as Harshdeep son of Narinder Kumar residing at VPO: Kalewal Beet, Tehsil Garhshankar, District Hoshiarpur, Punjab-144523 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Harshdeep Rana.

I, Kavita wife of Moti Lal residing at Village Dadwan Post Office Dhariwal, District Gurdaspur, Punjab India Pin-143519 have changed the name of my minor son Krish aged 14 years and he shall hereafter be known as Krishdeep Singh.

I Shivika D/o Late Sameer Mahajan Resident of Smeer Crokery Emporium, Bijli wala Chowk, Hall Bazar, Amritsar-I, Amritsar. I have changed my name from Shivika to Shagun Mahajan. All concerned please note.

I, Jobanjeet Singh S/o Gulzar Singh R/o Village Dadupura, PO Majitha District Amritsar have declare that Jobanjeet is my Given name and Singh is my Surname

I, Kaushal Chauhan S/o Prem Kumar R/o H.No.51, Sehaj Enclave, Majitha Road, Near Gopal Mandir, Amritsar have changed my name from Kaushal Chauhan to Kaushal Kumar

I, Ritu Kumari W/o Kaushal Chauhan R/o H.No.51, Sehaj Enclave, Majitha Road, Near Gopal Mandir, Amritsar have changed my name from Ritu Kumari to Ritu Chauhan

I, Sabjit Kaur W/o Kulwant Singh R/o Majitha Road, Pandori Waraich, Amritsar have changed my name from Sabjit Kaur to Sarabjeet Kaur.

The Buffet Box / Renée Ranchan



There was something almost comical about education during the pandemic—until one remembered that it was no laughing matter. Above the laptop screen sat a neatly knotted school tie, an impeccably ironed shirt and a face attempting earnest concentration. Below the camera, however, lurked pyjama- bottoms, Crocs, slippers, tracksuit-lowers and every imaginable sign of scruffiness, Sundayish domesticity. Classrooms had shrunk into bedrooms; examinations arrived through glowing screens; degrees seemed to float towards students with an ease that would once have been unimaginable...

The absurdity was not confined to appearances. Families that could scarcely afford a square meal somehow found the means to procure a smartphone. Parents borrowed, pawned, tightened already threadbare budgets or agreed to monthly instalments simply because education had migrated into a device no larger than a hand. My household-help approached me in despair. Her daughter was pursuing a B.Com in Hindi medium. Overnight, the course material popped up in English. The girl could scarcely string together a sentence in the language... The following morning, however, the maid breezed in with complete nonchalance. "Oh, she'll manage," she chimed, as though the matter had resolved itself overnight! That tiny episode said rather more about those bewildering months than any official circular ever could...

Yet very few voices demanded that the entire academic calendar be suspended. Perhaps everyone understood that bringing schools, colleges and universities to a complete standstill for a year would have snowballed into an administrative nightmare. How would the backlog be absorbed?! How would the previous year's students be accommodated alongside the succeeding ones?! The country simply soldiered on... Whether one had genuinely mastered the syllabus or merely drifted through it, almost everyone progressed, because there seemed to be no practical alternative...

... The internet, meanwhile, had already done what no loudspeaker ever could... A clip recorded in one city lit up thousands of mobiles elsewhere. Instagram reels, WhatsApp forwards, edited videos, hashtags and endless commentary travelled faster than rumour ever managed in previous generations. Outrage multiplied at the speed of a thumb. The amplification was unprecedented. Robert Browning's Pied Piper, no longer carries a flute. Today, he carries a smartphone! Without social media, one wonders whether the movement would have gathered such extraordinary momentum?! A video recorded in one corner of the country, was viewed in another place, and then in yet another...

Voice Within / Vijay Singal

The Concept of Sharanagati in Bhagavad Gita



Sharnagati, which literally means seeking refuge in or going for shelter to, generally refers to the complete and unconditional surrender to God. Sharnagati is the state when one places his life in the benevolent hands of the Divine. More than an activity, sharanagati is a sentiment. It implies having full faith and trust in the infinite grace of God. It involves yielding one's will to the divine will. Instead of clinging to one's limited intellect, one submits to the decision of the highest wisdom. One has firm belief that God being the supreme maintainer, would take care of his interest also. Whenever required, the Supreme would guide and protect him. Sharnagati is not another name for escapism. It is not a fig-leaf for non-performance. Surrendering to God is not an excuse to avoid doing one's

The Pied Piper's New Flute

Then came May 2026. The NEET paper-leak controversy struck a very different nerve. Here were students who had spent years burning the midnight oil, sacrificing holidays, friendships and sleep, only to discover that the finish-line itself appeared compromised. Their rage was neither surprising nor unreasonable. Years of sacrifice had collided with a system that had in-your-face failed them. The anguish was real. Reports of students taking their own lives and of horrific injuries sustained during the clashes served as a grim reminder that behind every placard stood a young life and a future stretched to breaking point...

Thousands gathered at Jantar Mantar, where the demonstrations continued for 36 days before culminating in the march towards Parliament. Eventually, the political fallout claimed the Education Minister's resignation. Institutions were shaken, and questions that had long simmered beneath the surface burst into public view...

A democracy not only permits protest; it depends upon it. Equally, protest is not a licence to abandon every restraint. There is a vast gulf between dissent and degradation. Criticise a Prime Minister. Challenge the government. Question policies. Demand accountability. Every citizen possesses that right. It is one of democracy's greatest strengths...

That is the very essence of free expression but dissent cannot become a licence for abuse; dragging the Prime Minister's mother into the fray is simply hitting below the belt. It neither strengthens the protest nor elevates the debate. When slogans descend into the language of the gutter, everything goes downhill. Argument gives way to abuse; conviction dissolves into spectacle...

The internet, meanwhile, had already done what no loudspeaker ever could... A clip recorded in one city lit up thousands of mobiles elsewhere. Instagram reels, WhatsApp forwards, edited videos, hashtags and endless commentary travelled faster than rumour ever managed in previous generations. Outrage multiplied at the speed of a thumb. The amplification was unprecedented. Robert Browning's Pied Piper, no longer carries a flute.

Today, he carries a smartphone! Without social media, one wonders whether the movement would have gathered such extraordinary momentum?! A video recorded in one corner of the country, was viewed in another place, and then in yet another...

nook within nano-seconds. Anger travelled at the ping of a notification; it was the smartphone that became the Pied Piper's new flute, summoning an entire generation into the same digital procession.

One notification calls; another follows; soon an entire generation marches to a rhythm dictated not by melody but by algorithms. The Piper no longer leads children through streets. He escorts millions through endless scrolling, perpetual reaction and an appetite for instant outrage. Every image demands another image. Every slogan invites another slogan. Every clip seeks a more dramatic sequel. The unease on my part, is not with the young protesters, but with the fashionable insistence on wearing "Gen Z" almost as a badge of distinction, as though one generation constituted a race apart. Every generation has had its rebels, its idealists and its dreamers. Labels may be convenient; they should never become identities, don't you think?!

What precisely is Gen Z?! A separate tribe?! Every generation has imagined itself uniquely misunderstood, right?! We once spoke of generation gaps without elevating them into social identities. Labels can become convenient little boxes into which we pack remarkably similar human beings. Here, I acknowledge that the expression Gen Z has become rather cacophonous to my ears. It is uttered with such proprietorial pride that one might imagine a new civilisation had arrived, complete with its own passport, flag and customs regulations. Their vocabulary, too, often resembles a private code—"POV", "TL;DR", "FR", "NGL", "IMO", "BRB"—as though the rest of humanity were patiently waiting to intercept their conversations! One is tempted to ask, with tongue firmly in cheek, who exactly is eavesdropping?! Language is meant to build bridges, not draw little linguistic moats around ourselves. Every generation coins its own expressions, of course! But when a shorthand begins to substitute thought itself, one cannot help wondering whether the Pied Piper's flute has been replaced not merely by a smartphone but by a stream of abbreviations marching us all, lock, stock and barrel, towards where...

Young people today combine effortless digital fluency with remarkable confidence. Yet one sometimes senses another current running beneath the surface—a restlessness that seldom permits silence, a dependence upon constant stimulation,

an impatience that mistakes immediacy for importance. However, definitely so, the police, too, must examine their own reflection.

Law and Order cannot be maintained courtesy muscle-flexing Officers who frequently confront volatile situations requiring difficult judgments. Yet, authority, carries its own temptation... We have all encountered the personal assistant outside a high-brow office who behaves as though he himself occupies the highest chair in the building. Borrowed power has an unfortunate habit of becoming intoxicating. Whenever force appears excessive, whenever acts of unnecessary violence emerge, the State weakens its own moral argument. Restraint is not weakness; it is strength exhibiting discipline.

Whenever discussions on free expression arise, my thoughts drift to Speaker's Corner in London's Hyde Park. Every Sunday, men and women arrive, carrying portable stools or folding ladders. They climb their improvised platforms and proceed to criticise governments, monarchs, taxation, foreign policy, religion or almost anything else under the sun. Four listeners may gather; forty may pause. Arguments flourish; disagreements abound. Yet, more often than not, the crowd disperses having exchanged ideas rather than injuries. Passion survives. Civility survives with it... Surely that remains the higher aspiration.

The NEET protests exposed genuine failures. Students deserved answers. Institutions owed them transparency. Governments were obliged to restore confidence. The police were expected to enforce order without appearing eager to demonstrate power. Protesters were entitled to raise their voices without allowing those voices to descend into vulgarity. Social media illuminated legitimate grievances even as it rewarded exaggeration and emotional excess.

Perhaps that is the question lingering long after the slogans have faded.

Have our mobiles become indispensable tools—or have they quietly become the Pied Piper's new flute?! Have we mistaken virality for victory?! Have we confused volume with persuasion?! Above all, can a democracy rediscover the difficult art of disagreement without surrendering either dignity or compassion?!

Those answers matter far more than the next hashtag...

(Dr Renée Ranchan writes on socio-psychological issues, quasi-political matters and concerns that touch us all...)

preme Lord), shall be freed from all evil.

Sri Krishna has declared (in shloka 7.14) that by surrendering to God, one can cross beyond the world of maya, which consists of three modes of nature, and which is very difficult to overcome. In other words, one can understand the true nature of creation; and, thus, transcend the miseries of life.

How can one seek refuge in the Supreme? Sri Krishna has stated in shloka 9.34 that one should always focus his mind on Him, offer obeisance to Him, be devoted to Him; and worship Him. Thus united with Him, and having Him as one's goal, one shall certainly achieve Him. In other words, a true devotee always feels the divine presence by his side. He is not lonely, even while alone.

It has further been stated (in shloka 7.19) that knowledge leads to surrender to the Supreme. It has been stated that after cultivating spiritual knowledge during many lives, one realises that the Supreme Being is the all that is. Such a truly knowledgeable person surrenders to Him completely.

Sri Krishna has stressed, time and again, that while surrendering to God, one must continue performing his duties sincerely. He has stated (in shloka 18.56) that His true devotees, even while performing all kinds of actions, take full refuge in Him. By His

grace, they attain the eternal and imperishable abode.

Further, it has been revealed (in shlokas 18.61 and 18.62) that Ishvara (the Supreme Lord) dwells in the hearts of all beings, and causes them to wander in the world, according to their karmas. By surrendering unto Him exclusively with the whole of one's being, one can attain, by His grace, supreme peace and the eternal abode.

In the concluding shloka, Sri Krishna has assured mankind that he will take complete care of those who surrender to Him fully. The surrender does not depend upon getting or not getting the desired results. Even if one does not get what he wants, his faith in God is not shaken.

From a practical standpoint, sharanagati is the best shield from the miseries of life. Most of human suffering is the result of constant urge for controlling things. Failure to do so evokes the feelings of regret, guilt, resentment, and revenge etc. When, after doing his best, one leaves everything to the Divine dwelling in one's heart i.e. he listens sincerely to the voice of his unadulterated conscience, he develops an attitude of glad acceptance and gratitude. The very root cause of misery gets removed. All anxieties, fears, and guilt vanish. The life of saranagati, thus, is the life of blessedness.

Punjab’s Own IPL; Top Players To Feature In Sher-e-Punjab T20 League: CM Mann

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab is set to get its own IPL-style T20 league, with Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Saturday unveiling the Sher-e-Punjab T20 League, featuring six franchise teams and star Punjab cricketers including Shubhman Gill, Arshdeep Singh, Abhishek Sharma, Prabhsimran Singh, Ramandeep Singh and Gurnoor Brar.

The league will be played from August 30 to September 13 at the Punjab Cricket Association (PCA) Stadium in Mohali, with more than 450 Punjab players set to enter the auction on August 9, giving emerging talent a major platform alongside established players.

During this, Indian cricketers Abhishek Sharma, Arshdeep Singh, Prabhsimran Singh and Ramandeep Singh were present. CM Mann said Punjab has always produced talented players for the country and that the government is working continuously to connect young people with sports and further strengthen the



state in the sporting arena. He also highlighted sports as a principal weapon in the campaign against drugs.

Calling the league “Punjab’s own IPL”, Mann said, the league will feature six franchise teams. Indian Cricket Team Captain Shubman Gill will represent Fazilka Falcons, Arshdeep Singh will play for Ludhiana Lions, Abhishek Sharma for Amritsar Soormaaz, Prabhsimran Singh for Jalandhar Warriors, Ramandeep Singh for Mohali Kings, and Gurnoor Brar for Bathinda Royals.

“The players who have brought glory to India will add to the prestige of the tournament. The league will be held from August 30 to

September 13, with all matches to be played at the PCA Cricket Stadium in Mohali,” Mann said.

He said Punjab is currently the backbone of the Indian cricket team, with 21 players from the state featuring in the IPL. All of them will now be among the major attractions of Punjab’s own league. All players participating in the Punjab Cricket League will be from Punjab.

“For this purpose, a pool of more than 450 players from Punjab has been created, who will participate in the auction on August 9. The prominent names among these players include Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Markande, Naman

Dhir, Vihaan Malhotra, Imanjot Singh Chahal, Ashwani Kumar and Krish Bhagat. The league will be played on a round-robin basis, with each team playing eight league matches,” Mann said.

He said the league will provide young players from Punjab with valuable experience of playing on a major platform. Likewise, it will give them an opportunity to share the dressing room with established players thereby giving them experience. A comprehensive campaign has been launched to eradicate drugs from Punjab, and sports are the principal weapon in this battle.

On the occasion, Punjab Cricket Association President Amarjit Mehta, Secretary Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer and Vice-President Deepak Bali presented a T-shirt bearing the league’s logo to CM Mann as a token of honour.

Indian cricketers Abhishek Sharma, Arshdeep Singh, Prabhsimran Singh and Ramandeep Singh, who are part of the Indian team, also presented a cricket bat and ball to the CM.

No Laxity in Road Construction and Repair Works, says Haryana CM

PNS ■ Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Saturday said that ensuring safe, smooth and uninterrupted mobility for citizens is the Government’s foremost priority.

While reviewing the status of 2025-26 road works projects at a meeting with senior officers of 10 key departments, he directed officers concerned to ensure that all road construction, widening and repair works across the State are completed within the stipulated timelines, with no compromise on either quality or the pace of execution. Officers from PWD, HSAMB, Panchayati Raj Department, FMDA, GMDA, SMDA, PMDA, HSVP, HSIIDC and ULBA attended the meeting.

Reviewing the functioning of the ‘Hamari Sadak’ mobile app, Saini directed officers to ensure that complaints lodged by citizens regarding potholes and damaged roads are addressed promptly and on priority.

He directed that potholes be filled without delay and that reports of the repair work carried out must mandatorily be uploaded on the app. He made it clear that any officer or employee found negligent in resolving complaints or uploading the action taken would face strict disciplinary action.

Saini directed the Public Works Department and other agencies concerned to ensure mapping of all roads in the State, so that an accurate record of the condition and maintenance of each road is available.

Taking a firm stand against



delays in construction works, he said contractors failing to complete works within the stipulated time frame would be penalised. Those found compromising on prescribed quality standards would face registration of an FIR and blacklisting.

He directed officers to prepare a comprehensive list of all road projects affected by or pending due to railway-related issues. The list should form the basis for close coordination with railway authorities to resolve the issues at the earliest and accelerate the construction of Railway Overbridges (ROBs) and Underbridges.

He also stressed the need for high-quality roads in the State’s industrial areas. He said better industrial infrastructure would not only make transportation easier for entrepreneurs and traders but also create new opportunities for investment and employment in Haryana.

Reviewing the availability of road construction material, the CM directed that road works should not be held up if there is a delay in the supply of bitumen. In such cases, the roads should instead be constructed using cement concrete (CC) technology. He emphasised that the pace of development should not be allowed to slow down under any circumstances.

CM Saini reviews the functioning of Haryana State Federation of Cooperative Sugar Mills

PNS ■ Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Saturday directed officials to take effective measures to financially strengthen the Cooperative Sugar Mills of the State by reducing production costs, improving sugar recovery and ensuring optimum utilization of available resources. He said that along with enhancing the operational efficiency of the mills, providing better facilities to sugarcane farmers remains a priority of the State Government.

While reviewing the functioning of the Haryana State Federation of Cooperative Sugar Mills, he directed that unnecessary stoppages during mill operations should be minimized and timely maintenance of machinery and advance availability of essential spare parts should be ensured. He also sought details from the Managing Directors regarding the hours of stoppage experienced by their respective mills during the crushing season.

Emphasizing direct interaction with farmers, Saini directed that

suggestion boxes be installed at sugarcane weighment centres of the Sugar Mills so that farmers can submit their problems and suggestions. The concerned officers should regularly check these boxes and ensure time-bound action on the suggestions and complaints received.

He further directed the Managing Directors of all Cooperative Sugar Mills to hold meetings with farmers every four months so that their problems and suggestions can be discussed directly and useful suggestions can be incorporated into the functioning of the mills. The Chief Minister made it clear that genuine suggestions received from farmers should be acted upon promptly.

Saini said that, in accordance with the Budget announcement under the Sugarcane Technology Mission, the incentive for farmers adopting sugarcane cultivation in wider rows at a spacing of four feet has been increased from Rs. 3,000 per acre to Rs. 5,000 per acre. He directed officials to extensively publicize the scheme so that the maximum number of farmers can avail themselves of its benefits.

Third accused in Batala Grenade attack case held

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In a follow-up breakthrough in the Batala grenade attack case, Counter Intelligence (CI) Jalandhar, in a joint intelligence-led operation with Batala Police, has apprehended the third accused involved in the attack, Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab, Gaurav Yadav said on Saturday. The arrested accused has been identified as Karanjit Singh alias Bacha, a resident of Murgi Mohalla in Batala.

The development came close on the heels of Punjab Police arresting two accused persons—including Rajan alias Gullu and one juvenile—involvement in the grenade attack on Police Post Urban Estate in Batala, which took place on August 1. Yadav said that preliminary investigation has revealed that the arrested accused Karanjit alias Bacha is an operative of an ISI-backed terror module allegedly operated by a Portugal-based Babbar Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) mastermind.

Following the incident, the accused went into hiding and was allegedly planning similar attacks on police establishments across the state, he said, while adding that using technical and human-intels, police teams have managed to nab the accused. The DGP said that further investigation is underway to unravel the complete terror network, identify foreign handlers and local support networks, and establish all forward and backward linkages involved in the conspiracy.

SAD demands immediate implementation of the Women’s Reservation Bill

PNS ■ Chandigarh

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Saturday demanded the immediate implementation of the Women’s Reservation Bill in the country besides supporting the union government’s proposal to increase parliamentary seats by fifty per cent in all States.

These decisions were taken at a meeting of senior leaders of the SAD after holding detailed deliberations on key issues before parliament. The meeting was presided over by its president – Sukhbir Singh Badal.

The party made it clear that it stood for the immediate passage of the women reservation bill as well as delimitation.

Asserting that the SAD supported the proposal put

up in the Lok Sabha by the union government to increase the share of all States in parliamentary seats by fifty per cent, Badal said the SAD stood for a fair and equitable delimitation exercise which ensured equal increase in representation to all States. “This will ensure justice is done to all States”, he added.

Speaking on the issue of the Women’s Reservation Bill, Badal said the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) had also set an example by providing for women’s reservation in its House. Senior leaders who attended the meeting included Balwinder Singh Bhundar, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Sikandar Singh Maluka, Maheshinder Singh Grewal, Gulzar Singh Ranike, Janmeja Singh Sekhon, Daljit Singh Cheema and Hira Singh Gabhria.

Congress will make sand free for people after forming government in 2027: Raja Warring

PNS ■ Chandigarh

Punjab Congress President Amarinder Singh Raja Warring on Saturday announced that a future Congress government in Punjab will make legally sourced sand available free of cost for genuine household and public construction needs, turning Punjab’s natural resources into a direct benefit for its people.

To be implemented after the Congress forms the government in 2027, the proposed ‘Punjab Da Ret Haq’ Scheme will aim to bring down construction costs for ordinary Punjabis, support employment and accelerate development across the state.

In a statement, Warring said Punjab’s rivers and natural resources should not become a means of enriching a handful of powerful interests. They must become an economic resource that benefits ordinary families and helps build a stronger Punjab.

He said the Congress government would change the fundamental approach towards sand mining in Punjab. “Sand is not a luxury. It is needed to build a house, repair a home, construct a school, build a road, lay a drain and create infrastructure. If Punjab has this natural resource, why should an ordinary Punjabi be forced to pay an excessive price for it?” he said.

30 KG Heroin recovered in Ferozepur, two held

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Police’s Counter Intelligence (CI) Ferozepur, in a joint operation with Border Security Force (BSF), has busted a major cross-border narcotics smuggling module with the arrest of two individuals, and recovered 30.200 kg of heroin from their possession, Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said on Saturday.

Those arrested have been identified as Sukhwinder Singh, a resident of village Walle Shah Uttar in Fazilka and Manpreet Singh, a resident of village Nawan Hasta in Fazilka. Apart from recovering big haul of heroin, police teams have also impounded their Hero Deluxe motorcycle (PB-05-AS-9856) being used for smuggling activities.

The DGP said that further investigation is underway to establish the forward and backward linkages of the cross-border smuggling network and identify all persons associated with the cross-border handlers.

Sharing operational details, AIG CI Ferozepur Gursewak Singh said that acting upon specific tip-off, the Police team conducted a special joint operation with BSF Fazilka near village Satirwala at Hindumalkot road in Fazilka. During this operation, the police party apprehended two suspected persons travelling on the motorcycle and recovered 30.200 kg heroin from their possession, he said. The AIG said that more arrests and recoveries are likely in coming days as the investigation progresses.

CM Mann Hands Over Govt Job Appointment Letters To 866 Youth

PNS ■ MOHALI

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Saturday handed over 866 more appointment letters in Mohali, taking the total number of government jobs provided in just four-and-a-half years to 69,094.

“Transparent recruitment process has replaced the old system where cash and recommendations were considered essential for securing a government job,” he said, pointing out that the growing confidence of the youth in the system and the declining trend of migration abroad reflected the impact of providing opportunities on the basis of merit. Highlighting Punjab’s progress in education, he said the State had surpassed Kerala to rank first in the country, with 882 government school students clearing NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) serving as proof of the

transformation. These 866 appointments include 636 candidates of the Health & Family Welfare Department, including 614 Staff Nurses and other staff comprising 3 Pharmacists, 13 Multi-purpose Health Workers (Male), 2 Ward Attendants, 1 Class-IV employee and 3 Sweepers. Besides, 101 candidates have been appointed in Sugarfed, 57 as Junior Auditors, 51 in the Defence Services Welfare Department, 11 in the Cooperative Department and 10 candidates as Law Officers in the Home Department.

