

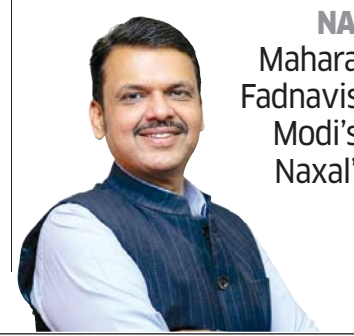
PAGE 3
NATION

CM Rekha cautions youth against Urban Naxals



PAGE 6
NATION

Maharashtra CM Fadnavis backs PM Modi's 'dimagi Naxal' remark



PAGE 8
GLOBAL

Trump focuses on violent-crime reduction at New York Police academy



PAGE 11
SPORTS

Praggnanandhaa draws with Wesley So



AGENDA



PM's seven streams to power India's 2047 journey



80TH I-DAY SPEECH SHORTEST IN 4 YEARS	SAPTA DHARA
Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a 75-minute Independence Day speech on Saturday, the shortest in four years and his fourth shortest ever.	● Manufacturing ● Agro-food production and food processing ● Technology and innovation ● Logistics ● Defence ● Green and blue economy ● Soft power
PM'S OFTEN-REPEATED PHRASES	
Prime Minister Narendra Modi used <i>Mere pyare deshwasiyon</i> (My beloved fellow citizens) most often in his 13th Independence Day speech on Saturday, saying it nearly 40 times. He also used <i>Sathiyon</i> (friends) about 10 times.	

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday exhorted the youth from the ramparts of Red Fort to lead the nation to a Viksit Bharat and announced a slew of initiatives for Gen Z. They included free online coaching for competitive examinations and AI training for one crore young people. Enhancing his outreach to them, especially after the recent protests at the Jantar Mantar, the Prime Minister also outlined a massive nationwide sports talent hunt to achieve excellence at the world level. Modi delivered his 13th Independence Day speech. During his 75-minute address, he outlined his vision for a Developed India by 2047, introduced the Sapta Dhara (seven streams of strength) framework, and announced new plans focused on youth, technology, energy security, self-reliance, women's participation, and national preparedness. The speech began with



the full National Song, Vande Mataram, sung at the Red Fort on Independence Day for the first time since independence, marking its 150th anniversary.

Assuring the young people of the country of his support, Modi cautioned against "dimagi Naxals" and said they had to be

"identified and isolated", as these elements had embedded themselves in the corridors of power in the country.

Modi also appealed to all the political parties to rise above differences and support the Women's Reservation Bill, saying all must venerate women's power. This came days after a near washout of the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

In his 13th consecutive Independence Day address to the nation, next only to 17 by Jawaharlal Nehru in a row, Modi mainly focused on the young generation in a nearly 75-minute-long speech. Modi referred to the youth more than 50 times in the course of it.

Modi sought to rally parties and young Indians around his Viksit Bharat 2047 vision while laying out a roadmap for India's economic and strategic rise through what he described as seven streams, or "Sapta Dhara", of development.

MORE REPORTS ON ► P2,3,5,9
CONTINUED ON ► P4



'Vande Mataram' rendered at Red Fort for first time

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

In a first for Independence Day celebrations, 'Vande Mataram' was rendered at the Red Fort complex during the 79th anniversary of the historic occasion on August 15. It was followed by the customary 'Jana Gana Mana', the National Anthem.

The mega function commemorates 150 years of the enduring legacy of the national song, 'Vande Mataram', as floral decoration on the ramparts depicted the national flag at the centre, flanked by 'Vande Mataram' in Hindi.

As Prime Minister Modi hoisted the National Flag from the ramparts of the iconic Red Fort, the ceremony was synchronised with a 21-gun salute fired by the 121 Field Battery (Ceremonial) using indigenous 105 mm Light Field Guns. Following the flag hoisting, the Army band performed 'Vande Mataram'. Two Mi-17 helicopters of the Indian Air Force also showered flower petals over the venue. One of the helicopters carried the National Flag, while the other carried a flag bearing the words 'Vande Mataram'. After the flag hoisting, the Tricolour

received a 'Rashtriya Salute'.

After that, flower petals were showered at the venue by two Mi-17 helicopters of the Indian Air Force — one carrying the National Flag and the other carrying a flag depicting 'Vande Mataram'. Written in 1875 by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, 'Vande Mataram' had turned into a rallying cry during the freedom movement. It was adopted as India's national song by the Constituent Assembly in 1950.