Addressing the gathering after distributing the appointment letters, Mann said hard work and dedication have been the sole criteria for selection. Gone are the days when jobs were given on the basis of bribery or recommendations. “Today, the State Government gives jobs to eligible candidates. All appointments have been

made purely on the basis of merit, transparency and fairness, without any recommendation or political influence,” he said. Urging the newly appointed youth to remain humble, Mann said, “You have worked hard and burnt the midnight oil to achieve these positions, and sky is the limit for you. Continue striving for higher jobs and greater success, but do not feel proud of your achievement. Stay humble, remain grounded and continue to work hard.”

Calling upon the new recruits to serve society, the Chief Minister said, “You have now become an integral part of the Government family. Use your pen to help the needy and underprivileged sections of society and ensure maximum welfare of the public so that every section of society benefits from your service. This is the real service of mankind, for which every new appointee should play a key role.”

Punjab waiting to give Congress full mandate: Bhupesh Baghel

PNS ■ Malerkotla

Congress general secretary in charge for Punjab, Bhupesh Baghel, on Saturday said that the people of the state are eagerly waiting to give full mandate to the party in the Assembly elections scheduled early next year.

Baghel said that after touring 18 districts across Punjab, he has noticed “overwhelming enthusiasm among the people for the Congress as they are fed up with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government which has completely destroyed the state”.

Speaking during a ‘Har booth, Congress Mazboot’ programme here, Baghel exhorted the Congress workers to unite and get battle ready. During the event, chaos prevailed briefly as some workers jostled to move close to the stage where Baghel, Punjab Congress president Amrinder Singh Raja



Warring and some other leaders were seated, prompting Warring to come down to calm the situation.

Addressing the gathering, Baghel accused the BJP-led government at the Centre of misusing investigating agencies like the Enforcement Directorate against its political opponents. Warring also exuded confidence that the Congress will form the government in Punjab next year.

Calling for police reforms in the state, Warring

announced that “after the Congress forms the government, reforms will be initiated to make police accountability mandatory”, which, he said, is important to prevent abuse and registration of “false cases against innocent people”. Every inquiry officer who orders registration of FIRs will be held accountable and made to compensate for any willfully wrong FIR, Warring said.

The 117-member Punjab Assembly is scheduled to go to polls early next year.

BRIEFS

GURPREET KAUR MANN ATTENDS ‘TEEYAN’ EVENT IN MUKTSAR



Muktsar: Dr. Gurpreet Kaur Mann, wife of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, attended a ‘Teeyan’ programme in Muktsar Assembly constituency on Saturday, celebrating Punjabi culture. A large number of women participated in the programme. During the programme, she interacted with the women and learnt about their experiences.

PUNJAB POLICE’S ‘GANGSTRAN TE VAAR’ COMPLETES 200 DAYS OF CRACKDOWN ON ORGANISED CRIME

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Police’s anti-gangster campaign ‘Gangstran Te Vaar’ has completed 200 days, emerging as one of the state’s most sustained and comprehensive crackdowns on organised crime. During the operation, police conducted 1,09,087 raids across Punjab, arrested 1,532 proclaimed offenders, initiated action against more than 58,000 criminals and their associates, recovered a massive cache of illegal weapons and narcotics, and dealt a significant blow to organised criminal networks. Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said the campaign has evolved into a multi-dimensional enforcement operation targeting not only gangsters but the entire ecosystem supporting organised crime. “The first 200 days of ‘Gangstran Te Vaar’ have demonstrated the impact of sustained, intelligence-led policing. Our strategy goes beyond arrests to dismantling the ecosystem that enables organised crime by targeting associates, finances, logistics, communication channels and overseas linkages. Punjab Police remains committed to ensuring that there is no safe haven for gangsters operating within or outside the country,” he said.

HARYANA EDUCATION MINISTER CONDUCTS SURPRISE INSPECTION OF GOVERNMENT COLLEGE IN PANCHKULA

Chandigarh: Haryana Education Minister Mahipal Dhanda on Saturday conducted a surprise inspection of the Government College, Sector-1, Panchkula. During the visit, he inspected various facilities on the college premises and interacted with students. He patiently listened to their academic and basic infrastructure-related concerns and directed the college administration to take prompt steps for their resolution. During the interaction, students apprised the Education Minister of their requirements regarding various courses, resources and basic facilities available at the college. A key demand raised by the students was the introduction of a Master of Physical Education (M.P.Ed.) course at the college. Taking note of the demand, Dhanda assured the students that the government would consider it positively and take necessary steps in this regard. He said that efforts would be made to facilitate the introduction of the M.P.Ed. course so that students aspiring to build careers in sports and physical education could access better opportunities locally.

THREE KILLED AFTER CAR RAMS INTO STATIONARY TRUCK IN JALANDHAR

Chandigarh: Three persons died after their car rammed into a stationary truck on a highway in Punjab’s Jalandhar on Saturday. Police said the truck driver fled the spot after the accident. “We received information about the accident in the morning. When we reached the spot, a truck bearing a Haryana registration number was parked on the road. The Swift car, passing through that stretch of road, rammed into it,” Station House Officer (SHO) of Division 1, Jalandhar, Rakesh Kumar, said. “Due to the impact, three car occupants died. The identities of the deceased are being ascertained,” he said. The truck driver fled after the accident. The bodies have been sent to the civil hospital for post-mortem, the SHO said.

HIMACHAL CM DIRECTS MEDICAL COLLEGES TO BOOST RESEARCH, STRENGTHEN DIAGNOSTICS SERVICES

Shimla: Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu has directed to promote research in the medical colleges of the State to offer better health care facilities to the patients. While presiding over a meeting of the Health department on Saturday, he said that research in the medical sector is paramount and a dedicated research department would be established in the IGMC, Shimla in the first phase and later the initiative would be replicated in the other medical colleges across the State. Sukhu said that the present state government remains committed to strengthen the diagnostic services in the health institutions to ensure timely and accurate diagnostics services to provide early treatment. He said that directions had been given to conduct instant diagnostic tests like MRI, CT Scan and X-rays etc. without any waiting period for the patients. He also stressed on conducting in-house blood tests and said that the state government has released Rs. 75 crore for setting up of automated labs in the three medical colleges viz. Atal Institute of Medical Super specialties Chamiyana, IGMC Shimla and Tanda medical college so that multiple tests could be done simultaneously using a single blood sample. He said that tenders have been floated to procure machines for establishing these labs. He said that there is no paucity of funds for upgrading the health infrastructure and the state government would provide all-out support for strengthening medical facilities.

CHANDIGARH DEPUTY COMMISSIONER INSPECTS SPECIAL CAMPS FOR ELECTORAL SERVICES

Chandigarh: Deputy Commissioner, U.T. Chandigarh, Nishant Kumar Yadav on Saturday made surprise visits to various polling station locations to review the functioning of the two-day Special Camps for Electoral Services being organised on August 8 and 9 across Chandigarh as per the schedule of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). During the visits, the DC inspected the arrangements at the polling stations and interacted with Booth Level Officers (BLOs). He directed the BLOs to actively assist and guide citizens visiting the camps for electoral services. The Special Camps are being organised at all polling station locations and citizens can visit their respective polling stations to check their names in the electoral roll and avail themselves of the prescribed electoral services. During the ongoing Claims and Objections period from July 21 to August 20, eligible citizens can submit claims for inclusion in the Draft Electoral Roll along with the prescribed declaration and supporting documents.

HSLSA ORGANISES STATE-LEVEL CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME TO STRENGTHEN JUSTICE DELIVERY SYSTEM

Chandigarh: The Haryana State Legal Services Authority (HSLSA) organised a state-level capacity building programme at the auditorium of the Chandigarh Judicial Academy, Sector 43, on Saturday for further strengthening the justice delivery system and ensuring better coordination among various departments. The programme was organised under the guidance of Justice Deepak Sibal, Judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court and Executive Chairman, HSLSA, in collaboration with the Department of Women and Child Development, Haryana. The programme aimed to acquaint judicial, administrative and police officers with contemporary legal provisions, practical aspects and effective institutional coordination, particularly for the effective implementation of laws relating to women, children and other vulnerable sections and ensuring timely access to justice.

Himachal, Kerala reel from havoc; Assam flood toll mounts to 98

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Rain fury eased in several parts of the country on Saturday; however, destruction prevailed in its wake, with the death toll in Assam mounting to 98, mobility paralysed with 153 roads blocked in Himachal Pradesh and hundreds in Kerala staying put in relief camps due to damage to houses and roads.

In Assam, more than 1.55 lakh people remained affected by floods, with the toll in this year's deluge reaching 98 with one more fatality, officials said on Saturday.

Even as 13 districts remained affected, the government will, from Sunday,

launch an assessment of damage caused by the deluge to expedite release of funds for permanent rehabilitation in the four worst-hit districts in the eastern part of the State.

Marking a four-day streak of showers, the national capital on Saturday recorded its wettest August day in two years, with the month's rainfall total nearly reaching the monthly average in just the first eight days.

With 98.7 mm of rain till 8.30 am, Delhi marked the highest rainfall in August since 2024, when 107.6 mm of rain was recorded on the first day of the month.

Traffic snarls were reported at several stretches across the national Capital amid

incessant rain, with heavy congestion at the Kalindi Kunj border, ITO, Press Enclave Marg, Geetanjali Marg and Mehrauli-Badarpur Road. Traffic was also affected in parts of east Delhi, including stretches of GT Road.

During the first seven days of August, Delhi recorded 127 mm of rainfall as relentless rain continued to affect the national Capital through Friday. The heavy rainfall on Friday caused widespread waterlogging, increased flow in drains, and numerous reports of wall and house collapses across Delhi.

Friday, which saw the city pounded mercilessly by showers, caused multiple incidents, including the collapse of a wall at a private



parking facility in Deoli, damaging eight vehicles. Additionally, an 18-year-old went missing after being swept away by rainwater while trying to cross a drain in the Priyanka Camp area of southeast Delhi during heavy rainfall. In Himachal Pradesh,

torrential rains have led to the closure of 153 roads, and the Shimla Met Office issued an 'orange alert' for heavy to very heavy rains at isolated locations in the State on Monday and Tuesday.

According to the State Emergency Operation Centre

(SEOC), 77 water supply schemes and 104 transformers were also disrupted as of Saturday morning.

Since the monsoon began on June 30, 65 people have died in rain-related incidents so far, including 14 in landslides and one in flash floods. The State has suffered losses totalling ₹834 crore, officials said. The weather department has predicted a wet spell in the State till August 14.

In Kerala, rains prevailed on Saturday, and although floodwaters are receding gradually in many areas, hundreds of people remain in relief camps as many roads and houses are still flooded.

The Upper Kuttanad and Kuttanad regions of Alappuzha and interior areas

of Kottayam district continued to bear the brunt of the flooding, though water levels had started receding at several places, officials said.

Floodwaters were receding only marginally in some areas, and several residents remained stranded or affected as their houses and roads were still underwater.

Major roads, including the Alappuzha-Changanassery road, remained inundated, disrupting traffic in the region. Small boats were being used to ferry people and shift essential belongings from waterlogged areas.

In view of the prevailing rains, holidays were declared for all educational institutions in eight districts — Kasaragod, Kannur,

Wayanad, Kozhikode, Thrissur, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha — on Saturday as a precautionary measure.

Local self-government institutions, revenue officials and elected representatives have been asked to facilitate the evacuation of vulnerable residents to relief camps wherever necessary.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast rain and thundershowers at several locations in western Uttar Pradesh and isolated areas in the eastern parts of the state over the next 24 hours.

Officials have also issued a warning of heavy rain in certain locations in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Dialogue, dignity, inclusion essential for effective access to justice: CJI Surya Kant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Indore

Dialogue, dignity and inclusion are essential for effective access to justice, and a true legal aid means "people spoken to and not merely spoken at", Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said on Saturday.

Speaking to reporters after a programme here, he also stated that the backlog of cases in the country has decreased significantly over the last decade.

Addressing the Western Zone Regional Conference of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), he said that the objective of legal aid is not merely to dispose of cases, but also to ensure respectful treatment of individuals. Access to justice begins with dialogue, the CJI said, stressing that appropriate legal solutions should be provided to people based on their specific problems.

The grievances of different communities should be



heard in their own languages, he said.

Describing the volunteers associated with legal services authorities as part of a "judicial army," the CJI said they play a crucial role in taking government schemes to the grassroots level.

He urged the volunteers to assist victims in securing justice in a manner that upholds dignity and inclusivity. "Dialogue, dignity and

inclusion -- I do not read these words as slogans for a banner. I read them as an accurate description of what legal aid looks like when it actually works: people spoken to and not merely spoken at, treated as citizens and not mere case numbers, and reached wherever they are, rather than expected to find their own way to us," the CJI said.

Access to justice has never

been built by laws alone, but it begins with a conversation, he further said.

Every legal aid application starts with someone narrating a problem, every mediation begins with parties agreeing to listen, and a legal awareness programme succeeds only when institutions first understand the realities of the people they seek to serve, he said, adding that people must "feel heard" before justice is delivered.

Institutions certainly have a duty to inform citizens of their rights, but they must also remain willing to learn from the communities they serve, the CJI noted.

"The legal needs of a tribal family in Madhya Pradesh, a fisherman community in Goa, a migrant worker in Gujarat or a woman seeking legal assistance in Mumbai are unlikely to be identical. Our response, therefore, cannot be uniform. It must be rooted in local realities," he said.

VP Radhakrishnan visits Cellular Jail in Andaman, pays tribute to freedom fighters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Sri Vijaya Puram

Vice-President CP Radhakrishnan on Saturday visited the Cellular Jail National Memorial here, paid tributes to freedom fighters and recalled the contribution of revolutionary VD Savarkar to India's freedom struggle. Radhakrishnan laid a wreath at the Martyrs' Column, offered his respects at the Swatantrata Jyoti and visited Savarkar's cell during his visit to the historic jail.

He also visited the Central Tower, gallows and the museum and exhibition gallery before witnessing the Light and Sound Show depicting the saga of India's freedom struggle and the sacrifices of freedom fighters.

Speaking during the visit, the VP described Savarkar as a "unique and fearless revolutionary" whose patriotism inspired generations of young Indians.

While recalling Savarkar's years of imprisonment and



harsh treatment in the Cellular Jail in the Andamans, he said, "The purpose of sending freedom fighters to jail was to demoralise them; Savarkar ji never got demoralised. Finally, the British Raj got demoralised."

He also highlighted Savarkar's contribution to the fight against untouchability and social discrimination. Radhakrishnan said India's

'Har Ghar Tiranga Abhiyaan' and the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of 'Vande Mataram'.

Radhakrishnan arrived at INS Utkrosh, the naval air base near Veer Savarkar International Airport, on Saturday afternoon and was received by Lieutenant Governor Admiral Devendra Kumar Joshi (Retd) and senior officials. He was also accorded a ceremonial Guard of Honour. After his arrival, Radhakrishnan went to Lok Niwas and held a meeting with Joshi. On Sunday, Radhakrishnan will participate in the 'Har Ghar Tiranga Abhiyaan' by hoisting the national flag at Flag Point in Sri Vijaya Puram around 9 am.

He will then attend a state function, 'Tiranga Concert on Vande Mataram' at the Dr BR Ambedkar Institute of Technology auditorium.

In the afternoon, the Vice-President will visit the historic Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Island before leaving for New Delhi in the evening.

Govt follows zero-tolerance policy against human trafficking, says CM Samrat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary on Saturday said that the state government has a "zero-tolerance policy" against human trafficking.

Speaking at the Eastern Zonal Conference-cum-Consultation on Missing Children and Human Trafficking, Choudhary said his government is committed to bringing the victims of human trafficking into the mainstream of society on a priority basis.

"Bihar government is working with a zero-tolerance policy against human trafficking. Alongside preventing trafficking, providing victims a safe environment and bringing them back into the mainstream of society are the government's priorities," Choudhary said.

Through the Naya Savera 3.0 campaign, efforts are underway to create awareness, prevent trafficking, and rescue and rehabilitate



victims of human trafficking and child labour and to provide them with skills, employment and dignity, he said. Under the three phases of 'Naya Savera', a total of 158 FIRs were registered, 275 human traffickers were arrested, and 693 victims were successfully rescued, including 322 females (106 adults and 216 minors) and 371 males (26 adults and 345 minors), police officials said.

The Bihar CM said that "time-bound action" is being taken in human trafficking cases through real-time monitoring. Choudhary asserted that checking outmigration would be a crucial factor towards preventing human trafficking in the state.

'Can't always doubt foreign funding': Sule opposes FCRA bill in present form, seeks JPC scrutiny

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

NCP (SP) working president Supriya Sule on Saturday opposed the FCRA bill in its present form, saying one cannot always view foreign funding with suspicion, and urged the Centre to either withdraw it or refer it to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC).

Sule told the media here that all political parties should be given an opportunity to discuss the contentious Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, amid reports that it will be taken up for discussion and passage in Parliament next week. She also compared foreign funding to money sent home by Indians living abroad. The Baramati MP cautioned the government against rushing it through Parliament.

"We reject and disagree with the present form of the FCRA bill. If the government is about to withdraw the bill, then it should send it to a JPC. In a strong democracy, merely opposing some-



thing is not enough; we also have to sit together and discuss it," she said.

According to Sule, one can't always doubt foreign funding, and it should not automatically be viewed with suspicion, maintaining that action should be taken if funds are linked to illegal activities like drug trafficking or terrorism.

Sule said foreign funds could also support legitimate medical and educational work in India. She also drew parallels between foreign funding and money sent home by Indians living abroad. "There are organisations such as the Gates Foundation and USAID that have been doing good work

for many years. Why should we look at every foreign-funded organisation with a bad eye?" she said.

The FCRA bill provides for a comprehensive framework for vesting, supervision, management and disposal of foreign contributions and assets in a 'designated authority', including provisional and permanent vesting. Critics have argued that it will shift the law from regulating foreign money to controlling independent organisations.

On the proposed delimitation legislation, Sule said it would be premature to comment as the bill had not yet been introduced. "When it comes, we will discuss

every Bill with our alliance partners," she said.

Sule welcomed Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's recent comments about the younger generation and said political parties should listen to them.

"I thank RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat for recognising how honest this new generation is. I welcome his statement. I would be happy if the BJP also listens to what he has said," she said.

On protests by youths, Sule claimed that the new generation can speak freely because it does not depend on the government for jobs, contracts or other benefits.

"These young people are educated. They do not have a problem with the IAS, Income Tax, CBI or ED. They do not want contracts. Since they have none of these interests, they are able to speak freely about what they believe is true," she said. Sule accused the Maharashtra government of adopting an election-centric approach, referring to "conditions" attached to assistance for farmers.

Bengal CID grills Abhishek's close aide in land fraud case for around 10 hours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee's aide Sumit Roy was quizzed by the West Bengal CID for around 10 hours on Saturday in connection with a government land fraud case in Paschim Medinipur district, officials said.

Roy was questioned by CID

leuths at the probe agency's headquarters in Bhawani Bhawan.

The Supreme Court has granted him interim protection from arrest till August 14, subject to his cooperation with the investigation. "Our officers questioned him for hours. The investigation is at a very preliminary stage and nothing could be disclosed right now," an official said.

TN CM Vijay brainstorms with MPs on delimitation, DMK, AIADMK boycott

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay on Saturday chaired a meeting of Tamil Nadu MPs on the Centre's proposed delimitation, and it was boycotted by the DMK and the AIADMK, which dubbed the deliberations a "farce" and a "drama".

Vijay led the discussions on the proposal of the Centre to carry out delimitation and its likely impact on the state. MPs belonging to ruling TVK's alliance parties, the Congress, VCK, MDMK and IUML, and friendly parties, the CPI and CPI(M), took part in the meeting. In total, 19 MPs participated.



Eleven Congress MPs, two MPs each from CPI, CPI(M) and the VCK; one MP each from the MDMK and IUML took part.

DMK's alliance parties, MNM and DMDK, which have one RS MP each, did not take part. AIADMK, which has four MPs in the Upper House and its ally the PMK,

which has one MP, also in the RS, did not participate.

The DMK has 22 Lok Sabha and 8 Rajya Sabha MPs.

Congress veteran leader P Chidambaram and VCK chief Thol Thirumavalavan were among the participants. Marxist party's Su Venkatesan, MDMK's Durai Vaiko, the Congress party's Jothimani were among others who participated.

Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary M Sai Kumar had sent separate invitations to the MPs on August 6 and 7, government sources said.

The meeting was held at Kalaiavanar Arangam, a government-owned auditorium here near the Secretariat.

Marginalised communities must be brought into mainstream: Bhagwat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Buldhana (Maharashtra)

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Saturday said that to make the country 'Vishwaguru' in the true sense, it is necessary to bring marginalised communities into the mainstream.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating sports grounds at a residential school for the Pardhi community at Khamgaon in Maharashtra's Buldhana district, he said the communities we now describe as 'bhatkevimukt' (nomadic and denotified tribes) were once dispensers of knowledge. "Every person in the 'bhatke and vimukt' community is one of our own. Hence, it is



my duty to have this perspective and do something for these people, so that their lives improve," the RSS chief said. These communities were once repositories of knowledge, Bhagwat said.

"They went out (migrated) to share their knowledge selflessly, but over time became marginalised. During the British era, because they par-

ticipated in the freedom struggle, the entire Pardhi community was branded as a criminal tribe, which caused them to fall far behind in development," he said.

"If we want to make India a Vishwaguru, these marginalised elements of society must be brought into the mainstream," the Sangh chief further said.

To achieve this goal, society must stand together with "everyone having equal strength," Bhagwat said.

Every family and every individual should have education and basic necessities of life, and the entire society should work towards this goal without merely depending on the government, he added.



On the occasion, Dr. Anshu Kataria, President, Punjab Unaided Colleges Association (PUCA) & Chairman, Aryans Group of Colleges, appreciated the efforts of Finance Minister S. Harpal Singh Cheema for reviving the Post Matric Scholarship (PMS) scheme for Punjabi students. He said that the Government has sanctioned Rs 432 crore towards pending PMS dues for 2017-20 and has assured the disbursement of more pending funds in the coming months. Dr. Kataria appreciated Cheema's efforts to resolve the long-pending PMS issues of Punjab. On the occasion, teams from Aryans Group of Colleges, Swami Vivekanand Institute of Engineering and Technology, Doaba Group of Colleges, Indo Global Group of Colleges and Saraswati Group of Colleges were present.

Dyson's lightweight cleaning tools drive micro-cleaning trend in Homes

Chandigarh: Changing lifestyles are reshaping household cleaning habits, with micro-cleaning emerging as a new trend. Instead of spending hours cleaning on weekends, consumers are increasingly spending a few minutes each day tackling small messes before they accumulate. According to Dyson, lightweight and versatile tools are making micro-cleaning easier and more effective. The Dyson V12 Detect Slim, with multiple attachments, helps clean kitchens, furniture, mattresses, electronics and floors efficiently. "Micro-cleaning is about preventing dust, dirt and clutter from building up in the first place," said Logan Thomson, Senior Dyson Engineer. "Regular cleaning reduces the burden of deep cleaning and keeps homes organised." Thomson also recommended focusing on overlooked areas such as beneath furniture, mattresses and sofas. Experts say micro-cleaning can save time while reducing fine dust and allergens.

NIA files chargesheet in cross-border terror case

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a chargesheet against two people accused in a cross-border terror plot. The case involves the alleged smuggling of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), a firearm, and heroin across the India-Pakistan border. The plan was meant to enable attacks that could cause mass casualties and disrupt public order in India.

The chargesheet, filed in the NIA Special Court in Mohali, names Shubham Kumar, who is in custody, and Jasvir Chaudhary, who is still at large. Both are charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Explosive Substances Act, the Arms Act, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and the Railways Act.