The full version of 'Vande Mataram' was recently accorded the same legal protection as the National Anthem and was played ahead of and at the conclusion of President Droupadi Murmu's address to the nation on the eve of the 80th Independence Day on Friday. The development came days after President Murmu gave her assent to the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which provides 'Vande Mataram' with the same legal protection as the National Anthem. Under the amended law, deliberate disruption of or obstruction to the singing of the National Song can invite penalties, including imprisonment, a fine, or both.

CONTINUED ON ► P4

PIONEER IN SHORT

ISRAELI AIRSTRIKES ON SOUTHERN LEBANON KILLS 11

Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon killed at least 11 people on Saturday, in the deadliest attacks since a precarious truce between Israel and Hezbollah went into effect on June 20. Lebanon's Health Ministry and State news agency said one of the airstrikes that targeted a home on the edge of the village of Ansar killed seven people, including three children, and wounded two. The second, in the village of Deir al-Zahrani, killed four and wounded 17. Israel and the Lebanese Government announced a "framework agreement" on June 26, laying out a plan for Israeli forces to withdraw from southern Lebanon, in exchange for the disarmament of the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group. It also envisions steps toward an eventual peace agreement between the two countries, which technically remain in a state of war nearly 80 years after Israel's establishment. Hezbollah has refused direct talks and wasn't party to the deal. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam criticised Israel's airstrikes on southern Lebanon, saying they intimidate "residents in their homes" and undermine efforts to stabilise the situation in the south.

FULL REPORT ON P8

INDIAN MISSIONS WORLDWIDE MARK 80TH INDEPENDENCE DAY

The Indian tricolour made a symbolic journey across the globe from east to west on the country's 80th Independence Day, being hoisted successively at Indian missions worldwide from Fiji to San Francisco. The initiative was named 'Suryapath Tiranga', which is part of the broader 'Har Ghar Tiranga' campaign, a nationwide and global programme encouraging Indians and members of the diaspora to display the national flag as they celebrate Independence Day. The initiative began in the small Pacific island nation of Fiji at 1:30 am IST (8 am local time), where High Commissioner Suneet Mehta hoisted the tricolour at India House in Suva. The flag then moved westward across Indian missions, with celebrations taking place in New Zealand, Australia, Japan, South Korea, China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Uzbekistan, Oman, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

75-minute address among Modi's shortest I-Day speeches

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Becoming only the second Prime Minister after Jawaharlal Nehru to hoist the national flag at the Red Fort for 13 consecutive years, Narendra Modi's address to the nation from the Red Fort on Saturday was the shortest, lasting 75 minutes. Statistically speaking, it was the shortest in four years and the fourth shortest of his 13 consecutive appearances at the historic ramparts. Moreover, PM has spoken for 18 hours and 38 minutes in Independence Day

addresses from the Red Fort over 13 years.

His shortest Independence Day speech was 56 minutes in 2017. The 2026 address was significantly shorter than his 103-minute speech last year, which is the longest of his tenure, and surpassed his previous record of 98 minutes in 2024.

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The Prime Minister's 2026



address was also considerably longer than his shortest-ever speech. In 2017, Modi spoke for 56 minutes. His first Independence Day address

in 2014 lasted 65 minutes.

Over the years, the Prime Minister's speeches have ranged from under an hour to more than 100 minutes. He

spoke for 88 minutes in 2015 and 96 minutes in 2016, followed by 83 minutes in 2018 and nearly 92 minutes in 2019. The address lasted 90 minutes in 2020, 88 minutes in 2021, 74 minutes in 2022 and 90 minutes in 2023. The 75-minute speech came as PM Modi delivered his 13th consecutive Independence Day address from the Red Fort. Last year, he overtook Indira Gandhi's record of 12 consecutive speeches, moving behind only Jawaharlal Nehru, who delivered 17 such addresses in succession.

CONTINUED ON ► P4

DAE mandates insurance cover for nuclear operators

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) has said that the nuclear plant operators need to maintain an insurance policy, financial security or a combination of both for nuclear damage, according to the draft rules of the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy (SHANTI) Act, 2025.

The draft rules released by the DAE also state that the financial security must remain in place until all spent fuel has been removed from the concerned storage pool. According to the draft rules, the Centre must, once every five years, constitute a group of experts to review the maximum limits of an operator's civil liability for nuclear damage.

Another key provision is that if a nuclear power plant or reactor is of foreign design, its design should be certified or approved in the country of origin by its regulatory body. Country of origin here means those countries that are self-reliant in nuclear reactor design and supply-chain ecosystem, whose regulatory approvals are trusted globally, according to the draft rules.

The draft rules say such a nuclear power plant or reactor should also be operational either in the country of origin or any other foreign country.

Moreover, the draft rules highlight that the licencing authority may grant "in-principle approval" after admitting an application, where the site or technology has not been selected.

CONTINUED ON ► P4



Vande Mataram row erupts at Congress I-Day event

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A fresh political controversy erupted on Saturday after a video from the Congress party's Independence Day programme at its headquarters appeared to show party president Mallikarjun Kharge and Congress Parliamentary Party (CCP) chairperson Sonia Gandhi making gestures that seemed to ask workers to stop the rendition of the national song, Vande Mataram. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi was also seen appearing to follow the gesture moments later, triggering



sharp reactions on social media and allegations that the Congress leadership was uncomfortable with the song being played.

BJP hit out at the grand old party, alleging that its top leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge showed "utter disre-

spect" towards the National Song Vande Mataram when it was being sung at the party's Independence Day event, and demanded an apology from them.

Several leaders of the ruling BJP also accused Sonia of objecting to the singing of the full version of Vande Mataram at the event, a charge that the Congress denied, asserting that there was no attempt to stop the singing of the full version of the National Song and Gandhi was only asking for a chair for party chief Mallikarjun Kharge as he was standing for a while. Asked about the allega-

tion levelled by BJP leaders, Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh categorically denied that there was an attempt to stop the singing of the song's full version. "As the Congress president was standing for a long time, Soniaji was asking for a chair for him," Ramesh said.

Slamming the Congress, BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said, "It was seen that their supreme leader Sonia Gandhi, super leader Rahul Gandhi and sitting President Mallikarjun Kharge were not attentive when the National Song was being sung."

CONTINUED ON ► P4

TN BJP chief's remarks against Vijay triggers controversy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

Remarks by BJP State chief Nainar Nagenthiran targeting Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay sparked a political row on Saturday, with Minister A Rajmohan strongly condemning them. The remarks, which Nagenthiran presented as a response to Vijay's "kutti kathai" (short story) criticising DMK president MK Stalin, drew condemnation from political parties.

Speaking at a party event at Kamalalayam, the BJP State headquarters, Nagenthiran mockingly remarked, "When people search for a father in the house and cannot find him, they should ask the



mother at home to know who the father is."

The remarks sparked widespread backlash, with several leaders condemning them as derogatory and disrespectful.

CONTINUED ON ► P4

17 Delhi Police personnel honoured with service medals on I-Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Seventeen officers and staff members from the Delhi Police have been honoured with service medals on Independence Day for their outstanding and dedicated work. Among the awards are two President's Medals for Distinguished Service and 15 Medals for Meritorious Service.

Dinesh Kumar Gupta, IPS, Additional Commissioner of Police, and Sub-Inspector (Executive) Rajesh Kumar will receive the President's Medal for Distinguished Service.

Gupta, who joined the AGMUT cadre in 2010, has worked in many operational and specialised roles. He has served as Assistant Commissioner of Police in several areas and as Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police in various districts and units, including Railway, IGI Airport, Traffic, Recruitment Cell, and

Shahdara District. He also tackled policing challenges in Arunachal Pradesh.

As Additional Commissioner of Police for Traffic, he managed traffic during large public events, religious gatherings, Parliamentary sessions, and national ceremonies. He has also received the Medal for Meritorious Service.

Rajesh Kumar started his career with Delhi Police as a Constable in 1988 and had nearly 40 years of service by 2018. He played a key role in setting up and running the Quarter Allotment Cell website from 2010, which made government accommodation processes more transparent and efficient. He also worked as the nodal officer for the Directorate of Estates and handled important administrative tasks in Rohini District. He was awarded the Medal for Meritorious Service in 2005.

The 15 recipients of the Medal for Meritorious Service



include senior officers, inspectors, and staff who have made important contributions to crime prevention,

investigations, digitisation, law and order, and public service.