These charges include terrorism, illegal possession of explosives and firearms, drug trafficking and threats to transportation infrastruc-



ture. The case started in February 2026 when the State Special Operations Cell (SSOC) in Amritsar arrested Shubham Kumar. He was found with a live IED in a metal case, a remote-control device for detonation, a foreign-made .30 bore pistol with a magazine, 20 live cartridges, a mobile phone and some heroin.

These seizures gave investigators their first major lead, which later pointed to a larger, organised conspiracy. In March 2026, the NIA took

over the case because it involved both interstate and cross-border elements. Their investigation uncovered a network led by a handler in Pakistan with several associates in India. According to the NIA, the main goal of this network was to obtain and smuggle arms, explosives and drugs through cross-border routes. These operations used weak spots along the border to support terrorist activities in India.

The investigation found that Kumar was tasked with

planting a timer-activated IED on a passenger train. The aim was to cause civilian casualties on the railway. The larger plan included coordinated attacks at several locations in Punjab and Delhi, aiming to cause loss of life and property, disturb public peace and threaten national security.

The NIA says the investigation has produced a large amount of oral, written and digital evidence. This material supports the alleged conspiracy and shows the roles of each accused person. The chargesheet was filed on time, showing the agency met legal deadlines and was thorough.

At the same time, authorities are working to find and close the routes used to move explosives, weapons and drugs across the border. Officials say stopping these supply lines is key to preventing future plots. This case highlights the ongoing challenges of cross-border terrorism and the need for constant vigilance, teamwork between agencies and strong legal action to protect national security.

Cross-border smuggling networks: Persistent threat to India's security

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

Cross-border smuggling networks operating along the India-Pakistan frontier continue to pose a significant challenge to national security, combining the illicit movement of narcotics, arms and explosives with elements of terrorism. These networks, often directed by handlers based across the border and supported by local associates in India, have been repeatedly highlighted in investigations by agencies such as the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Border Security Force (BSF) and Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB).

A recent example came on August 7, 2026, when the NIA charged two people with smuggling an improvised explosive device, a firearm, and heroin across the border. The plan included attacks in Punjab and Delhi and an attempt to target a passenger train. This case shows how these networks mix drug trafficking with gathering materials for violence. The NIA says its investigation is still ongoing to find more members and



the routes used to move contraband.

These networks often use Punjab and Rajasthan as main entry points because they are close to the border. Much of the heroin comes from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, and the money from this trade often funds terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. Parliament has confirmed that foreign groups use drug smuggling to raise money for terror groups in these areas.

In recent years, authorities have seen the problem grow. NCB data from 2025 shows a big increase in cases, especially in Punjab, where most aerial deliveries of contraband happen. Each year, hundreds of kilograms of drugs are seized in Punjab and nearby areas, showing

both the scale of smuggling and the strong response from law enforcement. At the same time, foreign-made weapons are also being found, highlighting how arms and drugs often move together.

The effects go beyond security. Large amounts of narcotics entering border states cause public health problems, especially in Punjab, where addiction is a major issue. The illegal trade also hurts the economy by undermining legal businesses and creating hidden funds that support organised crime and extremism. These networks also threaten national security by enabling attacks that disrupt public order and important infrastructure.

Indian agencies have increased their efforts. The

NIA, BSF, state police, and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) are working together and have made several arrests, seized large amounts of goods, and disrupted money trails. They are trying to find handlers in Pakistan, local contacts, and distribution networks in different States. They are also checking other possible routes, such as those on the western coast. Using technology and sharing intelligence are important parts of their work, with the main goal of breaking up the smuggling networks.

Even with these successes, the networks keep adapting, so the problem continues. Cases like the recent NIA investigation show that ongoing vigilance, inter-agency cooperation, and strong legal action under laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act remain essential.

Tackling the connections between smuggling, organised crime, and terrorism is vital to protect India's borders and internal security, security experts say.

Govt to take measures to rebuild breached embankments: Himanta



TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday visited Bengabara and Naharbari under Mangaldai Assembly constituency in Darrang district to take stock of the recent flood situation and assess the condition of the affected areas.

The Chief Minister inspected the breached portion of the embankment along the Noa River near Bengabara village and reviewed the ongoing repair works. The breach in the river embankment a few days ago had inundated several villages in the area.

Sarma also visited the relief camps set up at the under-construction Anganwadi Centre at Bengabara village and Outala HS School and interacted with flood-affected people taking shelter there. He enquired about their well-being and assured them of all possible assistance. He subsequently

inspected the breached embankment along the Kulsi River at Naharbari.

Chief Minister Sarma said that the recent floods had caused considerable hardship to the people of the area following breaches in the embankments. The Chief Minister said that the Government would take special measures to rebuild the breached embankments with enhanced strength. He also assured that all flood-affected families would be provided the necessary assistance at the earliest as per Government norms.

Health and Family Welfare Minister and Guardian Minister of Darrang Ashok Singhal, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Minister and local MLA Nilima Devi, MLA Paramananda Rajbongshi, District Commissioner and officials of the district administration and concerned departments were present during the visit.

Par panel flags OBC quota deficit in Posts dept

AMIT KAUSHAL
■ New Delhi

A parliamentary committee chaired by Lok Sabha MP Ganesh Singh has expressed concern over the shortfall in Other Backward Classes (OBC) representation in the Department of Posts and urged the Union Ministry of Communications to strictly adhere to the mandated 27 per cent reservation quota across all cadre levels.

The report of the Committee on Welfare of Other Backward Classes was presented in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, laying out six major recommendations aimed at addressing backlog vacancies, boosting rural infrastructure, and ensuring social equity.

Highlighting a sharp deficit, the



Lok Sabha MP Ganesh Singh

parliamentary panel noted that OBC representation in Group 'A' stands at a meager 7.2 per cent at the Junior Time Scale level. In Group 'B', OBCs constitute only 19.5 per cent of Inspectors of Posts and 21 per cent

of Stenographers. The figures are marginally better in Group 'C', where representation stands at 25.2 per cent among Postal Assistants and 26.1 per cent among Postmen — yet still below the prescribed threshold.

Expressing dissatisfaction that representation remains incomplete even after three decades of the policy's rollout, the panel urged the department to immediately initiate Special Recruitment Drives to clear 207 Group 'C' backlog vacancies, the majority of which (204) are in the West Bengal Circle.

Taking note of the financial hardship faced by over 2.5 lakh Gramin Dak Sevaks (GDS) who perform essential doorstep postal and payments bank services in rural areas on a basic monthly remuneration of ₹10,000 to ₹12,000, the panel recom-

mended an immediate upward revision in their regular pay.

Among other key observations, the committee directed the department to strictly enforce reservation rules for temporary and contractual appointments lasting 45 days or more, as per DoPT guidelines. It also advocated for operating more rural post offices from Gram Panchayat Bhawans to deepen financial inclusion and cut rental overheads, while recommending that basic facilities be granted to recognised OBC Employees' Welfare Associations.

Emphasising the vision of inclusive development, Shri Ganesh Singh stated that reservation must extend beyond mere percentage fulfillment to deliver real socio-economic empowerment and equal opportunities for eligible youth.

CPI(M) slams E20 fuel policy, cites vehicle damage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Polit Bureau of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Friday expressed serious concern over the implementation of the Union Government's Ethanol Blending Policy (EBP), demanding that consumers be given a choice between blended fuel and unblended petrol at all retail outlets.

Taking a strong stance against the mandatory roll-out of E20 fuel, the CPI(M) alleged that the policy prioritises corporate profits over public interest, food security, and consumer rights.

In a statement issued from the party's central committee office, the Left party highlighted a recent

communication by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) to the Union Petroleum Ministry. The party noted that SIAM had raised alarm over vehicle damage caused by ethanol-blended fuel before withdrawing its letter. "The subsequent withdrawal of the letter, obviously under pressure, does not negate the concerns raised therein," the Polit Bureau stated.

Critiquing the pricing structure of E20 fuel, the CPI(M) pointed out that despite initial assurances that ethanol blends would be cheaper, E20 is currently sold at rates comparable to regular petrol. This comes despite blended fuel offering lower mileage and causing increased wear and tear on engine components, leaving motorists with no alternative options.



Raising concerns over agricultural impact and food security, the CPI(M) warned against the diversion of food crops for fuel production in a nation struggling with hunger and malnutrition. The party highlighted that maize is being imported to boost ethanol output, leading to distortions in cropping

patterns and the over-extraction of groundwater due to water-intensive cultivation.

The CPI(M) further cautioned the Centre against the potential import of Genetically Modified (GM) corn from the United States, warning that it risks contaminating local crops and being diverted for human consumption.

Calling for an immediate review of the fuel strategy, the CPI(M) demanded that ethanol blends be priced proportionately lower than unblended petrol to compensate consumers for reduced fuel efficiency. It also urged the government to cap ethanol blending at 20 per cent and warned of widespread public protests if the policy is not rectified.

Improved connectivity drives Ladakh tourist surge

MOHIT KANDHARI
■ Jammu

Better air and road connectivity has boosted tourist arrivals in the cold desert region of Ladakh this season.

The Union Territory has already recorded 3,30,332 tourist arrivals between January and July this year, accounting for 98.35 per cent of the total footfall for the entire year of 2025.

Ladakh became the most sought-after destination this season, with a rapid surge in June and July. More than 2.12 lakh tourists visited Ladakh, accounting for nearly 65 per cent of the total 3.30 lakh tourist arrivals recorded so far this year.

According to official sources, Ladakh received 1,05,046 tourists in July 2026, compared to 67,273 in July 2025, registering a growth of 56.15 per cent. The July arrivals comprised 95,416 domestic and 9,630 foreign tourists.

June also witnessed a significant increase, with 1,07,740 tourists visiting Ladakh compared to 75,089 in June 2025, representing a growth of 43.48 per cent. Of the June 2026 arrivals, 1,01,060 were domestic and 6,680 foreign tourists.

Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena attributed the growing tourist footfall, particularly domestic tourism, to the sustained infrastructure development in Ladakh.

LG Saxena said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to our citizens to explore the beauty and diversity of our own country has given a further impetus to domestic tourism.

LG Saxena said the trend reflects the growing popularity of Ladakh as a destination for adventure, nature, culture, Spirituality and high-altitude tourism.

The fact that Ladakh has crossed the one-lakh mark in tourist arrivals for two successive months and has already achieved more than 98 per cent of the entire 2025 footfall by the end of July is a very encouraging milestone, LG Vinai Saxena added.

Of the 3,30,332 tourists who visited Ladakh during January–July 2026, 1,57,371 (47.64 per cent) arrived by air, while 1,16,523 (35.27 per cent) entered through the Kashmir route and 56,438 (17.09 per cent) arrived through the Manali route.

Ladakh and India are among the safest places for tourists, and we welcome vis-



itors from across India and abroad. Our priority is to ensure that this growth translates into sustainable livelihood opportunities for our people while protecting Ladakh's fragile ecology, rich culture and heritage," said LG Saxena.

According to a spokesman of the Ladakh Tourism department, the surge in tourist arrivals during June and July has also been supported by a vibrant calendar of cultural, spiritual and experiential events organised across Ladakh. Major attractions during the period included the Hemis Festival, Pratham Sindhu Kumbh, Ladakh Astro Week 2026

(held in the last week of May), Phyang Tsedup and several other local monastic festivals, which brought together visitors interested in Ladakh's rich Buddhist heritage, culture, spirituality and unique high-altitude experiences.

The rapid growth in the Tourism sector assumes greater significance and coincides with a major and rapid transformation in Ladakh's connectivity infrastructure since the formation of the Union Territory. The total road network has increased from 1,799 km in 2019 to over 4,200 km in 2026, while the number of bridges has increased from

19 to 72. According to experts in the Tourism sector, the period of seasonal disruption on key routes has also reduced substantially. Zoji La, the gateway to Ladakh from Kashmir, which earlier remained closed for around 127 days annually, now remains closed for only 16 days. Similarly, the annual closure of the Kargil–Zaskar Road has declined from 154 days to 11 days, significantly improving near-year-round connectivity for tourists. The number of homestays has increased from 128 in 2019 to 2,275 in 2026, creating new livelihood opportunities for local households.

The tourism surge has further been supported by a series of reforms in the tourism sector, creating tourist-friendly infrastructure and amenities under the guidance of LG Vinai Saxena. Initiatives like tourism sector reforms to reduce compliance burden, simplification of cumbersome documentation, and granting of Industry Status to hotels and guest houses have strengthened confidence among tourism stakeholders, including hoteliers, guest house owners, tour operators, etc.

AIKS calls for mass farmer protests on August 10

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) on Saturday called upon farmers and their families across the country to participate in mass protest actions on August 10, including 'Jail Bhao', 'Rasta Roko', and 'Rail Roko', targeting the Central Government's agrarian and labour policies.

The call for the nationwide agitation was declared by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) during its All-India Convention on July 28 and subsequently endorsed by the National Convention of Farmers and Workers convened alongside the Central Trade Unions (CTU) in New Delhi on July 29.

According to AIKS leadership, the upcoming action serves as a prelude to a longer, sustained agitation set to launch on November 26, 2026 — marking the anniversary of the 2020–21 farmers' movement — under the banner of 'Save Agriculture, Save Industry, Save India'.

In a press statement, the farmer body emphasised



Representative image

that the August 10 action aims to project a united front of workers and peasants against corporate encroachment and the denial of fair remuneration. The outfit highlighted key charter demands, including a statutory guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) calculated at the C2+50 per cent formula with guaranteed State procurement across all crops.

Additionally, the unions are demanding the repeal of the four Labour Codes, an increase in the minimum

wage for workers to ₹42,000, and a daily wage of ₹700 for 200 days of work under MGNREGA for agricultural labourers. Other major demands raised by the body include complete agricultural loan waivers, ₹25 lakh compensation for families affected by peasant suicides, an explicit rejection of free trade agreements, the withdrawal of the proposed Seed Bill 2025, and a halt to the privatisation of electricity and installation of pre-paid smart meters.

Alcohol ban in Bihar failed to prevent violence against women: NCAER study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Bihar should revoke the ban on alcohol as it failed to prevent violence against women from rising, and anecdotal evidence suggests that legal drinking was substituted by an increase in the consumption of illicit drugs and alcohol, a research paper by economic think tank National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) has said.

The paper, titled 'Macro Perspective of Bihar's Development Achievements, Unfinished Agenda, and the Way Forward', further said that the reinstatement of the liquor excise tax to the pre-ban levels would increase the state's own revenues by 14-15 per cent and decrease spending on enforcement and anti-smuggling operations.

The paper, prepared by a team of economists led by Ratna Sahay and presented at the 'India Policy Forum', noted that the primary motivations for introducing the ban in April 2016 were the belief that alcohol consumption was a significant contributor to domestic violence and that household resources



could be better spent on more productive activities.

It added that women's groups and activists strongly supported the prohibition, arguing that it would lead to a decrease in alcohol-related abuse. "We now have sufficient data and information to assess if the ban was effective. Reported crimes against women in Bihar have not declined following the introduction of prohibition. Instead, total reported crimes against women increased over the post-2016 period," it said.

According to the paper, overall, the available evidence does not indicate a broad-based reduction in crimes against women following prohibition.

At the same time, it pointed

out that the prohibition regime has been accompanied by concerns regarding the expansion of the illicit liquor trade, increased enforcement challenges and corruption, and the growing use of alternative intoxicants, including illicit drugs.

"In tandem, there was a significant rise in illegal liquor trade leading to higher alcohol consumption, increased crime and corruption, and an increase in the use of alternative additive substances, such as illicit drugs," it said.

The paper said the economic consequences of the liquor ban were significant; before the ban, excise duty on alcohol was an important source of state revenues (14

per cent in the 3 years leading up to the ban).

"Moreover, enforcement expenditures on monitoring and anti-smuggling operations increased, widening the fiscal deficit further," it said, adding that, in short, the introduction of the ban has not served its intended purpose; instead, it has coincided with higher violence against women, loss of state revenues, and higher expenditures.

The authors of the paper said they believe it's time to reintroduce the excise duty at historical levels to achieve 14 per cent of state revenues.

The restoration of law and order was critical in Bihar's post-2005 recovery.

Following decades of corrupt practices, violent crime, and weak administrative capacity, the state government under Nitish Kumar began to emphasise policing, criminal prosecution, judicial reforms, and administrative accountability. Bihar's development is central to India's ambition of Viksit Bharat to become a developed economy by 2047, given that Bihar has the second largest population and remains the poorest state.

Railways approves merger of Chitrakutdham Karwi-Kanpur, Pratapgarh-Kanpur Express trains

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Indian Railways has approved the merger of the 14109/14110 Chitrakutdham Karwi-Kanpur Central Express and 14123/14124 Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratapgarh-Chitrakutdham Karwi Express. The merged service will operate as the 14123/14124 Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratapgarh-Chitrakutdham Karwi Express. The merger is aimed at improving direct rail connectivity between Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratapgarh and Chitrakutdham Karwi, while strengthening connectivity between major destinations including Kanpur Central, the Lucknow region and Chitrakoot.

Passenger capacity to double to 24 coaches

As part of the merger, the combined train service will have an enhanced passenger carrying capacity. The existing 12-coach composition will be increased to 24 coaches, significantly augmenting seating capacity and helping address overcrowding and rising passenger demand on the Kanpur-Pratapgarh section.

The enhanced capacity is



expected to provide greater convenience to passengers travelling between Kanpur, Banda, Chitrakoot, Pratapgarh and other stations along the route.

Direct connectivity between Chitrakoot and Pratapgarh-Lucknow region

The merged service will provide improved direct rail connectivity between Chitrakoot and the Lucknow-Pratapgarh region. Passengers will have a more convenient travel option without the need to change trains at Kanpur Central.

The service is expected to particularly benefit passengers travelling for pilgrimage, tourism, education, employment and other purposes

between the important religious and regional centres of Chitrakoot, Pratapgarh and the Lucknow region.

Major stations to remain connected

The merged service will continue to serve several important stations along the route, including Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratapgarh, Chhibila, Maa Chandrika Devi Dham Antu, Amethi, Gauriganj, Kashimpur, Jais, Fursatganj, Rae Bareilly, Harchandpur, Bachhrawan, Nigohan, Lucknow, Manak Nagar, Unnao and Kanpur Central.

Beyond Kanpur Central, the train will serve Bhimsen, Kathara Road, Patara, Ghatampur, Hamirpur Road, Yamuna South Bank, Bharwa

Sumerpur, Ragaul, Banda, Atarra and Chitrakutdham Karwi.

The merger is expected to ease overcrowding on the Kanpur-Pratapgarh section and provide improved connectivity for passengers across the region.

The new merged service will strengthen passenger connectivity across Uttar Pradesh and improve accessibility to important religious and cultural destinations, while also supporting more efficient utilisation of railway resources.

The service will create a seamless rail corridor connecting Bundelkhand and Awadh, providing direct connectivity from Chitrakoot to Lucknow, the state capital, as well as to Pratapgarh.

The augmentation of the train composition from 12 to 24 coaches will double passenger carrying capacity at an affordable price and substantially improve rail services on the corridor.

Besides facilitating pilgrimage and tourism to Chitrakoot, the service is expected to strengthen connectivity for education, healthcare, employment, business and administrative travel.

Young, aspiring innovator wins Gold at IRIS National Fair

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Shaurya Patel won Gold for the second consecutive year at the Initiative for Research and Innovation in STEM (IRIS) National Fair 2025-26 Cohort 2, India's leading platform for school-level scientific research and innovation.

A class X student at Adani International School, Ahmedabad, Shaurya Patel's research aimed at developing a unified, longitudinal metabolic that integrates clinical biomarkers with lifestyle and wellness factors to improve early risk stratification and AI enabled preventive intervention.

This year 120 projects by 152 students were evaluated at the IRIS National Fair.

Having won the Gold at the IRIS in 2025 as well, Shaurya represented India at the prestigious Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) 2025 which was held in Columbus Ohio, USA, in May 2025.

BEML Q1 loss narrows to ₹27 cr

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

State-owned BEML has narrowed its consolidated net loss to ₹27.01 crore in June quarter FY27, helped by increased revenues.

It had reported a net loss of ₹64.11 crore in the first quarter of preceding 2025-26 fiscal, the company said in an exchange filing on Friday.

During the quarter, the total income increased to ₹821.19 crore from ₹642.56 crore a year ago.

In a separate statement, BEML said it secured orders worth ₹1,181 crore in Q1 FY27 as compared to ₹435 crore a year ago.

With this, BEML's total order book stood at ₹16,284 crore as on June 30, 2026 providing strong revenue visibility and a robust foundation for sustained growth.

"Our performance in the first quarter reflects the strength of our business fundamentals and the progress we are making in our transformation journey.



Our focus remains on sharper execution, operational excellence, technology-led innovation and building deeper capabilities across our strategic business verticals.

"With a strong pipeline of opportunities and a growing presence across domestic and international markets, we remain confident of creating sustainable, long-term value for all our stakeholders," CMD Shantanu Roy said.

BEML serves India's core sectors like power, infrastructure, rail, metro, defence, aerospace and mining.

IAF band to perform at Param Yodha Sthal at India Gate complex

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Indian Air Force band (IAF) is set to perform at the Param Yodha Sthal adjoining the National War Memorial on Sunday, ahead of the 80th Independence Day.

According to officials, the "spectacular display" aims to foster national pride through public engagement while celebrating 150 years of 'Vande Mataram'.

A team of musicians comprising 32 airmen and eight Agniveervayu, including three women, will perform at the venue, the defence ministry said.

"The musicians are set to take the stage with a performance that promises to be an unforgettable experience for the audience. With a repertoire of patriotic and soulful numbers, the IAF Band is set to raise the patriotic spirit with an energetic

performance," it said.

The band is scheduled to perform for an hour at the Public Plaza, Param Yodha Sthal, in the India Gate complex on August 9 evening, the officials said.

The principal conductor of the event will be Master Warrant Officer A Srihari, who will be assisted by Junior Warrant Officer Moon Dekha, Warrant Officer Abhishek Paul, and Sergeant NT Singh, they said.



India ships 18 tonnes of makhana to Australia



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India has shipped 18 tonnes of Mithila *makhana* by sea route from Bihar to Australia, the commerce ministry said on Saturday.

The consignment, sourced from *makhana* growers of Darbhanga district, is expected to strengthen the international presence of Bihar's flagship GI product while creating enhanced income opportunities for farmers through

export-led market access.

Bihar accounts for nearly 85 per cent of India's *Makhana* production.

To further strengthen the sector, a separate HS (harmonised system) Code for *makhana* came into effect from July 2025.

During 2025-26, India exported more than 7,000 metric tonnes of *makhana* and value-added *makhana* products to over 20 international destinations, including the USA, the Middle East and Africa.



Assam forest Minister Jayanta Mallabaruah participates in the Special Rhino Protection Force (SRPF) Raising Day celebration at Bagori Range of Kaziranga National Park and also paid tribute to Late Constable Partha Morang, one of SRPF's first personnel who lost his life in the line of duty and felicitated his bereaved wife

Technology, transparency key for urban cooperative banks to stay competitive: Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Union Minister Amit Shah on Saturday urged urban cooperative banks to embrace technology, ensure transparency and modernise customer services to remain competitive. Speaking at the inauguration of the new office of the National Urban Cooperative Finance and Development Corporation Limited (NUCFDC) in Mumbai, he said ensuring the prosperity of customers will help the banks achieve growth.

The Union Home and Cooperation Minister also urged all urban cooperative banks to join the NUCFDC, the

apex umbrella organisation for the sector, within a year.

The NUCFDC serves as the umbrella organisation and self-regulatory body for Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) in India. Approved by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and headquartered in Mumbai, it provides capital, IT infrastructure and liquidity support to strengthen the cooperative banking sector.

"Our responsibility is to ensure that all banks become members of this organisation (NUCFDC), introduce technology, bring transparency, train staff, provide modern services to customers and sustain in the competition," he said.

Shah said that of the nearly



1,400 urban cooperative banks in the country, around 690 have already become members of the organisation, and added that the remaining UCBs should also become part of it within a year. Making India prosperous requires fostering prosperity among its people, the minister said, adding that

the capital market alone cannot fulfil this objective.

"We need to create a new system of self-employment simultaneously. Urban cooperative banks can do it and it is our responsibility," he said.

Shah said the idea of "cooperation to prosperity" does not merely mean making banks

financially stronger, but ensuring that customers become prosperous as well, which in turn would help banks grow.

Speaking about the RBI's role, Shah said there was a need to bridge the perception gap between the central bank and urban cooperative banks.

"The Reserve Bank has a different outlook towards urban cooperative banks, and our urban banks also look at the RBI differently. We have to come out of it," he said.

Drawing on his five-year experience as cooperation minister, Shah said the RBI had always extended proactive support whenever the cooperation sector approached it with confidence.

No charges for UPI users, vast majority of transactions to remain free for merchants as well: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Government on Saturday categorically stated that consumers and small merchants will continue to enjoy free Unified Payments Interface (UPI) services to allay fears regarding the levy of charges on such transactions following the passage of a Bill to amend the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.

However, nominal Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) for merchants will be applicable as and when charges are introduced.

"They will apply only to a limited set of merchant transactions, above a certain threshold, at a nominal rate,

far lower than debit or credit card MDRs," the finance ministry said in a statement.

The statement comes two days after the Lok Sabha passed a Bill to amend the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, which authorises the government to permit banks and other service providers to levy charges on payments through UPI and other notified electronic payment modes.

"Once the Parliament passes the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which proposes to amend Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, the 'UPI and Services Steering Committee' headed by NPCI will decide on the

MDR, if any," it said.

The recent amendment to the Payment and Settlement Systems Act (PSS Act) has generated a debate, with some misinterpreting it as a move to impose charges on ordinary users, it said, adding, in reality, the amendment is an enabling provision designed to ensure UPI's long-term sustainability, technological advancement, and resilience against emerging risks.

Explaining the rationale, the statement said, with exponential transaction volumes, the system requires significant and continuous upgrades in cybersecurity, fraud prevention, and infrastructure.

The statement further said



that it was required for market expansion and self-sustainability.

It is necessary to increase competition by encouraging more companies to expand their operations, which requires a self-sustaining

revenue model, it said.

Reliance on subsidies alone is not viable for the next wave of growth, it said, adding that a balanced framework is required to ensure that UPI remains robust, inclusive, and future-ready.

Addressing concerns on narratives like external influences may be driving policy changes, the statement said, this is unfounded, completely false and misleading.

If external pressure had been a factor, the government would not have introduced UPI in 2016 or made it free of charge for both merchants as well as citizens since January 2020 and ensured that it became the world's largest real time interoperable payment system, it said.

The amendment should therefore be viewed in the context of the Government's broader objective of ensuring that India's digital payment infrastructure remains sustainable, competitive, innov-

ative and capable of serving the country's rapidly expanding digital economy, it said.

UPI is India's own innovation, and the government remains committed to keeping it free for citizens while ensuring its sustainability for decades to come, it added. India now stands at the cusp of the next wave of digital payments growth, it said, adding that to expand UPI further into rural and semi-urban areas and maintain competitiveness, the UPI ecosystem must be self-sustainable and affordable.

The amendment to the PSS Act is a forward-looking step to ensure that UPI continues to thrive as a secure, affordable, inclusive, and globally recog-

nised payment system, it said.

Since its launch in 2016-17, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has transformed India's digital economy into one of the most inclusive and dynamic payment ecosystems in the world, it said.

What began as a bold experiment in real-time, interoperable payments has now become a global benchmark, processing billions of transactions every month and reaching deep into the fabric of everyday life, it said.

Today, it said, UPI has grown into the world's largest real-time payment system, processing 2,366 crore transactions worth ₹29.9 lakh crore in July 2026 alone.

FROM THE

WORLD

COLOMBIA

President backs oil, gas sector

Colombian President Abelerdo de la Espriella pledged to revive the country's oil and gas sector, restore state-owned energy company Ecopetrol and strengthen the electricity system, arguing that energy security would be a cornerstone of his administration. De la Espriella said Colombia would pursue an energy transition – a shift away from oil, gas and coal toward cleaner energy sources such as wind and solar power – but insisted it must not come at the expense of the country's oil and gas industry. "I believe in the energy transition," he said. "But that transition must be built from strength, not from weakness, from self-sufficiency and not from dependence." The remarks reinforce a sharp shift from former President Gustavo Petro, who stopped awarding new oil and gas sector.

USA

Ex-Air Force official barred

The Pentagon revoked former US Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall's "eligibility" to access classified information and barred him from holding "any sensitive position," alleging Friday that he disclosed sensitive information about Air Force One's capabilities to the media. It follows reporting last month, including from The New York Times, on security concerns over the new, Qatari-gifted Air Force One, including that it lacked the advanced antimissile capabilities of its forebear. The plane underwent a \$400 million retrofit and upgrade, has been put into service domestically and President Donald Trump also flew on it to Turkiye last month. The Times reported that the president made the switch at the urging of the Secret Service and that the newer plane lacked some of the advanced security features of the older Air Force One aircraft.

IS-linked group kills 13 in Congo

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Kinshasa

Militants affiliated with the Islamic State group attacked a village in Congo near the border with Uganda early on Saturday, killing at least 13 people and burning and looting homes, a local civil society group said. The attacks occurred in the village of Banana Ecole, a suburb of the territorial capital of Mambasa. Marie-Noelle Anotane, the head of the New Civil Society of Congo/Mambasa, and Sylvain Andali, a local resident, said that the Allied Democratic Forces, or ADF, were behind the violence. Both said the militants used known ADF tactics.



"This death toll of 13 civilians is only provisional because most residents aren't responding to calls, and searches are continuing in other surrounding villages," said Anotane. The attacks forced people to choose between staying or risking travel to other parts of the province where the fastest-spreading Ebola outbreak in history rages. "I decided to leave Mambasa for Bunia because I fear repeated attacks by the

ADF," said Andali. "Many of my neighbours have already died, and I must protect my life and the lives of my family." The ADF, which has roots in Uganda and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group in 2019, has long operated in the border region. It is one of numerous groups operating in Congo, routinely attacking civilians. In July 2025, the group killed 66 people in eastern Congo in what the United Nations called a "bloodbath." The country also faces attacks from roughly 100 other rebel groups, most prominently the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group, which has seized key cities in the eastern region.



Participants spray water on each others during a water gun festival in Seoul, South Korea

AP

Drone explodes near gas pipeline close to Romanian border: Radev

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Sofia

A drone entered Bulgarian airspace on Saturday and exploded close to an international gas pipeline shortly after crossing the border from Romania. Bulgaria's Prime Minister Rumen Radev said the drone exploded just after 5 am about 100 metres inside Bulgarian territory. It was not detected or identified while flying through either Romanian or Bulgarian airspace. "There are no casualties or damage to buildings. The area has been cordoned off. We continue to monitor the situation," Radev said following a Government emergency meeting. Radev said the unmanned aerial vehicle exploded around 200 metres from a Romanian compressor station, and about 1 kilometre from Bulgaria's compressor station on the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline. "We will continue to monitor the situation and strengthen surveillance. Following this



Bulgaria's Prime Minister Rumen Radev

incident, we will also redeploy border police anti-drone detection and countermeasure capabilities from the border with Turkey to the border with Romania," Radev said. It was unclear where the drone had originated or whether it was linked to Russia or Ukraine. The incident would be raised at a meeting of the North Atlantic Council early next week, Bulgaria's Defence Minister Dimitar Stoyanov said.

Need for accountability if people harmed in peaceful protest in PoK: UN

YOSHITA SINGH ■ United Nations

Expressing concern over the security situation in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), a spokesperson for UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has highlighted the need for accountability for actions against people engaging in peaceful protest. The Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) region has been witnessing protests for several months over 12 contentious refugee seats, triggering a crackdown by security forces. The protests intensified with elections to the so-called assembly in the region starting at the end of last month amid allegations of widespread rigging. According to the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), a collective of activist groups, more than 40 people were killed during the first phase of polls on July 27.



Besides, it claims that some 400 protesters have been killed since the first week of June. Both claims have been dismissed by the Pakistan Government. The JAAC has alleged that the establishment manoeuvres the 12 refugee seats to install a prime minister of its choosing to lead the so-called Government in PoK.

India maintains that the entire Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh are its integral and inalienable parts. New Delhi also asserts that Pakistan has been in "illegal and forcible occupation" of parts of these Union Territories. "The Secretary-General supports the work of his High Commissioner, and we certainly

hope that the pleas made by Mr Turk will be listened to," Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General Farhan Haq said here on Friday in response to a question . The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk had on July 17 expressed concern about the recent developments in PoK, calling for impartial and thorough investigation into the deaths of protesters, Pakistan's ban of the JAAC and arrest of its leaders. Turk had 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 last month had said. On whether there will be calls for accountability from the authorities on the crackdown on protestors in the PoK, Haq said on Friday, "It's important that all authorities everywhere allow for peaceful protest, and certainly that is the

case here." "If there have been people harmed for engaging in peaceful protest, there needs to be accountability for that," Haq added. Turk's statement had specifically said that dozens of people, mostly protesters but also law enforcement personnel, were reportedly killed since June ahead of the vote for the Legislative Assembly starting July 27. The High Commissioner had 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 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. There are 53

seats in the so-called PoK legislative assembly - 45 are directly elected, while eight are reserved for women, technocrats and clerics. Elections for the 45 seats are being held in three phases, with the first phase on July 27 and the second phase on August 2 marred by violent protests. The Shehbaz Sharif Government has dismissed the JAAC claim of over 400 deaths since June first week saying the figure is "overly exaggerated." "The number of the people killed in protests is in two digits. Moreover, security personnel have also lost their lives," PM's adviser Rana Sanaullah said in a TV statement recently. India on August 4 described the so-called local body elections in PoK a "complete farce," asserting that such "hollow" exercises cannot hide the ground reality in the region.

Senators head for exits without meeting Trump's demands for voting bill

LISA MASCAROAP
■ Washington

Senators headed for the exits in the predawn hours Saturday, ending for now a crushing standoff over President Donald Trump's demands that they stay in session to pass a strict proof-of-citizenship voting bill before the summer recess. While they wrapped up many key priorities in the overnight votes, advancing Trump's SAVE America Act was not among them. Instead, Republican senators who had brought the chamber to a standstill spoke to Trump late in the evening about an alternative plan:



Senators Mike Lee

They would try again to approve elements of the voting bill as part of a broader GOP budget package to fund the Iran war and replenish the Pentagon when they return to work in September. "Obviously, with the president at his direction,

this is what he wants to do," said Senator Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, the GOP budget committee chairman, flanked by Senators Mike Lee, R-Utah, and Rick Scott, R-Fla., after their phone call with the president. The sudden wind-down after weeks of Trump ramping up his demands shows just how deeply the president is able to reach into the halls of Congress to set the agenda or disrupt it, the executive directing the affairs of the legislative branch. While Trump is often seen as a de facto speaker of the House, he is invariably trying his hand at mastering the Senate.

Senate approves funding bill to avoid a shutdown before election

KEVIN FREKING/LISA MASCARO
■ Washington

The Senate in an overnight vote on Saturday approved a short-term measure to fund federal agencies into early December and avoid a potentially chaotic Government shutdown during the middle of campaign season. The late-summer action on a funding fix is unusual. Normally, Congress waits until the final days or hours of a funding deadline to pass short-term patches, but this time senators acted nearly two months before the end of the fiscal year on September 30. The 90-6 vote showed lawmakers are still smarting from the two historic shutdowns that occurred this past year and want to avoid another before voters go to the polls. Senate Majority Leader John Thune wanted the funding dealt with before senators went home for the next five weeks to focus on their reelection campaigns and



Senate Majority Leader John Thune

other matters. It got caught up with other issues that pushed votes into the night, but the bill had broad bipartisan support. The House will also have to approve the measure when members return from their August recess before it can go to President Donald Trump's desk for his signature.

Thai high school shooting death toll rises to 8 after girl dies

JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI
■ Bangkok

A school girl died from critical wounds on Saturday after a student opened fire at a high school and his home outside Bangkok the day before, bringing the death toll from the attack to at least eight people. The 14-year-old opened fire at around 10 am Friday at Debsirin Nonthaburi School in Nonthaburi province northwest of the Thai capital before apparently taking his own life. He also appeared to have killed his two grandparents at his family home earlier in the morning, officials said. The girl, 12, died



after hospitalisation, the Health Ministry said. The school had posted a message on Facebook Friday seeking blood donations for two stu-

dents, including the girl, who was in seventh grade. Fourteen people remain hospitalised, of whom seven remain in critical condition

Saturday, according to Thailand's Health Ministry. Most of those wounded were between 12 and 14 years old. Relatives claimed the bodies of eight people from Bangkok's Institute of Forensic Medicine: five school staff, the accused shooter, and his grandparents. Emergency workers brought out a coffin and loaded it onto an ambulance, which will transport the bodies to their hometowns for funeral rites. The young girl's body is still to be released. Wiroon Supasingsiripreecha, head of the institute, said most of the victims suffered a single fatal gunshot wound to a

vital area, including the chest or head. He said the gunshot wound found on the alleged shooter was consistent with the weapon he had used. More detailed forensic findings, including toxicology results, are expected later, he said. Officials said the gun, described as small and compact, was legally registered to the boy's grandfather. There were reports that the boy, who lived with his grandparents, had shown signs of stress connected to school, although some of his relatives told Thai media that they were unaware of any troubles he might have been facing. The co-educational state school, which has about 3,000 students enrolled aged 12 to 18, said all classes would be suspended between August 10-14 and school staff were instructed to work from home during that time.

A few mourners laid flowers Saturday morning at the school's gate, where a few police officers could be seen. Charin Siriananchai brought his two sons, ages 9 and 6, to pay their respects. He said while his sons do not study here, he lives in the neighbourhood and drives past this school almost every day, often stopping to allow students to cross the road.

Pakistan-Turkiye-Saudi defence deal could reduce US role in West Asia

M ZULQERNAIN ■ Lahore

The trilateral defence pact signed by Pakistan, Turkiye and Saudi Arabia could significantly reduce the United States' strategic role in West Asia, according to some Pakistan-based defence analysts. The three countries on Friday signed a joint defence agreement under which an attack against one of them will be treated as an attack against all of them, amid increasing security concerns in the wake of escalating tensions in West Asia. Defence analyst Abdullah Hameed Gul, son of a former ISI chief, said the pact has emerged against the backdrop of growing doubts in the Gulf region about the United States' ability to provide security guarantees to regional allies. "The US had 27 military bases in the Gulf countries, and 17 of them were destroyed by Iran during the recent US-Iran

war. This led people in the region to question whether the Americans could actually protect them. That created the need for such an agreement," Gul said. With this pact, said Gul, America's "role in the region has been minimised – or is effectively over." "Qatar and Kuwait will soon also join similar agreements with Pakistan," said Gul, adding that Gulf countries had realised that Israel, rather than Iran, posed a greater security challenge to them. Foreign affairs expert Muhammad Mehdi said the pact has altered perceptions of Pakistan's position in the international arena. "Pakistan's standing in the world has changed. The world now sees Pakistan as having a major role to play in the Middle East and Central Asia. With Turkiye joining the three-nation arrangement, Pakistan will also be viewed differently in Europe," he said.



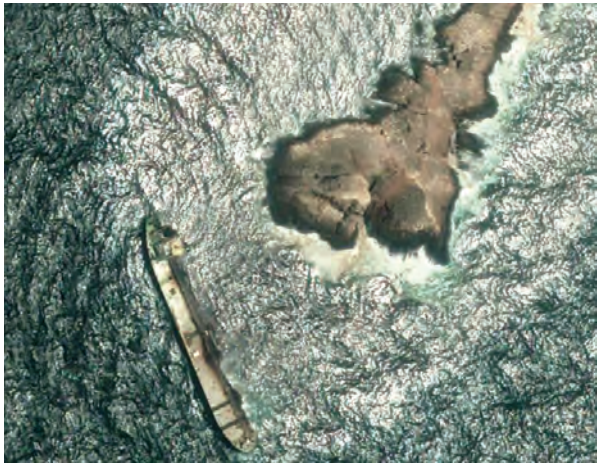


Satellite images show leaking tanker sinking off Oman

SARAH EL DEEB ■ Beirut

Satellite images reviewed by *The Associated Press* show that a sanctioned tanker carrying nearly a million barrels of oil appears to be increasingly submerged in water off the coast of Oman, where it has been grounded for weeks, while leaking ever more oil into the surrounding sea.

Crude oil has been leaking and spreading quickly in recent days from the tanker Caroline Bezengi, reaching the shores of Qibliyah Island off Oman's southwest coast. By August 7, the spill was covering nearly 800 square km (309 square miles), according to Wim Zwijnenburg, an environmental expert for



PAX, a Dutch organisation that tracks environment in conflicts. Greenpeace Germany has also said the

spill is drastically increasing, indicating deterioration of the vessel's condition. "Satellite imagery analysis

suggests that the oil spill covered 45 square km (17 square miles) up until July 26. By August 2, it had expanded to around 150 square km (58 square miles), and imagery from August 4 indicates that it now extends across roughly 600 square km (232 square miles)," said Nina Noelle, an environmental disaster expert at Greenpeace Germany.

The affected area is part of the Arabian Sea reserve, a marine protected area and host to wildlife, including endangered petrels and the rare Arabian Sea humpback whale.

The 247-metre (899-foot) Caroline Bezengi has been grounded off Qibliyah Island

in southwest Oman for two months. The tanker's crew reported an explosion on board on June 8, according to media reports.

It is believed to be part of Russia's "shadow fleet" and has been sanctioned by the British Government and the European Union for carrying Russian oil.

It had left the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, in Russia, in May, according to geospatial data tracking company SynMax Maritime.

The vessel's owners are believed to be Shanghai-based, according to Greenpeace and other reports. Satellite images dated August 5 show an oil sheen trailing northeast of

the tanker, aground off the rocky coastline, and surrounding the island.

In the images, the vessel appears to be partly submerged, noticeably more so than on a photo taken on July 31. July and August are peak monsoon season in the area.

On Thursday, the Government of Oman said it was responding to the incident. It was not immediately clear if the authorities have reached the tanker and whether there are efforts to salvage it or stop the leaking crude oil. The statement published by the Oman News Agency said authorities were observing the area through satellite images, field surveys and technical models. (AP)

Gurcharan Das awarded Lifetime Libertarian Award



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kathmandu

Renowned author Gurcharan Das was on Saturday awarded the prestigious Lifetime Libertarian Award for his "lasting contribution to the advancement of liberty", becoming the first Indian writer to receive the honour.

The award was presented by freedom advocacy network Liberty International at its 40th World Conference in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Accepting the award, the 82-year-old author said he was "delighted" to receive the honour and spoke about the idea of "inner freedom", which he described as "India's unique contribution to the Western idea of liberalism".

"How often does life reward you for something you believe right in your bones?" he said. The award caps a

career spent shaping India's economic and moral discourse in defence of freedom, entrepreneurship, and individual responsibility - themes that have run through Das' work for over three decades, according to a statement issued by the organisers. The cornerstone of Das' literary contribution is a quartet on the four classical Indian aims of life that he interprets as a "timeless ideal of human flourishing in the contemporary world", the statement said.

These include India Unbound, The Difficulty of Being Good, Kama: The Riddle of Desire and Another Sort of Freedom. He has also written a novel, a book of essays and an anthology of plays. Das has also edited a 17-volume economic and business history of India for Penguin.

Lebanon authorities detain Bashar Assad-era officer

BASSEM MROUE ■ Beirut

Lebanese authorities detained a former senior Syrian military officer who commanded an army division under ousted President Bashar Assad and might hand him over to Damascus on alleged crimes that he committed, Lebanese judicial and security officials said on Saturday.

After the fall of Assad's Government in December 2024 when Syrian insurgent groups captured his seat of power in Damascus, a number of military and security officers fled to neighbouring Lebanon, where some still remain.

If Major General Adel Issa is sent to his home country, it will be the first time Beirut has handed back an Assad-era official.

Since the ouster, dozens of members of Assad's security agencies blamed for atrocities have been arrested and put on trial in



Syria. The officials said Issa, who once commanded Syria's military 17th Division, went to the Syrian embassy in Beirut on Friday for some paperwork. Embassy officials

contacted Lebanon's prosecutor's office to tell them that Issa is wanted in Syria, the officials said. The Lebanese Public Prosecutor's Office dispatched a team from the Central Criminal Investigation Department and arrested Issa and transferred him to the Beirut Palace of Justice detention centre, said the officials.

The four judicial and two security officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media about the matter.

Issa told his interrogators in Beirut that he crossed to Lebanon illegally after Assad's fall but denied all accusations. The officials added that since Issa was detained on Friday, which is the weekend in Syria, Lebanese judicial authorities will wait for Syrian authorities to send his charge sheet on Monday.

The officials said Lebanese authorities will study the case and decide

on whether they will hand over Issa to Syrian authorities next week.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor, said after commanding the Syrian army's 17th Division, Issa was moved in 2015 to command ground forces in the eastern province of Deir el-Zour that borders Iraq and that he retired in late 2016.

Syria's conflict, which began with anti-Government protests in March 2011 before turning into a civil war, left half a million people dead and over 1 million wounded. Assad and his powerful younger brother, Maher, fled to Russia following the ouster.

Assad's cousin Atef Najib, who was blamed for atrocities that helped trigger the uprising in Syria 15 years ago, was put on trial in April. The ruling in his case is expected next week. (AP)

TWO DRONES SPOTTED FLYING OVER GERMAN MILITARY BASE

STEFANIE DAZIO ■ Berlin

Two drones were spotted flying over a German military base in the western part of the country earlier this week, just two days after a drone carrying explosives was found at a key cargo airport, the German Armed Forces said on Saturday.

Security surveillance at the Bundeswehr base in Mechernich reported seeing two drones around 10 pm on Thursday, according to a statement from the German Joint Force Command. The sightings were confirmed and military police forces deployed to the site.

The military said the Euskirchen police department has opened an investigation. The police did not immediately respond to a request for comment and the military did not release additional details.

Recently, drone sightings over civilian and cargo airports have been more widely reported. Last year, mysterious drone flights over the airspace of European Union member countries alarmed the public and authorities, and also prompted the cancellation of dozens of flights that stranded thousands of passengers. Thursday's sighting of the two drones came after a drone with explosives was found at Germany's Leipzig/Halle Airport shortly before midnight on Tuesday. The device was defused but German Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt said the incident posed a "new quality of danger."

Leipzig/Halle is a major hub for international freight and for providing support to Ukraine. The planes that regularly use it include Ukrainian Antonov transport aircraft.

It is also home to NATO's Strategic Airlift International Solution, or SALIS, which is currently operational almost every day in delivering equipment to NATO battle groups along its eastern flank from Finland to Romania and supporting EU and alliance nation missions. (AP)

Ukraine honours collector of souls killed while recovering war dead

VOLODYMYR YURCHUK/EFREM LUKATSKY ■ Kyiv

Ukraine paid tribute on Saturday to Oleksiy Yukov, a volunteer who spent more than two decades recovering the bodies of civilians and soldiers - many of them Russian - killed by war. He was 40.

An Orthodox Christian service was held at the Cathedral of Saint Volodymyr, in central Kyiv, where thousands of people gathered to pay their respects following his death in a landmine explosion during a recovery mission on August 5.

Yukov founded the Platsdarm ("bridgehead") organisation because he believed all the dead require a proper burial. He became known as a "collector of souls." Yukov, from the



war-torn Donbas region, was a martial arts instructor. He began recovering the dead as a teenager after encountering the remains of Soviet and Russian soldiers from World War II.