Sunder Kumar, IPS and

Joint Commissioner of Police (Crime), is recognised for his leadership in policing, immigration, and internal security.

He introduced the e-Beat Book within the Delhi Police. He led several technology projects, including e-Beat

Book 2.0, e-FRRO, cyber-fraud e-FIR integration, and improvements to criminal databases. He also played a major role in extradition operations and in implementing new criminal laws and administrative services.

Nupur Prasad, IPS and Joint CP (EOW), is recognised for her leadership in policing, investigation, and public-focused initiatives. As the first DCP of Shahdara, she established the district's policing framework and took action against drug networks and organised crime. Her assignments have included the Central Bureau of Investigation, Arunachal Pradesh, and West Bengal. She has advanced women's self-defence, youth development, cyber safety, and drug de-addiction programs.

Other awardees include Inspector Rakesh Kumar Bhatt, who is recognised for his work in scientific investigation and immigration; Inspector Tara Dutt, for excel-

lent administrative and stenographic service; and Assistant Sub-Inspector Kailash Chand, who has served with dedication for 36 years.

Those recognised for their work in operations and investigations include Woman Assistant Sub-Inspector Anjana Kumari, who took part in actions against terrorists, gangsters, and other serious criminals; ASI Satish Patil, who helped with major criminal investigations and the arrest of a wanted terrorist; and ASI Anand Ballabh, known for solving difficult cases and working well with the public.

The list also features ASI Pradeep Kumar Sharma, W/ASI Bindu, W/ASI Dinesh Kumar, W/HC Lalita, W/HC Sharmila, W/HC Pushpa Rani, and Head Constable Vijay Singh. They are recognised for their efforts in law and order, public service, administration, digital work, record-keeping, and security.

LG Sandhu hoists Tricolour at Lok Niwas on 80th Independence Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Lieutenant Governor Sardar Taranjit Singh Sandhu hoisted the National Flag at Lok Niwas on the 80th Independence Day, with freedom fighters, their families, RWA representatives, youth icons, students, and city residents in attendance. The police contingent presented the National Salute.

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta hoisted the national flag at his official residence on the 80th Independence Day, while Delhi ministers, including Ashish Sood hoisted the flag in his constituency. Manjinder Singh Sirsa, along with Delhi BJP president Harsh Malhotra, hoisted the national flag at the state BJP headquarters.



The Lieutenant Governor paid tribute to freedom fighters and nation-builders.

He referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day address, highlighting the vision of 'Shakti Ki Saptdhara'-seven streams of growth including manufacturing, agriculture, technology, infrastructure,

defence, the green and blue economy, and soft power. Sandhu stated these areas are relevant to Delhi and urged residents to contribute to the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

The LG outlined the objective of making Delhi a model of excellence, safety, and civic pride. He described his long association with the city and



called service to Delhi a responsibility.

He said the administration must work to improve convenience, dignity, and well-being for all residents.

The LG said Delhi's governance should follow the Prime Minister's principle of inclusive development. He stressed the importance of

coordination among the Union Government, Delhi Government, municipal bodies, neighbouring states, and citizens to address challenges. Key priorities include cleaning the Yamuna, reducing air pollution, housing, healthcare, safety, traffic management, and heritage restoration.

Delhi Police Headquarters marks 80th I-Day with flag hoisting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Police headquarters marked the 80th Independence Day on Saturday with a flag-hoisting ceremony. Senior officers urged the force to uphold the values of freedom, justice, equality, and dignity.

Special Commissioner of Police Rajesh Khurana hoisted the national flag at the police headquarters on Jai Singh Road and conveyed Independence Day greetings to personnel and their families. Khurana stated that the day serves as a reminder of the sacrifices made during the freedom movement and



the police force's duty to protect the nation's core values.

He said Delhi Police personnel are expected to protect citizens' rights, maintain public order, prevent

and detect crime, and respond to challenges with professionalism and competence. The senior officer paid tribute to police personnel who lost their lives in the line of duty.