Platsdarm's volunteers go into fields and forests, among ruins and across territory, where the ground is often mined. Yukov suffered leg injuries and lost an eye in a mine blast

in 2022. Still recovering from those injuries, he returned to the fields.

In a social media post last month, Yukov described the landscape in which he worked.

"Remote mines, shelling, drones - everything is against you. But you go and do everything to ensure that every soul returns home," he said.

He also addressed those who believed Russian bodies should simply be left behind: "When they say: 'Let them rot,' I do not agree. This is how we fight for every soul."

Yukov spoke of his work in religious terms, saying a body was a soul waiting to go home.

"This is action," he wrote. "Action every day in the fields, in the forest belts, among the ruins, where your life can end at any moment." (AP)



Police officers check the mooring lines of a vessel ahead of Typhoon Dolphin in Beilun District of Ningbo City, China

AP

US reviews proposal to end 60-day grace period for foreign workers to find new jobs

SAGAR KULKARNI ■ Washington

The US is reviewing a proposal to eliminate the 60-day window for foreign workers holding non-immigrant visas to find employment after a job loss, a move that may force them to leave the country immediately.

A proposal from the Department of Homeland Security is currently under review at the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB), according to its website.

If finalised, the proposed regulation would eliminate the 60-day grace period accorded to certain principal non-immigrants and their dependents if the principal's employment ceases before their period of stay expires.

Further details of the proposal are not immediately known. The 60-day grace period was introduced in 2017 to allow foreign workers and their dependents to stay in the US while searching for new employment after a job loss.

Immigration consultants said the Department of Homeland Security has the discretion to



shorten or refuse the grace period, but has rarely done so. The rule applies to E-1, E-2, E-3, H-1B, H-1B1, L-1, O-1 and TN categories of non-immigrant visa holders and their dependents.

The grace period also allows US employers to more easily facilitate employment changes for existing or newly recruited non-immigrant workers. If the 60-day grace period is eliminated, foreign nationals whose employment ceases prematurely and their dependents would generally be required to depart the US immediately. (PTT)

Iran's leaders believe a victory is within reach, and that time is on their side

JOSEPH KRAUSS/AMIR-HUSSEIN RADJY ■ Cairo

The Strait of Hormuz is, by some accounts, named for a Zoroastrian deity destined to emerge victorious after a 9,000-year standoff with an adversary.

Iran's leaders feel their own victory is at hand and won't require the same epic patience.

They are betting that military pressure will ultimately force the United States to accept their control over the crucial waterway for global energy - and that time is on their side. They know about the diminishing stockpiles of key US weapons such as advanced missile interceptors. They know the war is deeply unpopular with Americans. They know that as long as the strait is largely closed,

the price of gas and other goods will stay high ahead of US congressional elections in November. They know that trying to open it by force would be costly and may require American ground troops. They know their Houthi allies in Yemen could widen the war and disrupt another major trade route.

By that logic, US President Donald Trump has no choice but to capitulate. But Iran's strategy carries risks. Trump points to strikes that have decimated Iran's top leadership, navy and air force. He alternates between threatening escalation and saying talks are going well. Iran's own economy has been battered, in part because of a US blockade.

Iranians rose up in mass protests just months ago and could do so again. And Iran's leaders need only look to how Trump's "short-term



excursion" to the Middle East has bogged down to be reminded that wars rarely turn out as expected.

Iran says it is close to reaching a deal with Oman to manage the strait, which runs between the two countries. But it would be conditioned on the US lifting its blockade, so even if there are no direct negotiations - as Iran says - Trump would have to approve.

It's unclear whether the deal would allow Iran to charge fees. But it would formalise its control over what had been an open international waterway before the war, one that carried a fifth of the world's traded oil and gas.

Abdolreza Davari, an analyst who once advised former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said Iran's effective control of the strait has given it leverage with the US and

regional countries that can help guarantee its security.

"More than revenue from the strait, Iran wants to confirm its management and sovereignty over the strait," he said by phone from Tehran. Formal control over even part of the strait would be a clear win for Iran and a loss for the US, which has yet to accomplish some of its various and shifting goals in the war.

It would also deal a blow to global norms on freedom of navigation and set a precedent that much of the world would find disturbing - that nations can shut down trade choke points at will.

China, which buys oil from Iran and has influence over it, said as recently as May that "normal and safe passage" through the strait should be restored. (AP)

BRIEFLY

Brighton sends Buonanotte on loan to Spanish club Elche



Brighton midfielder Facundo Buonanotte will play for Spanish team Elche this season in what is the Argentinian playmaker's fourth loan spell since joining the Premier League club in January 2023.

The 21-year-old Buonanotte, who signed with Brighton from Rosario Central, was loaned to Leicester for the 2024-25 season and split last season between Chelsea and Leeds.

Buonanotte played regularly for Leicester but had trouble getting minutes at both Chelsea and Leeds.

"Facundo is a talented young player who has continued to develop since joining the club," Brighton sporting director Mike Cave said in the team's announcement late Friday.

"This loan gives him the opportunity to play regular football in one of Europe's top leagues."

Elche finished 15th in La Liga last season.

"We believe this move will provide an excellent environment for him to gain further experience, and we'll continue to monitor his progress closely throughout the season," Cave said. Buonanotte made his Argentina senior team debut in 2023 against Indonesia and played again for La Albiceleste in 2024 against El Salvador.

'Ayush wanted Shi Yu Qi in World Championships draw'



Ayush Shetty's daunting World Championships opener against China's world Number1 Shi Yu Qi could work in the Indian's favour as his opponent is not currently at his best and the home crowd could give the youngster an edge, feels his coach Sagar Chopda.

Shetty, who announced himself on the big stage with a runner-up finish at the Badminton Asia Championships earlier this year, faces the toughest opening-round assignment against Shi Yu Qi, who outclassed the Indian in the continental final in straight games. "If you look at it, it's probably one of the toughest draws anybody could get. But playing Shi Yu Qi, Ayush has nothing to lose," Chopda, the head coach at the Centre for Badminton Excellence (CBE) in Bengaluru, formerly known as the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy (PPBA), told PTI Videos.

Davis Cup: Korea to host India on hard courts in Qualifier Round 2



South Korea have opted to host India on hard courts at the Olympic Tennis Centre in Seoul on September 18-19 in the Davis Cup Qualifiers Round 2, setting up a potentially intriguing tie between two closely matched teams.

India are currently ranked 19th and Korea 16th in the Davis Cup standings, while the Koreans hold a slender 6-5 advantage in their head-to-head record. India will pick their squad on August 10 for the crucial tie. The last meeting between the two sides came a decade ago, when India prevailed 4-1 in Chandigarh in 2016 in an Asia/Oceania Group 1 tie played on grass. Korea players are traditionally more comfortable on hard courts and that's why India had deliberately opted for grass when the teams last met. India earned their place in the second round with a dramatic 3-2 victory over the Netherlands in Bengaluru in February. Dhakshinewar Suresh was the hero, winning both his singles rubbers and partnering Yuki Bhambri to victory in the doubles.

Win at all costs: 1975 heroes urge to end WC wait

MONA PARTHSARATHI
■ New Delhi

India's 1975 World Cup heroes Ashok Kumar and Aslam Sher Khan have urged the national hockey team to put the country ahead of individual ambitions, saying an uncompromising desire to win for the nation can help end the 51-year wait for a World Cup medal.

India has won the men's World Cup only once, in Kuala Lumpur in 1975 when they defeated Pakistan 2-1 in the final. Ashok scored the winning goal in the 51st minute to script one of the most memorable moments in Indian hockey history. His message to the current side is simple. "I would say to the Indian team: keep in mind that victory or defeat will not be yours, but your country's. This will automatically inspire you. This 51-year wait has been too long, and now

we have to win a medal," Ashok said while talking to PTI. The World Cup is scheduled to be held in the Netherlands and Belgium from August 15 to 30.

Aslam, who scored the important equaliser in the semi-final against Malaysia, believes the current players need to approach the World Cup with the same sense of patriotism that drove the 1975 team. "When we entered the World Cup, our country was like our mother, and we played with that same passion. You too must enter the field with the thought that we are playing for our mother, and our passion must be such that we will win at all costs," he said.

The two former players know what it takes to recover from disappointment. Ashok and Aslam were part of the Indian teams that won bronze at the 1971 World Cup and silver in 1973.



Missing out on the title in those tournaments only intensified their hunger for gold in 1975. "When we lost the semi-final in 1971, coach Balbir Singh Sr cried so much that it was difficult to calm him down. Such was the passion to win for the country," Ashok recalled. "When we won silver in 1973, there was huge disappointment of missing out on gold. I even wondered how I would show these medals to my father and uncle. I would feel ashamed to return home

World Cups," Aslam said.

There was also an unwavering belief within the squad. "We never considered ourselves inferior to anyone, whether it was Germany, Holland or Australia. This confidence is what is needed, and with this passion, no one can stop this team," said Aslam, who later represented India at the 1976 Montreal Olympics.

For Aslam, the 1975 campaign was also a test of personal resilience.

Having spent most of the tournament on the sidelines, he said the frustration of not getting an opportunity became almost unbearable.

"I spent most of the time away. I sat there, and the personal agony was so intense that I would tear up every night before going to sleep for not getting a chance to play," he recalled. That frustration eventually turned into a defining moment.

ESFI announces contingent for BRICS Esports title

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Esports Federation of India (ESFI) on Saturday announced the final contingents for the BRICS Esports Championship 2026 to be held in Moscow, and the Global Esports Games (GEG26) in Los Angeles following the conclusion of the National Esports Championships (NESC).

The National Esports Championships, which concluded on August 5, served as India's official selection tournament, bringing together the country's top esports athletes to earn the right to represent the nation at two of the world's premier multi-title esports events. For the BRICS Esports Championship, scheduled to be held from September 9-15 at the VK Play Arena in Moscow, organised by the Russian Esports Federation, India will field a two-member TEKKEN 8 contingent. National champion Arsalan Wani secured his berth after emerging victo-



rious at the NESC BRICS qualifier and will join Gurashish Singh, who was the winner of NESC 2026 (Asian Games) as part of the Team India.

Shubham finished as the first runner-up, while Ashish claimed the second runner-up position in the qualifier.

Meanwhile, India finalised its roster for the Global Esports Games 2026 in Los Angeles, organised by the Global Esports Federation (GEF). Team India will compete across multiple esports titles spanning PC, console, and mobile platforms, further strengthening

national competitions, including the upcoming Asian Games," said Lokesh Suji, General Secretary, Esports Federation of India and vice president, Asian Esports Federation (AESF).

At the Global Esports Games, India will compete in Counter-Strike 2, where Diamond Dogs secured the national berth after defeating Friedup Gaming in the grand final. The squad comprises Ritesh Sarda (Captain), Hrishikesh Shenoy, Gourav Panwar, Garvit Nehra and Yash Kumar Singh.

In Clash Royale (Open), Devershi Kumar Kulhara emerged champion, followed by Heer Chawda and Mohamed Rizal S, while Shagun Srivastava won the women's category ahead of Nikita S. India's NBA 2K contingent will feature Shubham Sharma (Captain), Ashutosh Kumar and Sumer Singh Sandhu, while the Rocket League team comprises Abhai Ponna (Captain), Jayanth Engineer and Aditeya Amol Srivastav.

Ashish opens India's medal account with javelin silver at World U20 Championships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Eugene (USA)

Ashish Yadav won a silver in the men's javelin throw event to open India's medal account, while national senior record holder Pooja Singh qualified for the women's high jump final at the World Athletics U20 Championships here.

Yadav's third round throw of 74.09m fetched him the silver medal while T Dharanidharan, the other Indian in the fray in the men's javelin throw finals on Friday, finished sixth with 72.35m. Yadav's effort was 40cm short of his personal best of 74.49m, which he had recorded during the Indian Open Throws Competition in Patiala in March. The 19-year-old Yadav became the second Indian, after two-time Olympic medallist Neeraj Chopra, to win a silver in the event. Chopra had won gold and set the still-standing world junior record of 86.48m in the 2016 edition in Poland. The gold medal

went to South Africa's Jan-Hendrik Heymans who sent his spear to 80.50m, the season's U20 world lead, in his sixth and final attempt. Dominica's Addison James clinched the bronze medal with a throw of 73.89m.

Mohammed Ashfaq, who broke the U20 national record during the men's 400m first round heat race a day earlier with a time of 45.81 seconds, finished eighth, clocking 46.20 seconds in the finals.

American Jayden Deleon won the gold with a championships record time of 44.47 seconds, while compatriot Quincy Wilson took the silver with 44.62 seconds. South Africa's Leendert Koekemoer clinched the bronze with a time of 44.96 seconds.

Pooja qualified for the final round in the women's high jump event, sailing over 1.79m on day three of the meet.

All 14 athletes across two qualification groups, who managed to clear 1.79m, were awarded places in the



final. The 19-year-old Pooja holds the national senior record of 1.93m.

In the men's long jump, both Shahnavaz Khan and Jithin Arjuna made it to the finals after the qualification round. Shahnavaz finished fourth in qualification Group A and fifth overall with a 7.73m jump in his third and final attempt. Jithin also advanced, finishing 12th overall and taking the last available spot, with his

7.57m jump in his third and final attempt.

Italy's Daniele Inzoli was the only athlete across the two qualification groups to breach the automatic qualification distance of 8m with an effort of 8.15m.

Poonam, however, failed to qualify for the women's javelin final after finishing eighth in her qualification group and 13th overall with the day's best throw of 48.81m.

Former gymnasts write to ministry, seek inquiry in alleged irregularities in SOM roster

AMIT KUMAR DAS
■ New Delhi

Former international gymnasts, including multiple-time national champion Rakesh Patra, have urged the Sports Ministry to order an independent inquiry into alleged procedural irregularities in the Gymnastics Federation of India's preparation of the Sportspersons of Outstanding Merit (SOM) roster. In separate letters to Sports Secretary Hari Ranjan Rao on July 30, Patra and another former international gymnast made similar allegations that the federation's actions violated provisions of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 and the

rules framed under it.

"I respectfully request the Ministry to order an independent inquiry into the process adopted by the Gymnastics Federation of India for preparation of the Roster of Sportspersons of Outstanding Merit," Patra, a multiple-time national champion who represented India at five World Championships besides the Commonwealth and Asian Games, appealed in the letter in possession of PTI. "Call for all records, including notifications, applications received, scrutiny reports, minutes of meetings, evaluation criteria and all documents relating to the preparation of the roster. "Examine whether the



process adopted by GFI is in conformity with the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 and the Rules made thereunder. Take appropriate disciplinary actions against the GFI if the process is found to be unfair and illegal," he added.

Patra also requested the Ministry to "direct the GFI to

Sportspersons of Outstanding Merit (SOM) in violation of the National Sports Governance Act." One of the allegations related to what the complainants described as the backdating of notifications and an arbitrary extension of the application deadline.

"The President, GFI issued a first notification dated 30th April 2026 seeking candidature within 60 days ie by 29th June 2026," the former gymnasts wrote. "However just a few days before the original deadline the contents of that notification were changed with the deadline updated to 2nd July 2026 without any other changes to the letter including its date and reference number.

"This appears to be a classic case of backdating of official notifications seriously compromising the integrity of the process." GFI President Sudhir Mital said: "Because names had not come by that time and it says at least minimum 40 — 20 men, 20 women, so had extended it."

However, an email sent by GFI to its affiliated state associations on June 30 stated: "We are delighted to receive an overwhelming response to the applications. given the encouraging interest, we have decided to extend the application deadline until 2 July 2026, 10 pm (22:00 hrs), allowing more applicants the opportunity to register." Another point

raised by the complaints was "Ineligible sportspersons included in the Roaster."

According to the complaints, two athletes — Ashish Kumar and Aditya Rana — were included in the published SOM roster despite being ineligible under the National Sports Governance Rules, 2026.

The complaints said that both the gymnasts had competed in the Senior Artistic Gymnastics National Championships held in Bhubaneswar earlier this year, whereas the rules require applicants to have retired from competitive sport for at least one year before applying. Documents of the Senior Artistic Gymnastics National

Championships show that Railways' Aditya Rana and Uttar Pradesh's Ashish Kumar featured in the competition held in Bhubaneswar from April 25 to May 3 this year.

"We have asked him because he (Ashish) said that he didn't play. So, we asked him to give us a response and explain. So, we are waiting for it. And if he (Ashish) has played, then he will be out of it," GFI president Mital said.

The complaints also alleged that the federation invited applications for SOM roster without first publishing regulations or criteria governing the selection process, leaving it open to arbitrary decision-making.

Padikkal seals spot with stylish hundred as Jaiswal, Pant fail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Colombo

Devdutt Padikkal assured his spot in India's playing eleven for the opening Test with a stylish century on the second day of the warm-up match against Sri Lanka Cricket XI, while seasoned Rishabh Pant and his understudy Dhruv Jurel failed to make the most of favourable batting conditions.

At the end of the second day, India finished its first innings at 357 for eight in 90 overs. Padikkal's artistic unbeaten 142 and a gritty 63 (retired out) by veteran Ravindra Jadeja were the highlights, while Manav Suthar (41) also impressed with the bat on his maiden overseas international assignment.

The pitch had become much easier to bat on, and Padikkal took full advantage, hitting 18 delectable boundaries to show that he is ready to reclaim his rightful place now that first-choice Number 3 batter Sai Sudharsan has been ruled out of the series after failing to recover in time from his big-toe injury.

With Yashasvi Jaiswal (0) falling off the second delivery of the day while attempting to flash at left-arm seamer Vishwa Fernando (1/42), KL Rahul (40) and Padikkal added 96 for the second wicket. While Rahul played himself in, the sinewy Padikkal was a treat to watch, opening with a couple of cover drives off fuller deliveries before unleashing some delectable cuts both in front of and behind point. He was particularly severe on right arm pacer Ishitha Wijesundara who was hit for multiple boundaries. Anything short from pacers or spinners was pulled with a lot of disdain. The famous 'Nataraja Shot' also came out of closet against the pacers.

The hallmark of Padikkal's batting was the extra second he almost seems to have while deciding on his execution. His defence has also got tighter and the footwork against spinners has been exemplary. A pull shot off off-spinner Ramesh Mendis brought up his ton in just 121 balls before he was asked to retire. By then, he had added 72 runs for the third wicket with Jadeja, who again showed why he is a valuable asset as a middle order batter overseas even as his spin bowling stocks has depleted quite considerably.

The biggest disappointment of the day was certainly Rishabh Pant (2) who once again played an indiscreet shot against off-spinner Mendis (2/77) trying to hit him against the turn over long-on. The leading edge flew to long-off. If Pant perished going for the offensive, Dhruv Jurel's (1) technical ineptness against off-spinner was exposed once again after the South Africa Test series.

A forward defensive prod and the inside edge flew to short square leg fielder who caught it on second attempt. But Manav Suthar, who is impressing everyone with his heart and commitment joined Jadeja as the duo added 76 to steady the ship. Towards the end, Padikkal once again came out to bat and added four more boundaries to his quota of 14 in company of Saransh Jain (22 retired out).

BCCI secretary Saikia to visit COE to take stock of injury crisis



KUSHAN SARKAR ■ New Delhi

Concerned with the spate of injuries that has rocked Indian team of late, BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia will be meeting Head Of Cricket of National Cricket Academy (NCA) VVS Laxman on Sunday to take a stock of the rehabilitation management programme at the Centre of Excellence (COE).

India will be missing the services of Jasprit Bumrah (knee swelling), B Sai Sudharsan (left foot big toe), Harshit Rana (hamstring), Nitish Kumar Reddy (hamstring) and Washington Sundar (quadriceps) due to various injuries. Akash Deep (lower back stress fracture) has been out for the longest time since Bengal's Ranji Trophy semi-final defeat.

Adding to that, white ball experts Hardik Pandya (quadriceps), Varun Chakravarthy (hamstring) and Prince Yadav (hamstring) are also at the Centre of Excellence where the Sports Science team is overworked without a figure head since the resignation of Nitin Patel in early 2025. Right now the challenge is to get all these players back on the park.

Sudharsan and Bumrah were enlisted in the squad

subject to fitness but COE's team of experts decided to exercise caution looking at the bigger picture.

"Yes, secretary Saikia will be in Bengaluru to take a stock of the situation along with VVS Laxman. There is a meeting scheduled between the two. It is not known whether head coach of national team Gautam Gambhir or chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar will join online or not.

It will be interesting if both Saikia and Laxman can front up and answer a few media queries with so many conjectures," a BCCI source in the know told PTI on conditions of anonymity. There are also rumours that COE and the current selection committee has always not been in sync with regards to the injury management timelines and some of the players being released before they ticked all the boxes. The issue of Harshit Rana reaching England after being distinctly overweight has not gone down well with the selection committee.

Similarly, the selection committee was initially made to believe that Bumrah and Sudarshan will be at least available for one of the two Test matches. (PTI)

IPL can fit into Australia's schedule, but we'll have to balance it: McDonald

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Sydney

Australia head coach Andrew McDonald has said the IPL can "fit" into his team's hectic international schedule, but the demands on his Test stars mean they will have to "balance it out" with workload management, particularly for the fast bowlers.

Beginning with a two-Test home series against Bangladesh on Thursday, Australia are set to play 20 Tests and 14 white-ball matches across next 12 months, with the 2027 IPL window expected to fall between a five-Test tour of India and the World Test Championship final, before the Ashes in England.

"I know people will start talking about the IPL and filling that time and what

does that look like," McDonald told Cricinfo.

"I've said this before, the IPL is part of our management plan for a lot of our players, and to expose our best players in what I believe is the best competition in terms of T20 cricket has its performance benefits as well. You've just got to balance that out."

Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Cameron Green and Travis Head are currently on IPL lists, while Josh Inglis is also part of the Lucknow Super Giants. Australia's experience in 2023, when Cummins, Starc and Head skipped the IPL before playing key roles in the WTC final and Ashes, could influence decisions this time around. McDonald stressed that managing Australia's



fast bowlers will be a priority, with the team aiming to preserve their fitness through a gruelling run of Test cricket. "I know that people say, country versus franchise and all that, but the important part of this period is that we're allowing our fast bowlers to reset their body, get everything in order to give themselves the best opportunity across the 20 or 21 games that everyone talks about," McDonald said.

"What I will say about our players is they make good decisions across the journey, and that's underpinned by discussions with the medical

Sai Sudharsan ruled out of Sri Lanka Test series

KUSHAN SARKAR
■ New Delhi

Talented top order batter B Sai Sudharsan was on Saturday ruled out of the two-Test series against Sri Lanka after failing to recover from a big toe injury sustained during the India A tour of the island nation last month. Sudharsan, who scored two tons in two 'A' Test matches, was hit during the second game against Sri Lanka 'A' and since then has been in rehabilitation at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru.

"Sai Sudharsan has been ruled out of the upcoming Test series against Sri Lanka. Doctors have advised more time for biological healing. Significant improvement, but not yet sufficient for a safe return to Test cricket," according to the update



from the Sports Science team which is monitoring the rehabilitation of the

player. The Sports Science team has informed the management and national selection committee. The medical cum fitness advice for Sudharsan reads: "Rehabilitation, strength & conditioning, and cricket-specific loads should be increased gradually and under close monitoring. The cautious approach is aimed at reducing the risk of recurrence or further complications and protecting long-term performance."

In his absence, Devdutt Padikkal, who scored a century in the practice game, will be the new number three batter. It will be interesting to see who replaces Sudharsan in the squad.

Burly Mumbai veteran Sarfaraz Khan seems to be a decent choice but an important member of the coaching staff as well as selection committee doesn't have a lot of faith in him. (PTI)

Shillong Lajong FC go top of Group E with win over Mumbai FC



TONY DAS
■ Shillong

Shillong Lajong FC cruised to a commanding 5-0 win over Mumbai FC in a Group E fixture of the 135th IndianOil Durand Cup, played here at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on Saturday, August 8, 2026, a result that considerably brightens their prospects of reaching the quarter-finals.

Everbrighton Sana led the scoring with a brace, while Abhay Gurung, Tremiki Lamurong and Figo Syndai were also on the scoresheet as the hosts made light work of their visitors from Mumbai in front of raucous home crowd.

The result takes Shillong Lajong to the top of Group E with six points from two matches, having won both of their opening fixtures. Langsing FC sit second on four points, with Nongkseh SS&CC third on one point. Mumbai FC, without a point from their two outings so far, remain bottom of the table.

Shillong Lajong set the tone early, with Phrangki Buam and Jota causing regular problems down the flanks. The hosts' first real opportunity arrived in the seventh minute, Ephraim Lalremtuanga's free kick finding Arthur Pangaro at the far post for a thumping header that Mumbai's defence somehow scrambled clear. A similar chance went unconverted in the 14th minute, captain Kenstar Kharshong failing to make proper contact despite being unmarked from another set piece.

Mumbai struggled to find any rhythm against Lajong's relentless pressing, their first shot on target not arriving until the 23rd minute, when Mandeep Singh Multani's effort lacked the power to trouble goalkeeper Siwel Rymbai.

At the other end, Mumbai custodian Yasheel Manish Shah was called upon repeatedly, denying Sana's low drive in the 16th minute and then producing a goal-line save to keep out Arthur Pangaro's close-range effort in the 25th. Lamlallian tested him again from distance in the 36th minute, though Mumbai did threaten briefly of their own accord soon after, Mohammad

Arsenal lands Guimaraes from Newcastle ahead of Premier League title defense

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

Arsenal completed the signing of Brazil midfielder Bruno Guimaraes from Newcastle on Saturday.

The Premier League champion paid a reported 75 million pounds (\$101 million) for Guimaraes, who signed a long-term deal at the Emirates. "I'm very excited," Guimaraes said. "I'm at the point of my life where I need a challenge like this. I want to win trophies, I want to make history and I think I'm in the right place to do it."

Newcastle did not want to



sell its captain, but the 28-year-old Guimaraes had told the club he wanted to leave.

Newcastle signed Guimaraes from Ligue 1 club Lyon in January 2022 and he swiftly established himself as a talisman for the team, as

well as one of the most influential midfielders in the Premier League.

Guimaraes helped Newcastle win the English League Cup in 2025 - the club's first major domestic trophy in 70 years - and also

played a pivotal role in the team twice qualifying for the Champions League.

He joins an Arsenal mid-field anchored by Declan Rice as the team bids for back-to-back Premier League titles. Guimaraes has made 48 appearances for Brazil, including at the recent World Cup. He won a gold medal at the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. "It's massive what I have done so far, but I want more. I want to win for Arsenal. I want to win more trophies in my career, and I think I'm in the right place, at my peak at 28 years old," Guimaraes said.

Jemimah ruled out of Hundred with injury

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India batter Jemimah Rodrigues has been ruled out of ongoing Hundred after suffering a hamstring injury while playing for Southern Brave, putting her participation in the upcoming Women's T20 Asia Cup in doubt. Southern Brave confirmed on Saturday that Rodrigues has been replaced by Australian all-rounder Charlie Knott for the remainder of tournament.

"We can confirm that due to an injury suffered by Jemimah, we've signed Knott as our injury replacement for remainder of The Hundred. Wishing



you a speedy recovery, Jemi," Southern Brave posted on X. The 25-year-old has scored 143 runs with a highest of 42 not out in six innings for the Brave at an average of 35.75 and a strike rate of 131.19.

The Women's T20 Asia Cup begins on August 28, with India starting their campaign against Thailand on August 30.

Jorge Messi, Lionel Messi's father and longtime agent, dies at 68

RAMIRO BARREIRO
■ Montevideo (Uruguay)

Jorge Messi, the father of soccer star and Argentina captain Lionel Messi, died Saturday at a hospital in the central Argentina city of Rosario. He was 68.

The Rosario-based Club Atletico Newell's Old Boys announced his death in a social media post that said he had undergone treatment in recent months for an unspecified illness. The post described him as "the pillar and the person who, with vision, rigor and affection, supported the career of the best player of all time, alongside his wife, Celia Cuccittini."

The South American Football Confederation, CON-

MEBOL, in a statement also offered its condolences "with respect and affection for Lionel." Messi led Argentina to a runner-up finish in this year's World Cup. In the team's first match, against Algeria, he was visibly emotional after scoring the first of his three goals. He said later that he wept for "a reason unrelated to sports."

"I went through some difficult, complicated days," he said. "I am grateful to the delegation, to all my teammates, because they were always by my side wishing me strength so that I would be OK."

Media reports at the time outraged the Messi family, which days later released a statement confirming that



"Jorge is experiencing a health issue," without specifying the nature of his condition. "A person's health and the peace of mind of their loved ones should not be the subject of speculation or irresponsible media interest," according to the statement, which also expressed "discomfort at the lack of sensitivity, respect and scru-

ples with which some people have treated a strictly private and family matter."

Jorge Messi was a chemical technician and worked as a steelworker. He played soccer as a midfielder and reached the youth ranks of Newell's Old Boys but had to abandon the sport to complete his mandatory military service in Argentina.

He played a fundamental role in his third son's career, serving as his agent and managing his business affairs. He was the one who traveled with a young Messi to Barcelona in the early 2000s for the trial that would open the doors to La Masia, the Catalan club's youth academy. Lionel Messi made his professional debut in 2005 and went on to win eight Ballon d'Or awards. He led Argentina to the 2022 World Cup title.

"My dad was always by my side," Lionel Messi said in a 2007 interview with Radio del Plata. "Sometimes I would lock myself in my room to cry when we arrived in Barcelona, or my dad would do the same without

me seeing him, or thinking I didn't see him. We pretended we were both OK, but we weren't. My dad even asked me what I wanted to do when we were feeling down, if I wanted to stay or go back, and I wanted to stay, and he stayed with me."

His father negotiated the contracts with Barca and later his transfers to Paris Saint-Germain and Inter Miami, while also managing the use of his famous son's image rights and his numerous investments in real estate, hotels, and restaurants. In 2016, father and son were convicted in the Spanish courts on tax evasion charges, but avoided prison because sentence was less than two years. (AP)

Mumbai struggled to find any rhythm against Lajong's relentless pressing, their first shot on target not arriving until the 23rd minute, when Mandeep Singh Multani's effort lacked the power to trouble goalkeeper Siwel Rymbai.

At the other end, Mumbai custodian Yasheel Manish Shah was called upon repeatedly, denying Sana's low drive in the 16th minute and then producing a goal-line save to keep out Arthur Pangaro's close-range effort in the 25th. Lamlallian tested him again from distance in the 36th minute, though Mumbai did threaten briefly of their own accord soon after, Mohammad

Mumbai tried to respond, Afzar Noorani curling narrowly over from the right side of the box in the 56th minute, but any momentum was extinguished when Dhruvmil Pandya's heavy touch gifted possession back to Lajong in the 64th minute. Sana punched without hesitation, diving into the box and finishing crisply for his second of the afternoon and his side's fourth.

Yasheel continued to stand firm where he could, denying Kharshong from close range in the 69th minute and Joedson from almost point-blank distance in the 79th, sparing his side further embarrassment on both occasions.

The hands behind the Tiranga

Discover the unsung heroes who weave our pride this Independence Day

SAKSHI PRIYA

Before Independence Day celebrations begin, quiet workshops echo with sewing machines. Unsung artisans ground our national pride through their sweat and devotion. Flag making is a deeply emotional legacy passed through generations. Seeing the Tiranga fly reminds us that everyday heroes wove our freedom. We shall celebrate our handloom, not just one but every time.

"We feel very proud that we make the Tiranga for our country," says Abdul Malik. His family has been turning patriotism into a physical reality since 1962. Situated right in the chaotic and bustling lanes of Sadar Bazaar is his legendary shop, **Gaffar Bhai Jhande Wale**. This spot is a landmark so iconic that locals simply ask delivery drivers to drop them at the flag maker's door. I sat down with him to uncover how a plain piece of cloth transforms into the beating heart of **140 crore Indians**. Join me as we explore the rich history and the vital importance of understanding the devoted hands that craft our ultimate symbol of freedom.



HISTORIC MILESTONES

"Earlier, ordinary people were not allowed to hoist the national flag at their homes". "After Naveen Jindal's Supreme Court case, people got permission". "We made the flag that was installed at the Supreme Court". "Later, we received an order to make a 120 foot by 90 foot national flag for the Ambala border".

A MESSAGE TO EVERY INDIAN
INDIA IS A DEMOCRATIC AND INDEPENDENT COUNTRY OF 140 CRORE PEOPLE. "I HOPE EVERYONE CONTINUES TO CELEBRATE IT TOGETHER SO THAT THE WHOLE WORLD SEES OUR UNITY". "WE FEEL VERY PROUD THAT OUR COUNTRY IS BEING SERVED BY OUR HANDS". WE SHALL CELEBRATE OUR NATION, NOT JUST ONE BUT EVERY TIME.



THE LEGACY OF FLAG UNCLE

"The most emotional moment for me was when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the *Har Ghar Tiranga* Abhiyan. We made 1.5 lakh flags in a single day. The Prime Minister's Office honoured my late father with the title 'Flag Uncle'. He passed away on December 29, 2025. That is a moment we will always cherish."

- Abdul Malik

Precision and Monsoon Hurdles

"To make the Tiranga, the first thing is to maintain the correct size and pay special attention to the Ashoka Chakra". "The biggest challenge is arranging the cloth". "During the rainy season, it becomes very difficult because the cloth comes from Surat, and floods affect supplies". "That is why we prepare our work five to six months in advance."

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

A night of Kuchipudi

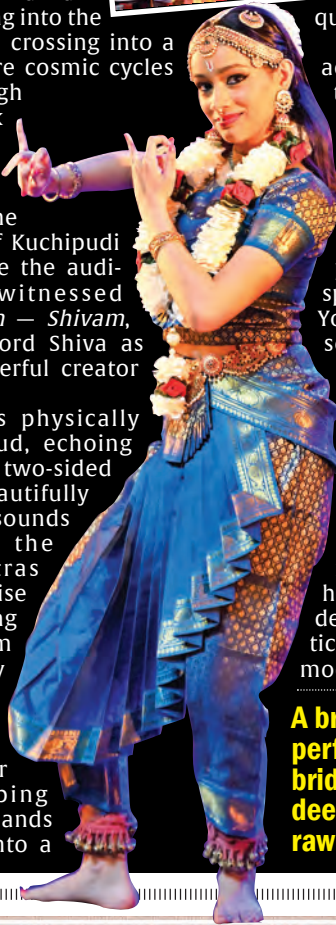


The 30th Parampara Series opened with a beautiful Kuchipudi performance by Raja Radha Reddy Troupe

TEAM VIVA

Raja Radha Reddy and Kaushalya Reddy have been at this since 1976, nearly five decades now, building up Natya Tarangini into what it is today, a real stronghold for Indian performing art. All of those years of cultural preservation set the ideal stage for the milestone 30th Parampara Series, which just opened at Kamani Auditorium. Walking into the grand hall felt like crossing into a sacred space where cosmic cycles took shape through rhythmic footwork and expressive eyes. The Raja Radha Reddy Troupe brought the ancient essence of Kuchipudi vividly alive before the audience. We first witnessed *Mahapranadeepam — Shivam*, which explored Lord Shiva as Nataraja, the powerful creator and destroyer.

The performers physically embodied the loud, echoing strikes of Shiva's two-sided *damru*. They beautifully captured the 14 sounds associated with the *Maheshwara Sutras* through their precise movements. Seeing them perform live completely absorbed the entire room. Every heavy stomp on the wooden floor and wide sweeping motion of their hands drew us further into a



quiet spiritual trance. It felt exactly like watching the actual heartbeat of the universe taking shape right in front of us. The intense cosmic energy softened as Radha Reddy took the stage in *Muddu Krishna*, portraying the devoted Naagpatni. Her performance conveyed profound sorrow, pleading with Lord Krishna to spare her serpent husband Kaliya. You could almost feel the poisoned lake trembling as Krishna gracefully departed the serpent's hood, restoring purity to the water. Reddy ended the piece with a joyous outpouring of song and dance, radiating genuine relief. The evening offered an unforgettable journey through Indian mythology grounded in raw human emotion that five decades of dedicated artistic practice can successfully achieve on a modern stage.

A breathtaking Kuchipudi performance that masterfully bridges cosmic mythology, deep cultural heritage, and raw emotion

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

ART CORNER

The artistic voice of freedom

An exhibition weaving heritage, imagination, and freedom through sixty-five diverse artistic voices

SAKSHI PRIYA

Art anchors human memory to the earth we walk upon while giving flight to our deepest inner thoughts. This balance between grounded heritage and boundless imagination drives *Threads of Freedom 2.0: A Journey from Soil to Soul*. Curated by Saloni Wadhwa for the Akatva Arts Foundation, the current gathering at New Delhi's Visual Art Gallery brings together over sixty-five distinct voices who have been granted absolute liberty to weave their personal and cultural narratives into vivid physical forms.

The collection presents a fascinating look at how Indian artists currently handle different materials to tell their stories. **Shambh Nath Goswami** immediately draws the eye with *Purnima Night Puja*, a large acrylic canvas that captures the warm glow of evening riverbank rituals. Nearby, **Raghu Vyas** showcases



PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



TRUE TO YOU BUT ME CAPTURES IDENTITY, MEMORY AND EMOTION THROUGH FOUR EXPRESSIVE MIXED-MEDIA PORTRAITS, INVITING VIEWERS TO REFLECT ON THE MANY LAYERS OF SELF

classical portraiture skills in his detailed oil painting *Rembrandt*, creating a quiet moment that naturally makes observers pause and look more closely.

The artists manipulate their chosen materials to tell compelling contemporary stories. **Kapil Kapoor** shapes industrial fibre-reinforced polymer into a dynamic sculptural piece titled *Enlightenment*, complementing the traditional canvases hanging nearby.

Pratibha Awasthi invites deep reflection with her lush oil composition *Beyond the Word*, standing in powerful thematic contrast to the urgent environmental commentary found in **Shubhamdeep Kaur's** striking piece *Exploitation of Nature*.

Bold colour palettes dominate the gallery space, especially visible in **Priya Luthra's** expansive acrylic piece *Life* and **Zutshi's** serene oil canvas *Sartal te Pamposh*.

Through these incredibly varied expressions, the exhibition succeeds as a vital cultural space where creators celebrate the enduring ties between personal identity and our shared national roots.



Beyond the label lies the loom

TEAM VIVA

Long before computers mapped the world, Indian weavers were coding complex mathematics on wooden looms. August 7th brought another National Handloom Day. People usually point to the 1905 Swadeshi movement. Let us skip the history lesson this time. We need to look at a raw and brilliant reality happening right now. Too many master creators face a forced silence today, left with almost no stage to stand on.

India holds a massive secret workforce. Over three million people weave our fabrics. Seven out of ten are women working just outside the agricultural fields. Stroll through any luxury boutique in Milan or Paris. You will see huge price tags on beautiful garments. Those shiny labels hide a deep truth. The magic did not begin in a fancy European studio. The genesis of luxury textiles finds its roots far away from glittering runways, tucked deep inside places like Kanchipuram and Bhuj.

Weavers from Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh — names most buyers will never know —



"Sustainable brands have a responsibility to look beyond the fabric and support the people behind it. At Terra Luna, five villages in Gujarat work exclusively with us, allowing artisans to continue their ancestral craft with pride, while building more secure livelihoods and better opportunities for their families."

— Stuti Dhanuka, Sustainable Fashion Entrepreneur & Founder, Terra Luna

are the ones actually holding up the global luxury market. Their quiet, painstaking labour breathes life into the very foundation of global high fashion. These masters hold centuries of complex design blueprints strictly in their memory. They control thread counts by pure instinct to weave complex patterns. No machine on earth can copy this human touch. They are luxury engineers,



DO YOU KNOW?

FRANCE AND ENGLAND ONCE TRIED TO BAN INDIAN CHINTZ

Everyone called it chintz. This incredibly soft Indian cotton burst with bright painted flowers and twisting vines. Weavers along the Coromandel Coast and across Gujarat somehow created something genuinely special. They crafted a cheap tough fabric that kept its vivid colors perfectly. By the late 1600s this exotic cloth had quietly taken over European bedrooms and stuffed their wardrobes full. Watching their customer base vanish left traditional European textile makers deeply terrified. Panicked craftsmen forced governments to intervene. France outright banned printed cotton in 1686, while England passed the strict Calico Acts by 1721. Yet, smugglers kept chintz alive. Manufacturers copied Indian patterns, producing fabrics that echoed its iconic florals. This beautiful textile rewrote global fashion and left a legacy that outlived protectionist decrees. We shall celebrate our handloom, not just one but every time.



Chintz comes from Hindi chint, meaning spotted or variegated



The Pioneer AGENDA

The only way in which a durable peace can be created is by world-wide restoration of international trade
— James Forrestal



The choke points on major maritime routes can hold the global economy hostage. India must look for alternative routes and access to other ports through multimodal transportation networks, including railways, highways and pipelines

BEYOND HORMUZ



M JAMSHED

The current geopolitical map of West Asia at war is also the epicentre of tectonic shifts in the global energy grid. To understand why, it is important to know one key statistic: nearly 80 per cent of global trade by volume moves by sea, but just about five or six choke points on major maritime routes are critical to maintaining a free flow of vessels. These chokepoints are then also the fulcrums of the free flow of international trade, logistics costs, and most importantly, the energy security of economies dependent on imports of oil and gas from specific global supply regions. Disruptions in the Persian Gulf since last February have resulted in oil and gas price increases and global shortages. According to the IMO, there have been 64 incidents impacting trading vessels in the region since the war started, and 6000 marine crews are stranded in and around the strait of Hormuz since July.

At the time this article goes to press, diplomatic negotiating rooms in Doha, Tehran, Muscat and Washington DC will be buzzing with activity to agree to draft language for a negotiated settlement for opening of the Strait of Hormuz and levy of a possible service charge or toll to be paid to Iran and Oman. This would be the first of its kind toll on an international maritime route, which except for certain eventualities is prohibited under the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea. Any such toll of the Hormuz will set a precedent for other countries controlling territorial waters at narrow point (like Gibraltar and the English channel). The service charges at Malacca and the levy of toll in the Turkish straits do not often make headlines but will be examples for the new geopolitical world.

A note on the Strait of Hormuz: this small but critical route supplies over 20 per cent of the global oil and gas requirements, but does not actually have any international waters. At its narrowest point, the strait overlaps with the territorial waters of Iran and Oman. But the crisis has impacted global energy supply lines and sent economies into freefall around the world, especially those dependent on imports of gas and oil from the Persian Gulf. The International Maritime Organisation has written to the United Nations Secretary-General, raising the concern that permitting Iran and Oman to charge tolls or service fees violates international norms, have repercussions for global trade, and undermine the internationally recognised legal framework for international navigation.

The crisis has made it clear that choke points on major maritime routes cannot hold the global economy hostage and necessitate alternatives. The on-going crisis is not only impacting the flow of oil and gas from the Persian Gulf, but also movements towards Europe through the Strait of Bab al Mandeb, the Red Sea, and the Suez

Canal that provide an exit through the Mediterranean to European markets. A similar disruption at the Suez canal will put at risk significant energy flows from Asia to the rest of the world.

Major oil producing nations like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq and Iran must look for alternative routes and access to other ports through multi modal transportation networks, including land bridging by Railways, highways, and laying pipelines. The crisis has demonstrated that business as usual is not enough. The future on the other side of this crisis may not guarantee that the free flow of ships is insured for all times to come.

A few developments indicate that many countries have already started working on options for moving oil and gas that avoid Hormuz, Bab al Mandeb, and the Suez Canal. For Saudi Arabia, exit through the Persian Gulf and the red Sea are both fraught with complications. Despite the existence of a pipeline, choke points continue to impact the flow of vessels to East Asia and Europe. The Bab al Mandeb is no longer a peripheral shipping lane. It connects the

THERE HAVE BEEN 64 INCIDENTS IMPACTING TRADING VESSELS IN THE REGION SINCE THE WAR STARTED, AND 6000 MARINE CREWS ARE STRANDED

THE MAJOR OIL COMPANIES ARE LOOKING AT SHIPPING THE CRUDE OIL FROM THE PORT OF YANBU ON THE EGYPTIAN SUMED PIPELINE

Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean and is one of the most consequential corridors for global trade and energy shipments. Since 2023, shipping has been impacted due to attacks on the ships and the raging conflict around the strait involving Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Houthis, Israel and the USA. There are reports that the Houthis will end up in control of the state of Bab al Mandeb and impose tolls. These further strengthen the argument for alternate routes and modes of transportation for oil and global trade to be explored, worked on, and commissioned on priority.

Pipe lines are being considered in addition to roads and railways. Important crude pipe line developments in the region include an Iraq - Syria - Jordan pipe line, Saudi East West, and UAE to Oman pipeline etc. In a significant development, Iraq and Syria have decided to revive the oil pipeline between Kirkuk in Iraq to the port of Baniyas in Syria on the Mediterranean Sea. This project is likely to take about 30 months as per latest reports and would consist of two pipelines with capacity of 1.5 billion barrels per day to 2.0 billion barrels per day. The effort



Primary bottlenecks and challenges

Despite its immense economic logic, the corridor faces critical headwinds:

GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICT IN WEST ASIA: The prolonged Middle East conflict involving Israel, Gaza, and wider regional tensions has severely strained the diplomatic coordination needed for the Northern Corridor. Specifically, the planned rail link connecting Saudi Arabia through Jordan to Israel's Haifa Port remains physically and diplomatically stalled.

FUNDING GAPS: While individual countries are financing domestic parts, an overarching, multi-billion-dollar joint funding pool or unified consortium for cross-border links has yet to be finalised.

TRADE FRACTURES: Minor friction point developments, such as the imposition of sudden external tariffs or regional politics, occasionally cloud immediate construction timelines.



The crucial need for IMEC

The corridor addresses severe global vulnerabilities and reshapes transcontinental geopolitics.

CIRCUMVENTING GLOBAL TRADE CHOKPOINTS: The protracted Red Sea crisis and Houthi militant attacks highlighted the fragility of relying entirely on the Suez Canal. By using an overland rail spine across the Arabian Peninsula, IMEC creates a vital alternative route.

DRASTIC LOGISTICS OPTIMIZATION: IMEC is projected to slash cargo transportation times by up to 40 per cent and reduce total logistics costs by nearly 30 per cent compared to traditional maritime routes.

BEYOND GOODS-ENERGY & DATA GRIDS: The project is not just for shipping containers; it is engineered to house undersea fiber-optic data pipelines to bypass data chokepoints, alongside cross-border electricity grids and green hydrogen pipelines.

COUNTERING CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI): Backed strongly by India, the US, and the EU, IMEC serves as a high-standard, transparent, and democratic infrastructure alternative to China's debt-heavy BRI.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT: It establishes a "triangular economic architecture"-positioning India as a manufacturing hub, the Gulf as a capital and logistics engine, and Europe as a high-tech consumer market.

to rebuild the pipeline is being supported by the United States, which has already lifted sanctions from Syria. In the meantime, road transportation of oil from Iraq to the Mediterranean Port in Syria, has begun in a big way. Opening a new route avoiding passage through the State of Hormuz, Saudi pipeline line from east to west connects Egyptian pipeline to the Egyptian terminal on the Mediterranean.

Saudi Arabia, the largest oil producer in the region, is bearing the brunt of the ongoing conflict impacting movement of oil and gas through its eastern coast on the Persian gulf. Taking into account the possibility of a prolonged conflict, major Saudi oil companies have started moving

larger quantities of oil on their east west pipeline, facilitating crude oil to be delivered at their red Sea port of Yanbu for transshipment to the Egyptian pipeline. The major oil companies are looking at shipping the crude oil from the port of Yanbu on the Egyptian Sumed pipeline. The pipeline, which is an alternative to the Suez canal, connects the Egyptian terminal of Ain Sokhna on the Gulf of Suez to Sidi Keir on the Mediterranean with a capacity of approximately 2.5 million barrels per day. Once delivered to the Mediterranean terminal, the crude is shipped to Europe, avoiding the use of even the Suez Canal, which is already congested.

An Iran - China- Central Asia - Russia - Europe multimodal route involving ships, railways, roadways, and Iran's southern Chabahar port through INSTC is already commissioned. Iran is also looking at developing its major port at Chabahar for energy supplies of oil and gas to Southern Asia and the far East avoiding the port of Bandar Abbas, which is located in the Persian Gulf. Iran and Pakistan are jointly working to utilise the upcoming Gwadar port and existing Karachi port in Pakistan. Technically, the territorial waters of Iran allow it to move vessels along its entire southern length and enter territorial waters of Pakistan near Gwadar. This would also ensure the safety of the oil and gas vessels which remain restricted for their movements within its territorial waters. The UAE and other gulf countries are joining to commission the GCC rail line connecting UAE with Oman in addition to developing the crude Pipe lines to Fujairah port in Oman. Qatar and Kuwait are also looking at joining the Iraq-Syria pipe line and also utilising the UAE-Oman and Saudi East-West pipe line.

Initiative led by India and US (like IMEC) acquire greater significance now and could be a feasible alternative. However major infrastructure projects to construct missing rail links in Saudi Arabia and Jordan are now urgently needed to operationalise the corridor. Saudi Arabia and Jordan joining the Abraham Accord will enable the corridor to make use of the Israeli port of Haifa. Other developments in this region and as alternatives to choke points elsewhere include a China-Central Asia-Europe rail corridor which also connects to Tehran and the INSTC, the Thailand canal being envisaged to provide an alternative to Malacca, and the southern Mexican rail bridging to avoid the congested Panama canal.

Even as the world builds new routes and a bigger network that can absorb global shocks with its scale, only the silencing of guns over the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea and a regional security architecture can create conditions for stable growth. But while we wait, countries must act to achieve their own energy security and not depend on oil and gas imports from afar for economic sustainability and growth.

The writer is Former Member Railway Board and Senior Adviser The World Bank

India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor: Progress made so far...

Since its high-profile announcement at the G20 Summit in New Delhi in September 2023, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) has progressed via a dual-track reality: rapid diplomatic, bilateral, and digital integration on the Eastern Corridor, contrasted against physical construction slowdowns on the Northern Corridor due to severe regional volatility.

The developmental progress achieved across different structural pillars includes the following:

Institutional and Bilateral Agreements

THE INDIA-UAE FRAMEWORK: Signed in February 2024, this serves as the primary operational blueprint for the Eastern Corridor.

It focuses on standardising customs processes and establishing data sharing protocols between South Asian and Gulf logistics networks.

DEDICATED DIPLOMATIC SPECIAL ENVOYS: Major European participants-specifically France and Italy-appointed dedicated special envoys to drive multilateral coordination and align the corridor with the European Union's Global Gateway initiative.

Physical Port & Railway Infrastructure

THE EASTERN CORRIDOR: India has fast-tracked mega deep-sea port developments, such as the Vadhavan Port in Maharashtra, to augment cargo handling capacity. Key logistical nodes like Mundra Port, Jebel Ali Port (Dubai, UAE), and Haifa Port (Israel) are already active maritime endpoints.

THE NORTHERN CORRIDOR: Broad overland construction of the trans-Arabian railway network started across specific domestic links in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. However, the critical rail link passing through the Jordan-Israel border has experienced major bottlenecks.

Digital and Virtual Integration

THE 'MAITRI' DIGITAL TRADE PLATFORM: To bypass traditional transnational bureaucracy, India and the UAE began developing a virtual trade corridor. This digital clearing ecosystem uses unified documentation systems to expedite customs and container transit times.

DATA & CLEAN ENERGY CORRIDORS: Feasibility studies advanced for laying ultra-high-capacity subsea fiber-optic cables to bypass vulnerable data chokepoints like the Bab al-Mandab. Technical planning has also been initiated to connect electricity grids and green hydrogen pipelines across the Arabian Peninsula.

Recent Structural Adaptations (2026)

Due to prolonged geopolitical friction stakeholders have expanded the initial blueprint into a more resilient "network of corridors":

OMAN INTEGRATION: Oman is increasingly treated as an active maritime gateway to allow cargo ships to bypass the volatile Strait of Hormuz entirely.

RED SEA AND MEDITERRANEAN DIVERSIFICATION: Alternative exits are being evaluated, leveraging Saudi Arabia's Red Sea ports (Jeddah and Neom) as well as newly expanded Mediterranean port configurations to preserve the corridor's viability.

“OBSERVE GOOD FAITH AND JUSTICE
TOWARD ALL NATIONS. CULTIVATE PEACE
AND HARMONY WITH ALL.”
— GEORGE WASHINGTON

The grammar of civilisational diplomacy



MALIKA PANDEY



diplomatic relations remained stable, the relationship lacked strategic momentum.

The past decade marks a clear departure. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has increasingly aligned its civilisational confidence with strategic policy. Indonesia has emerged as one of the strongest examples of this approach, where historical familiarity now reinforces cooperation across defence, maritime security, technology, connectivity and economic engagement. Rather than treating history as ceremonial diplomacy, the relationship has begun to use it as a foundation for contemporary cooperation.

President Prabowo Subianto's remarks during his visit to India captured this transformation. His admiration for Prime Minister Modi's leadership and governance model was notable. Even more striking was his observation that he carried 'Indian DNA.' The remark reflected the confidence of the President of the world's largest muslim-majority nation in acknowledging that Indonesia's historical identity cannot be understood without recognising India's enduring civilisational imprint. Equally significant was his willingness to publicly speak of learning from India's developmental experience. Few diplomatic statements combine historical memory with contemporary political admiration so naturally.

The growing partnership is visible in substance as much as symbolism. Defence coop-

STRATEGIC INTERESTS WILL ALWAYS DRIVE FOREIGN POLICY, BUT THEY ARE OFTEN EASIER TO PURSUE WHEN REINFORCED BY A DEEPER RESERVOIR OF HISTORICAL TRUST

eration through BrahMos has understandably attracted attention, but the relationship today extends well beyond military ties. Agreements on digital public infrastructure, Unified Payments Interface connectivity, maritime cooperation, higher education, resilient supply chains and critical minerals reflect an increasingly comprehensive partnership. Together, they demonstrate that civilisational familiarity is now being translated into practical cooperation.

One agreement deserves particular attention. India and Indonesia have agreed to strengthen cooperation between their Election Commissions, including collaboration on electoral management and Electronic Voting Machines. The irony is difficult to overlook. At a time when sections of India's political opposition continue to question the credibility of EVMs, another democracy responsible for conducting one of the world's largest elections has chosen to deepen institutional cooperation with India. Democracies rarely seek to learn from institutions they fundamentally distrust. International

confidence does not settle domestic political debates, but it does demonstrate that India's democratic institutions continue to command credibility well beyond its borders.

There is another remarkable convergence. Indonesia's Emas Vision 2045 and India's Viksit Bharat 2047 articulate similar ambitions of transforming large, diverse democracies into developed economies within the same historical generation. Their Independence Days fall just two days apart. India celebrates on August 15 and Indonesia on August 17. These parallels do not determine foreign policy, but they reinforce a shared vocabulary of national renewal and long-term development.

The significance of the India-Indonesia relationship, therefore, extends beyond trade figures or defence agreements. It illustrates how civilisational memory can strengthen contemporary diplomacy without becoming captive to nostalgia. Strategic interests will always drive foreign policy, but they are often easier to pursue when reinforced by a deeper reservoir of historical trust. In an increasingly transactional international order, that may prove to be India's distinctive advantage. Civilisations do not replace strategy. They make strategy more durable. The relationship between India and Indonesia suggests that history is most valuable not when it is commemorated, but when it quietly enables the future. That, perhaps, is the true grammar of civilisational diplomacy.

The writer is a public policy expert with years of experience working across key ministries of the Govt of India



DESPITE INHERITANCE, HISTORY DID NOT AUTOMATICALLY TRANSLATE INTO STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP. FOR DECADES, INDIA AND INDONESIA REMAINED CORDIAL BUT DISTANT

Walking towards the Goddess

SUMIT SETH

On a brief visit home to India in the last week of April, Ritu Sharma handed me a signed copy of Shakti: Tales of Power and Promise. It travelled back with me to Panama and waited, as books often do, for the right weekend. When I finally opened it, I read it with genuine pleasure. By the end, I was convinced that the author has written a book more intimate, thoughtful and enduring than its genre usually permits.

Ritu and I have known each other for many years. We trained together for about three and a half months in Mussoorie before our professional paths diverged: hers into the Indian Revenue Service, mine into the Foreign Service. Since then, I have followed her journey from a series of postings that has now brought me to Panama, about as far from a Himalayan shrine as one can reasonably be. That a book about the goddess should reach me here, across oceans, felt in itself like a small reminder of how far these old energies travel.

Shakti is a pilgrimage, though it does not sit neatly within either travel writing or religious study. The author travels across Shakti Peeths, not as an academic cataloguing temple architecture, nor as a tourist collecting impressions, but as a seeker trying to understand what remains alive in these places. That distinction gives the book its quiet

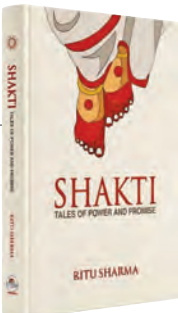
strength. Much of its appeal comes from the person doing the looking. Ritu Sharma is a serving IRS officer, a Chevening Fellow, and a public servant with two decades of experience in government. The administrator and the devotee often appear together in her sentences. One notices the discipline of observation, but also the willingness to be moved. It is this tension that keeps the goddess from becoming abstract.

The journey moves from Vaishno Devi in the northern mountains to Chamundeshwari in the south and Kamakhya in the east. Each chapter reads less like a formal essay than a conversation. The author does not offer a dry history of the shrines. She brings the reader close enough to sit beside her. One of the most memorable passages is her descent into the cave at Kamakhya, where water moves through a fissure in

the rock. She allows the sacred strangeness of the place to work on her instead of reducing it to explanation, and the scene stays with the reader.

Her prose is clear, unhurried and accessible. It carries the weight of Indian mythology lightly enough for newcomers, while remaining respectful of those who approach these shrines with devotion. Even the cover, with the adorned feet of the deity, establishes a note of reverence that the book gradually earns. The author's larger suggestion is made without sermonising: the divine feminine is not merely an inheritance to be preserved, but a reservoir of courage, memory and renewal. In her telling, power and promise are not separate ideas; they flow into one another.

The book is not without its limits. Its warmth sometimes avoids harder questions that could have deepened the inquiry, and readers looking for rigorous comparative scholarship may need to look elsewhere. But that is not the book the author sets out to write. What she offers instead is a way of carrying the sacred forward, not as nostalgia, but as a living presence. Reading her in Panama, far from any shrine, I found that presence unexpectedly persuasive. For a book of this kind, that is no small feat.



Author: Ritu Sharma
Publisher: Kitabwale
Price: ₹450

The book reviewer is a member of Indian Foreign Service and has served as Ambassador of India in Panama

Insider's reckoning with the Indian state

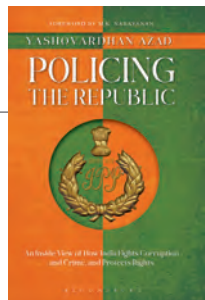
TEAM AGENDA

India's police still function under a law written for a colonial power to control its subjects, not a republic to serve its citizens. The Police Act of 1861, drafted in the aftermath of the 1857 uprising, remains in force in large parts of the country. In 2006, the Supreme Court, ruling on a petition filed a decade earlier by former Uttar Pradesh DGP Prakash Singh, issued seven binding directives ordering every state to insulate its police from political interference - fixed tenures for top officers, security commissions to buffer the force from the government of the day, and a clear separation between investigation and law-and-order duties. Nearly two decades on, compliance across

most states remains cosmetic at best. It is against this backdrop of a reform that never quite arrived that Yashovardhan Azad's new book, Policing the Republic, lands with particular weight.

Published by Bloomsbury India and priced at ₹699. Its subtitle -

gathering, and the broader question of how India's internal security architecture has evolved - and where it has stalled. Azad is billed as making the case that political interference and systemic weakness inside these institutions have eroded the guarantees the Constitution makes to citizens.



Author: Yashovardhan Azad
Publisher: Bloomberg
Price: ₹699



WEEKLY MOON SIGN FORECAST | 9-15 AUGUST
Thoughtful Conversations, Emotional
Reset & Renewed Confidence

Dr Shanker Adawal
Astrologer, Author & Researcher

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

Moon Watch

This week carries a clear turning point around the midweek Amavasya. What begins with discussion may need quiet reflection before action. As the new lunar cycle opens, confidence returns and priorities become easier to see.

Weekly Overview

The week opens with the Moon in Gemini, keeping conversations, planning and movement active. As it enters Cancer, emotions turn inward and home or family matters may need greater attention. Midweek Amavasya favours a pause, review and emotional reset.



Aries (Mesh): Conversations, short journeys or pending discussions may keep the opening days active. Useful information could arrive through an ordinary exchange, so listen before deciding. Midweek turns attention towards home and family, where emotions may run a little deeper. As the weekend approaches, confidence improves and creative plans regain momentum. A lighter approach may solve what pressure could not.

Taurus (Vrishabh): Money matters, family priorities or an important conversation may need practical handling early in the week. Be careful with words, especially if expectations differ. The Cancer Moon then encourages movement, meetings and reconnecting with people. By the weekend, attention settles closer to home. Small improvements in your surroundings or family routine may bring more satisfaction than a major change.



Gemini (Mithun): With the Moon beginning the week in Gemini, ideas move quickly and you may feel ready to address matters that have waited long enough. Avoid promising more than time allows. Midweek brings finances, family responsibilities and personal values into sharper focus. The weekend becomes more active again, supporting communication, short travel and useful contacts. Clear words will save unnecessary explanations later.

Cancer (Karka): The opening days may feel quieter, making rest, unfinished work or private concerns more important than outside activity. Once the Moon enters Cancer, emotional awareness increases and personal priorities become clearer. Midweek Amavasya is better for reassessment than hurried decisions. By the weekend, attention shifts towards finances and family responsibilities. Simpler choices may bring greater peace of mind.



Leo (Simha): Friends, professional networks or future plans may offer useful support early in the week. Midweek becomes more inward-looking, and you may prefer some distance from unnecessary noise. This quieter phase can help settle unfinished thoughts. As the Moon enters Leo towards the weekend, energy and confidence rise noticeably. Use the renewed momentum for what genuinely matters rather than seeking attention everywhere.

Virgo (Kanya): Professional responsibilities remain important during the opening phase, and communication with senior people may require clarity. As the week progresses, friends, colleagues or wider networks can provide useful support. Midweek also favours reviewing longer-term goals. By the weekend, the pace softens and some private time may be necessary. Not every productive week needs a visible result.



Libra (Tula): Learning, travel plans or a broader professional question may occupy your thoughts early in the week. Midweek shifts attention towards career responsibilities and decisions that need both sensitivity and practical judgement. Recognition may come quietly rather than dramatically. By the weekend, friends and professional contacts become more active. A useful connection could develop simply through staying available and open-minded.

Scorpio (Vrishchik): Shared responsibilities, financial commitments or a sensitive personal matter may need careful handling during the opening days. Avoid reaching conclusions before the full picture appears. As the Moon enters Cancer, perspective broadens and learning or travel-related matters feel easier. The weekend brings greater professional focus and visibility. Quiet preparation earlier in the week may prove more valuable than expected.



Sagittarius (Dhanu): Relationships and one-to-one discussions take centre stage early in the week. A direct conversation can be useful, provided both sides are willing to listen. Midweek turns attention towards shared finances, trust or responsibilities that cannot be avoided. By the weekend, the mood becomes lighter and perspective widens. Learning, travel or future planning may restore enthusiasm and direction.

Capricorn (Makar): Routine work, health priorities and practical responsibilities may keep you occupied during the first part of the week. Small corrections will work better than trying to change everything at once. Midweek places greater emphasis on partnerships and cooperation. By the weekend, financial commitments or shared responsibilities deserve closer attention. Keep arrangements clear, especially where more than one person is involved.



Aquarius (Kumbh): Creative interests, children, personal projects or lighter social moments may bring welcome energy early in the week. Midweek turns practical as work routines and health priorities demand better organisation. Do not ignore small tasks simply because larger ideas appear more interesting. By the weekend, relationships come into stronger focus. Cooperation becomes easier when expectations are expressed without unnecessary complications.

Pisces (Meen): Home, family or personal comfort may matter more than usual at the beginning of the week. Some conversations could help settle an old concern. As the Moon moves through Cancer, creativity and emotional warmth increase, making personal connections easier. The weekend shifts attention towards work, routines and health.



“START WITH CHANGING UNHEALTHY
EATING HABITS TO HEALTHY ONES AND
MAKE THEM YOUR FAVORITES”
— SAHARA SANDERS

SHEETALA ASHTAMI

Where devotion rests upon a cool platter



ANIL
RAJPUT

There are Indian festivals in which the kitchen announces celebration through the hiss of hot ghee, the rhythm of grinding stones and the fragrance of food rising from an active stove. Sheetala Ashtami begins with the opposite sound: silence. The fire that normally sustains the household is allowed to rest, the cooking vessels have already completed their work, and the meal is served cool. Known widely as Basoda or Basora, the observance transforms food prepared on the previous day into an offering of devotion. What might appear to be a simple practice of eating yesterday's food is, in fact, a carefully ordered culinary tradition built around restraint, seasonal transition, maternal care and remembrance.

Sheetala Ashtami was observed on Wednesday, 11 March, on the Ashtami tithi of the Krishna Paksha in Chaitra. Since the festival follows Holi, it arrives as winter recedes and the first warmth of summer enters northern and western India. The principal cooking is completed on the preceding day, commonly associated with Sheetala Saptami, after which the hearth is cleaned and left unlit. Regional calendars differ, and some families worship on Saptami or another locally prescribed day after Holi, but the central practice remains the preparation of food in advance and its offering in a cooled state.

The festival is dedicated to Sheetala Mata, whose very name comes from the idea of sheetal, or coolness. This is more than a description of the goddess, for cooling provides the organising principle of the entire observance. Historically, Sheetala was invoked particularly in relation to fever, eruptive illnesses and smallpox, a disease characterised by high fever followed by painful skin eruptions. If illness was experienced as dangerous heat within the body, Sheetala represented its opposite. Soothing, cooling and relief. Her traditional imagery reinforces this association through the vessel she carries, together with the broom and neem leaves that came to signify cleansing and protection. The household translates this symbolism into ritual action. Its greatest source of heat, the cooking fire, is extinguished; freshly cooked dishes give way to food that has rested; curd and cool water assume particular importance; and the meal offered to the goddess is itself consumed cool. In symbolic terms, Sheetala cools the body, the hearth and the household together. Historically, her worship offered communities a religious language through which the fear of epidemic disease, particularly smallpox, could be understood and endured.

This history also explains why the idea extends beyond a single festival name or region. Basoda or Sheetala Ashtami is especially prominent in Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, but Gujarat preserves an especially close parallel through Randhan Chhath and Shitala Satam. Randhan Chhath is the cooking day, when food is prepared in advance, while on Shitala Satam the stove remains unlit and the previous day's food is offered and eaten. Further south, the practice is not identical, but an interesting echo appears in the worship of Mariamman in Tamil Nadu, another protective goddess historically associated with heat, illness and eruptive disease. At some Mariamman festivals, cooling preparations such as koozh, a porridge traditionally made using millet, form part of the offering. These traditions should not be treated as interchangeable, but together they reveal a wider Indian cultural vocabulary in which protective

goddesses, bodily heat and cooling foods repeatedly intersect.

The name Basoda is commonly associated with baasi bhojan, but translating this simply as "stale food" misses the ritual meaning. The meal is deliberately prepared on the previous day, allowed to cool, stored and then offered without lighting the hearth again. The act of cooling is itself devotional. On most festive days, sacred food is created through the transformational power of fire. Basoda reverses that relationship. Fire has already completed its work, and abstaining from fresh cooking becomes part of the offering. The timing after Holi also places the festival at a seasonal threshold, when northern India begins moving towards greater warmth. Traditional ideas of cooling the body, reducing excess heat and favouring foods that could be eaten without further cooking therefore sit naturally within both the religious symbolism and the changing season.

Among the most distinctive preparations is Meetha Oliya, particularly cherished in Rajasthani and Marwari homes. Cooked rice is cooled before being folded into smoothly whisked yoghurt with sugar, milk, cardamom and, in richer versions, saffron and nuts. Its gentle sweetness and cool texture embody the character of Sheetala worship more precisely than almost any other dish. The rice softens further as it rests, while the yoghurt carries the fragrance of cardamom through the mixture. It may be offered during the morning puja and later served as part of the family meal, occupying a space between dessert, prasad and cooling nourishment.

The same idea appears in Namkeen Oliya, the savoury counterpart in which cooled rice and yoghurt are combined with salt and lightly crushed cumin. Some families add black pepper, mustard powder, raisins or dried fruit, creating an unusual balance of tartness, spice and sweetness. Unlike curd rice that receives a hot tempering in many southern traditions, Oliya is often kept free of any fresh sizzling tadka on the day of worship. Its preparation demonstrates how Basoda cuisine creates flavour without depending upon last-minute heat.

From the coolness of Oliya, the meal moves towards the dry, durable foods of Rajasthan. Pachkuta brings together preserved desert ingredients such as ker, sangri, kumat, gunda and dried mango. These are soaked, boiled where required and cooked with oil, asafoetida, cumin, coriander, chilli and amchur until intensely flavoured but relatively dry. Its presence links Basoda with Rajasthan's ecological intelligence, where communities learned to turn hardy berries, pods and stored produce into food capable of surviving scarcity and heat. When prepared on Saptami, Pachkuta develops greater depth overnight and can be eaten without reheating.

In homes that do not make the complete mixture, Ker Sangri may appear independently. The desert berries and beans are soaked to remove excess sharpness, then cooked with spices, yoghurt or dried mango according to household practice. Beside it, Kairi ki Launji provides a glossy, sweet-sour accompaniment made by cooking raw mango with jaggery or sugar, fennel, nigella, cumin and chilli. Because launji keeps well, it is particu-

larly suited to a festival that prohibits fresh cooking. Its sourness also cuts through fried breads and sweets. Rajasthan's official tourism material identifies ker and sangri as characteristic ingredients of the state's arid landscape and cuisine.

Gram flour contributes another set of preparations that remain satisfying after cooling. Sukhe Gatte are made by kneading besan with yoghurt, oil and spices, shaping the dough into cylinders, boiling them and cutting them into pieces. Instead of returning them to a gravy, they are tossed into a dry masala of cumin, coriander, chilli and amchur. Besan ki Roti, kneaded with spices and sometimes ghee, offers a firm bread to accompany Pachkuta or launji. In millet-eating households, Bajre ka Sogra, a thick pearl millet roti shaped by hand, may be cooked the previous day and eaten with curd, jaggery or preserved vegetables.

The fried savouries of Basoda are selected for their ability to hold their texture. Moong Dal Kachori encloses a filling of coarsely ground lentils, fennel, asafoetida, coriander and chilli within a crisp flour shell. The filling is cooked until dry so that the kachori remains stable overnight. Mathri, made from stiff dough enriched with ghee or oil and seasoned with ajwain, cumin or black pepper, becomes even crisper as it cools. Khichia or Papad, roasted or fried on the preparation day, adds a brittle contrast to yoghurt and rice. Together these foods turn the absence of freshly cooked food into a meal of deliberate contrasts.

Yoghurt returns through Dahi Bade, in which lentil dumplings are fried, soaked in water, gently pressed and placed in seasoned curd before the festival morning. As they rest, they absorb moisture and become soft enough to break with a spoon. Roasted cumin, black salt, red chilli and a little sweet chutney may be added before the hearth rests. In some parts of northern and western India, Kanji Vade provide a sharper variation. Small lentil dumplings are immersed in water fermented with ground mustard, salt and chilli, producing a tangy preparation associated with the

period around Holi. Its sourness, created through time rather than last-minute cooking, fits naturally into Basoda's cuisine.

A simpler but meaningful offering is Sukha Kala Chana. The chickpeas are soaked, boiled and tossed with cumin, asafoetida, coriander and dried mango until the moisture has evaporated. Served with breads and launji, they add substance without requiring a gravy and may also be distributed in small portions as prasad. The dish reflects an important feature of Basoda food: ingredients are often cooked fully and kept drier than they would be for an everyday meal.

Sweetness is equally important, and Meethe Chawal often form one of the central offerings. Rice is cooked with sugar or jaggery, cardamom, saffron, cloves, raisins and nuts until each grain is perfumed and lightly glazed. When cooled overnight, the flavours settle and the rice becomes firmer, making it easy to portion during worship. The dish sits comfortably beside Oliya because the two use the same staple in very different ways, one creamy and tart, the other fragrant and jewel-like.

Fried sweets provide some of the festival's most recognisable aromas on the day before worship. Pua is made from a batter of wheat flour, milk or water, sugar or jaggery, fennel and cardamom, then fried into small, soft-edged rounds. Gulgule use a thicker jaggery-sweetened wheat batter and are dropped into hot oil as irregular dumplings. Both remain pleasant after cooling, but their textures differ: pua is flatter and tender, while gulgule are plumper and chewier. Prepared in generous batches, they are offered to the goddess, shared with children and carried to neighbours.

Grain takes a richer form in Lapsi, where broken wheat is roasted in ghee and cooked with jaggery or sugar until the grains swell but retain a slight bite. Cardamom, raisins and nuts may be added, though many households prefer its rustic simplicity. Churma begins with wheat or millet dough shaped into thick breads or dumplings, cooked, cooled and crushed with ghee and jaggery. The two dishes express contrasting uses of grain: Lapsi preserves each granule, while Churma deliberately breaks the bread into a fragrant, crumbly sweet. For a more luxurious offering, some families

prepare Moong Dal Halwa, slowly roasting ground soaked lentils in ghee until their raw aroma gives way to deep nuttiness, then adding sugar syrup, cardamom and nuts. Because it requires patience, its preparation on Saptami becomes an act of devotion. Rabri offers a cooler richness. Milk is simmered as layers of cream are gathered and returned to the reduced liquid, which is sweetened and flavoured with cardamom or saffron. Once chilled, it may be offered in small bowls with pua, gulgule or crisp Shakkarpore, whose fried flour pieces are coated in sugar or made from sweetened dough.

Beverages are less uniformly prescribed than the foods, yet they complete the cooled meal in many homes. Chaas, whisked from curd and water with roasted cumin and salt, lightens the richer fried dishes. Meethi Lassi or Namkeen Lassi may be prepared before the cooking restriction begins and kept chilled. Thandai, still seasonally familiar after Holi, may appear with milk, fennel, pepper, cardamom, nuts and rose. The liquid from Kanji can itself be sipped as a sour fermented drink, while cool water offered to Sheetala Mata remains the simplest and most symbolic refreshment.

Sheetala Ashtami also carries a lesson that feels increasingly relevant in an age of food waste. For younger generations accustomed to associating freshness only with food cooked at that moment, the festival offers a different understanding. Food prepared the previous day is not automatically inferior or unwanted. When cooked thoughtfully, stored safely and consumed appropriately, it can remain nourishing while also carrying memory, ritual and meaning. Sheetala Ashtami therefore encourages a more respectful relationship with food, one that values preservation over waste and continuity over constant replacement. The dishes prepared for the festival were chosen precisely because they could rest, retain their flavour and still be shared the following day. Passing this knowledge forward can help younger generations understand that sustainability is not always a new idea. Indian culinary traditions have long contained practices of careful storage, preservation and respect for every ingredient. On Sheetala Ashtami, yesterday's food is not treated as a compromise. It becomes prasad, and in doing so reminds us that valuing food is itself a form of responsibility.

Sheetala Ashtami ultimately asks a household to recognise that care can be expressed not only through abundance and activity, but also through restraint. For one day, the stove falls silent, yet the kitchen continues to speak through rice softened in yoghurt, desert berries preserved against scarcity, grain roasted in ghee, lentil dumplings transformed through time and sweets prepared for sharing. Its history also reminds us how food once helped communities respond culturally and emotionally to illness, long before diseases such as smallpox could be defeated through modern medicine. The ritual did not cure the disease, but it gave cooling, care and protection a language that families could understand and practise together. To carry Basoda forward, future generations must therefore inherit more than the instruction to eat food prepared the previous day. They must learn why the hearth rests, why Sheetala came to represent relief from burning illness, how Oliya differs from an ordinary bowl of curd and rice, why Pachkuta belongs to Rajasthan's ecology, how Gujarat carries a related tradition through Shitala Satam, and why the first portion becomes prasad before it becomes a meal.

When the methods, meanings and memories behind these foods are passed forward together, Basoda ceases to be merely a custom from another age. It remains what it has long been: a living conversation between food and faith, heat and coolness, health and hope, and one generation and the next.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)



Tricolour-themed popicle add a festive touch to the streets as Independence Day approaches, bringing flavours and the colours of the national flag

Plating the colours of courage and peace

Food remains our favourite way to show national pride on August 15. Whether we crave nostalgic schoolyard snacks or share vibrant feasts with neighbors, eating together perfectly celebrates our freedom

TEAM AGENDA

August brings a long line of holidays, but the fifteenth always takes older generations right back to their early school days. You remember the drill. Waking up at dawn, wrestling into a stiff uniform, and standing in the assembly ground while the principal hoisted the flag. We sang the anthem with full throats, though half our minds were fixated on the reward waiting at the end.

That treat was usually the classic yellow paper packet. Finding a warm samosa, a sweet laddoo, and a cold

fruit drink inside felt like hitting the jackpot. Sometimes a lucky few got a bigger cardboard box filled with kachoris, sandwiches, and extra sweets. Entire generations grew up linking national pride with those simple snacks, creating a tradition people still crave decades later.

Families can bring that exact feeling back today by planning a menu around the Indian flag. Saffron, white, and green carry deep historical meaning, standing for bravery, peace, and progress. Bringing these specific shades to the dining table feels right and gives the day a wonderful festive spirit.

Planning this kind of menu takes a little imagination. Home cooks can start the morning with hot tricolour idlis coloured with carrot and spinach

These golden laddoos remain the absolute heart of Independence Day, bringing back our favourite childhood schoolyard flag memories

Images are for representational purposes only



puree, or serve soft and layered dhoklas. For lunch, they can transition to colourful dumplings in the national shades, along with traditional dishes like saffron |sweet rice, rich palak paneer, and plain white raita.

By late afternoon, local bakeries start displaying tricolour cakes and tidy stacks of ribbon sandwiches. Round off the day by handing out pistachio-and-saffron kulfi to the children on your street — it turns the national holiday into a true neighbourhood celebration. Which school memory will you bring back to the table this Independence Day?



Uttar Dakshin: When North meets South

GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Uttar Dakshin, a unique 'sangam' of northern and southern dishes, sets the smoky, robust flavours of the north against the fiery, coconut-and-curry-leaf soul of the south. The festival's real achievement is restraint. Rather than a scattergun tour of "Indian cuisine", it plays two established culinary idioms against each other, dish by dish.

The vegetarian spread does this well: the Mathania Mirch Paneer Tikka carries its Rajasthani heat with confidence, while Kuzhi Paniyaram, dusted with milagai podi, brings a properly Tamil bite to the same table. A curry-leaf-tempered Hari Mirch Aloo and the Lucknowi Kathal Biryani sit a few feet apart, each unmistakably from its own region.

Non-vegetarian offerings lean on TGKF's real strength - the tandoor. The Malabari Spiced Kalmi Kabab and Khijra Murgh Boti Kabab carry coastal spice into the grill, while Meen Varuval and Andhra Masala Prawns keep the south's fire honest. Hyderabad! Kachhe Gosht ki Biryani anchors the meal's centre, and a slow-cooked Dak Bungalow Chicken Curry adds old-



world comfort. The cleverest handshake, though, is the

UTTAR DAKSHIN CELEBRATES INDIA'S UNITY THROUGH A VIBRANT CULINARY JOURNEY BLENDING THE DISTINCTIVE FLAVOURS OF NORTH AND SOUTH INDIA



Amritsari Fish — a Punjabi classic dusted with a gunpowder spice mix borrowed from further south.

Desserts close on the right note. A Pineapple Jalebi with Kesar Rabdi and a Mysore Pak Brownie make the same point as the mains, more gently: that fusion, done with intent, doesn't need to feel forced.

TGKF's format does the concept a favour. Kebabs are cooked using seven traditional methods, from tandoor and sigri to kadhai and stone grill, backed by a recipe bank of over 450 dishes. With unlimited servings, the menu changes daily while the standard remains. And for the Lucknow versus Hyderabad biryani debate, the answer is simple: order both. Both are Indian flavours.

Restoring the Rhythm of the Universe

AMMA (SRI MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI DEVI)

A king once went hunting in the forest in disguise. In the course of the hunt he was separated from his companions and lost his way, and at last, worn out and hungry, he came upon a small hut. The forest-dwellers who lived there did not know him, and they gave him some fruits to eat.

He bit into one and said, "But this is bitter." They sighed. "What can be done? The king who rules this land is utterly selfish, given to pleasure, and cruel. He wrings heavy taxes from the poor, and those who cannot pay he puts to death. It is because of his unrighteous ways that even fruits that are sweet by nature have turned bitter."

Back in his palace, the king could not forget what he had seen in the forest. "It is because of me that my people suffer so," he thought, and was filled with remorse. He resolved to give the rest of his life to their good. He cut the taxes deeply, and began to give in charity and to help his people in their need.

After some time he again went hunting in disguise, and visited that same hut. The family gladly gave him fruits. When he tasted them, each and every one was sweet.

When he asked the reason for the change, they said, "Our king has wholly changed. He rules now with great goodness, and all his subjects are happy and content. Because of his good deeds, a positive change has come over nature as well, and that is why these fruits are sweet."

What is the heart of this story? In this universe everything has its rhythm. The wind and the rain, the sea and its waves, our own breath and the beating of our hearts — each keeps its own measure.

There is an undeniable relationship between all of creation and every being in it, both living and non-living. This cosmos is like a vast interconnected

orchestra. Suppose one instrument is out of tune. Even just one phrase from it is heard and felt by all the musicians.

Similarly, whether we are aware of it or not, all of our actions reverberate throughout creation, whether performed as an individual or as a group. We are not individual islands but links of a common chain.

For the health and long life of body and mind, that harmony must be preserved. It is our thoughts and deeds that become the music of our lives. When the rhythm of our minds goes offbeat, it echoes in our actions. The result is discordant noise that affects everything around us.

Mother Earth then responds to the behaviour of Her children. When our



In this universe everything has its rhythm. The wind and the rain, the sea and its waves, our own breath and the beating of our hearts — each keeps its own measure

deeds are out of alignment with the music of the universe, Her cadence is thrown into disorder; when we tune in, She answers in kind, and our lives become beautiful music for others.

Today, we exploit the environment beyond all measure, and the balance of our world has been thrown awry; the selfish deeds of humankind rebound upon all that surrounds us. Behind disasters such as tsunamis, landslides and earthquakes resounds, above all, nature's broken rhythm.

So each of us must take care to mend our ways. When the greater part of humanity turns to good deeds, our collective rhythm will be restored. Peace and prosperity will prevail upon the Earth, and the music of love and compassion will bring joy to the very heart of creation.

(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)

burden him. In every step, there was a quiet proclamation: that one who is anchored in the divine remains untouched by the fluctuations of the world.

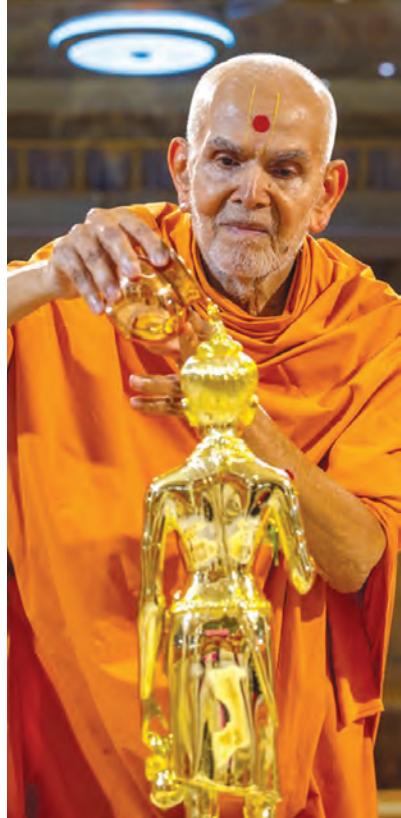
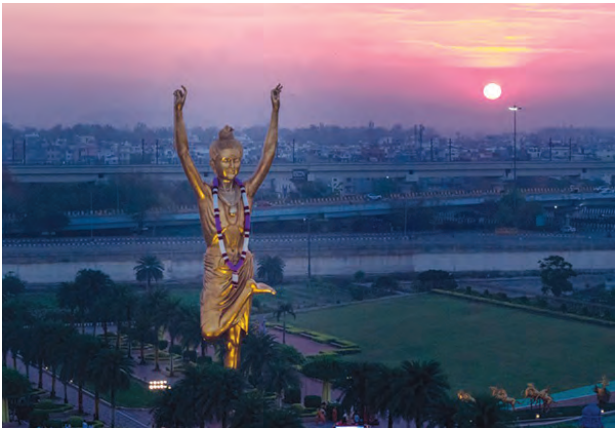
Yet his journey was not one of isolation; it was one of deep engagement with humanity. His solo mission was to help humanity. So, wherever he went, he encountered seekers, scholars, ascetics, and ordinary villagers. He did not merely observe; he questioned, guided, and transformed. His inquiries into the nature of the soul, the supremacy of God, and the path to liberation were not intellectual exercises; they were divine revelations disguised as dialogue. Many who considered themselves learned found their understanding reshaped in his presence. Others, burdened by suffering or confusion, found clarity and peace.

What makes Nilkanth Varni a beacon of universal values is the seamless way in which his life embodied the highest ideals. Fearlessness was not a virtue he taught; it was the way he lived. Walking alone through perilous terrains, he demonstrated that true courage arises from faith, not from physical strength. Compassion was not selective in him; it flowed equally towards all beings, transcending boundaries of caste, creed, or status. His renunciation was not rejection but realization, that the transient can never satisfy the eternal within. His discipline was not imposed; it was the natural rhythm of a mind established in purity. And his wisdom was not acquired; it was innate, flowing from the very source of truth.

At a time when spirituality had become burdened with empty rituals and forgotten values, Nilkanth Varni emerged as a silent reformer. He did not reject tradition; he restored its true purpose. He taught that genuine religion is not about outward display but inner transformation, not mechanical rituals but heartfelt devotion, and not division but seeing God in all.

When his spiritual journey led him to Gujarat, Nilkanth Varni became known to the world as Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The universal values he lived and taught continue to inspire millions and are beautifully exemplified today in the life and teachings of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

(Dr Swami Gyanananddas is a dedicated follower of the Swaminarayan tradition and has earned a PhD from MS University)



BHAGWAN NILKANTH VARNI ONCE ARRIVED AT A CITY CALLED BANSI (UP). AT SOME DISTANCE FROM THE TOWN FLOWED A RIVER WHERE HE BATHED DAILY, ABSORBED IN DIVINE REMEMBRANCE

into the unknown, not as a helpless child, but as a fearless divine Yogi, beginning a journey that would become one of the most extraordinary spiritual pilgrimages in history.

Barefoot and unprotected, he traversed the length and breadth of India for seven long years. Through the icy silence of the Himalayas, the dense forests echoing with unseen dangers, the flowing rivers, and the scorching plains, he walked more than 12000 KM with unshaken composure. This was not merely physical endurance; it was the living expression of absolute detachment and unwavering purpose. Hunger did not disturb him, harsh climates did not weaken him, and solitude did not

The Most Important Thing in Life to Fulfill Your Potential

SADHGURU

#1 Reflect on what is around you

Your inner world, if you want to call it that, should only be a reflection of what is around you. This may be diametrically opposite to some moral theories that say the outer and the inner should not touch each other, otherwise you would immediately get corrupted by everything around you. That is not true. You get corrupted by what is around you only when you have opinions about everything.

You look at one thing as good, something else as bad. You get attached to what you consider as good. You desperately try to avoid what you consider as bad, and of course that will rule you from inside. This is not the way to be. Seeing everything just the way it is — that is the way to be within. If you see something other than what is there, it means you are contaminating the world with your opinions and prejudices.

Creation is made so that you see it the way it is, not to make it the way you want to make it. This is an obscenity that humanity is committing upon the Creator's creation. Such a magnificent creation — what is there for you to do? Absorb it, if you can — nothing more — and even that is not simple because creation is phenomenally multi-tiered. There are not just things; so many phenomena are happening right here — one inside the other, all in one space, all in one time.

Everything that you think is past, everything that you think will be future is right here. If you see everything the way it is, if the whole creation reflects within you, if you can contain creation the way it is within you, you become the very source of creation. That is the way to be, inside and outside.

#2 Don't be a psychological case

Either you exist here as a piece of creation, which is pretty good, or you become like the very source of creation, which is fantastic. But being a psycho-



logical case is not a good thing. To be just a psychological case, you need not have put your mother through the trouble of delivering you. She could have delivered a file, and someone could have studied the case. It is not worth being a psychological case. If you consider only your thoughts and emotions as your life and there is nothing beyond that for you, you are a psychological case. You should not die as a psychological case — a bundle of thoughts, emotions, opinions, and prejudices. You must become a vibrant, full-fledged life. These are the most important things in life.

Touching the ultimate, rather than defining yourself through patterns of thoughts and emotions, is the greatest and one of the most important things in life you can do. You should strive to become an absolutely full-fledged life. A full-fledged life does not mean going out and doing all kinds of exploits in the world. It means allowing yourself to grow to full depth and dimension. Every human being should do this.

#3 Doing what's really needed

What we do is determined by what is needed. These days, wherever I go, people recognize me as someone who planted so many trees, is educating so many children, built so many hospitals, and so on. I squirm at the thought that this is what I am known for. It is most

unfortunate that most people cannot think beyond food, education, and things like that.

Suppose the country or the world was doing really well — everyone had enough to eat, everyone was well educated, everything was happening well — what meaning would it have to start an Isha Vidhya school and to give a midday meal? Right now, when the children have not eaten properly, the midday meal seems like a great blessing. It is a blessing only because of the cruelty of poverty. It is not a true blessing. Only because we created human beings without having the necessary food for them, serving them a meal feels like a great thing. I don't think it is. It is unfortunate that such things are still needed in the world.

Even if everyone had eaten well and they had everything they wanted, enhancing the experience of life to its ultimate possibility would still always be relevant. Ultimately, this is the purpose of all life — to blossom to its fullest potential. Whether it is a little plant, a tree, an elephant, an ant, a man, or a woman — the ultimate goal is to become a full-fledged life.

But being in the world, we have to play some game. Let us play a game that is of maximum usefulness and meaning to everyone around us. If you reflect creation just the way it is, there is no personal need to play a game and no compulsion to be a part of any game. Whether you withdraw into a cave or plunge into the marketplace, it is still a game. The only way to not be part of any game is to dissolve. That is a great thing to do, but when human beings attain to a certain clarity within themselves, they are of immense value to everyone around, so it is good if they hang around for a while and bring a little more clarity to others.

(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)

row will take care of itself.

We must remember that every season in our life has had an impact on us. It has made us grow, given us strength. Rain brings mud, but it has also brought rainbows, and rainbows have brought colors into our lives. Peacocks wait for the rain. When they see dark clouds gathering in the sky, they open their colorful feathers. And when it rains, they dance so beautifully!

Similarly, when darkness comes in our lives, it doesn't forebode the end. The phases of darkness also pass away with time. There are 2 ways to go through the dark phases: we either cry, complain, and blame, or we sing and dance through it. And when we sing and dance in the rain, we get soaked in joy.

So, let us cultivate the habit of being happy. Only we can do this for ourselves. Nobody else can do this for us.

The strength of our happiness is measured by the number of adverse situations we can smile through. It is easy to be happy when life is smooth. But if we can smile through all kinds of opposing situations that life brings, then we have grown. Let's tell ourselves, 'Whatever happens, I am not going to be unhappy.' This inner strength and 'santosh' (contentment) are qualities we must develop. And I tell you, this can definitely be done. It is possible.

There is a famous Mullah Nasreddin story around this. Mullah Nasreddin used to grumble all the time. He was a farmer, and he would grumble about the shortfall of rain, 'Oh, there is no rain, and no crops are growing.' Next year, there was abundant rainfall, and Mullah had a bumper harvest. People thought, 'This year Nasreddin wouldn't grumble.' So people went to greet him, 'Oh, Mullah! How are you? You seem to be doing very well. Mother Nature has bestowed you with a bountiful harvest



GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

joy is found only in the present moment. Yet usually we find the mind swinging back and forth between the past and the future. The final-year school kids are anxious about what to do after graduation. At the start of their career, people worry about achieving career goals. Professionally settled people want to purchase a new house, find a good life partner, and get married. After getting married, people want to have children. When they become parents, they wait for their children to settle down. It is like you prepared the bed to sleep all night without sleeping at all!

We keep postponing our happiness and peace of mind. We imagine life is about securing a job, building a bank balance, and creating the perfect family. One desire gives rise to another, and the race never ends. In the process, we become miserable. And when misery takes over, we lose our health, our peace, our relationships, and even our reputation.

Life is a celebration. Life is commitment. Life is wisdom. Life is seva-selfless service. We are here on this planet for only a short while. So why suffer, and why make others suffer? Who said what, when, or why-how long can you hold on to these things?

When life revolves around commitment, care, service, celebration, attainment of wisdom, and upliftment of the human spirit, grace replaces misery. And when life becomes a celebration, then money, reputation, relationships, and health all come back to us. It is ironic because what we spent our lives chasing was always with us.

We are here for a very short period of time on this planet. Have you noticed how most of us spend our time here? Suppose we live for 80 years. In those 80 years, we spend around 26 years and 8 months sleeping. Each day, we spend 2.5 hours on food and nearly 6 years and 8 months just eating over an 80-year lifetime. Similarly, we spend 2.5 years in the toilet. If we live in a big city like New York or Mumbai, we spend nearly 3 to 5 years in traffic. We hardly get around 30 years to do something productive. This is the time when we truly live our lives.

Let us observe our mind. We spend an enormous amount of time thinking about the past. Yet the past is past. It is gone, finished. Why should we waste time thinking about something unalterable? The same holds for worrying about the future. We postpone our happiness until some future date, but it never arrives. If we live life now, tomorrow

We postpone our happiness