The Pioneer Classified

CHANGE OF NAME

I, B Sundarai, Mother of JC-701241Y Sub B Ananthan, R/o- Vill- Meekery, PO- B Manihatty, Taluk- Kundah, Dist- Nilgiri, Tamilnadu- 643003, have changed my name from B Sundarai to Sundari, vide affidavit dated 15/08/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

I, JC 708873M Nb Sub Nishant Kumar, R/o- Vill & PO- Jhadina, Teh- Garhmukteshwar, Dist- Hapur, Uttar Pradesh- 245205, have changed my mother's name from Vimla Devi to Vimla Devi, vide affidavit dated 15/08/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

I, G Nagamma, W/o- No.15779631A BHM (GNR) Guvvala Kasirao, R/o- PO- Bollupalli, Md- Ardhavedu Dist- Prakasam, Andhra Pradesh- 523335, have changed my name from G Nagamma to Guvvala Nagamma, vide affidavit dated 15/08/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

Army No.14668066h Hav Rajput Shailendrasinh Jagatsinh Resident of B-52 Samrudhi Park, Post- Bhadakodra, Teh- Ankleshwar, Dist- Bharuch, State- Gujarat 393001, I have changed/corrected my son's Name from Hardik to Hardik Rajput vide Affidavit Dated 11/08/2026 before Notary Public New Delhi.

I, Sheela spouse of Rajput Shailendrasinh Jagatsinh Resident of B-52, Samrudhi Park So, Po- Bhadakodra, Teh- Ankleshwar, Dist- Bharuch, State- Gujarat 393001, I have changed my name from Sheela to Rajput Sheelaben vide Affidavit dt 13/08/2026 before Notary Public New Delhi.

I Naveen Bidhuri S/o Sh. Bijender Singh, R/o H. No. A-195, Bhargar Mohalla, Madanpur Khadar, SaritaVihar, South Delhi- 110076 have changed my name from NAVEEN KUMAR TO NAVEEN BIDHURI.

MY MONEY SECURITIES LIMITED					
CIN : L67120DL1992PLC047890					
Regd Off. 10-A, Under Hill Lane, Civil Lines , Delhi-110054					
Ph. 011-47087300, 47087455, Email- mymoneyviews@outlook.com					
Extract of the Standalone UnAudited Financial Results for the Quarter ended 30th June, 2026					
Sl. No.	Particulars	Quarter Ended		Year Ended	
		30.06.2026 Unaudited	31.03.2026 Audited	30.06.2025 Unaudited	31.03.2026 Audited (Rs. in Lacs)
1	Total Income	295.99	305.64	86.42	601.10
2	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	247.94	287.88	-72.21	422.92
3	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items#)	204.44	285.65	-77.73	420.69
4	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	204.44	285.65	-77.73	420.69
5	Equity Share Capital	1680.03	1680.03	1680.03	1680.03
6	Earnings Per Share (of Rs. 10/- each) (not annualised)				
	Basic	1.217	1.701	-0.463	4.103
	Diluted	1.217	1.701	-0.463	4.103
Note:					
1. The above results have been reviewed by th Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors in their meeting held on 14.08.2026.					
2. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Unaudited financial results for the quarter ended June 30, 2026 filed with Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the unaudited quarterly results is available on the stock exchange website www.bseindia.com and on the company website www.mymoneyviews.com					
		For and on behalf of the Board of Directors		Sd/-	
				(Sanjay Sethi)	
				Whole Time Director & CFO	
				DIN : 0350518	
Place : Delhi					
Date : 14.08.2026					

EKAM LEASING AND FINANCE CO. LIMITED

Registered Office: No.11 Rani Jhansi Road, (Motia Khan), M.M. Road New Delhi-110055

CIN NO: L74899DL1993PLC055697

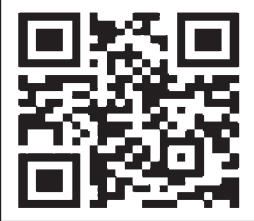
EMAIL: ekam.leasing1@gmail.com

info@ekamleasing.in Website : www.ekamleasing.in

STATEMENT OF STANDALONE AND CONSOLIDATED UNAUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER ENDED 30th JUNE 2026

The Un-audited Financial Results (Standalone and Consolidated) of the company along with the Limited Review Report for the quarter ended on June 30, 2026. The results were reviewed by the Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors of the Company in their respective meeting held on August 14, 2026. The full format of Standalone and Consolidated Un-audited Financial Results is available on the Stock Exchange website i.e. www.bseindia.com and on the Company's website : www.ekamleasing.in

Please scan the QR Code to view the full financial results:



On Behalf of the Board of Directors

Ekam Leasing And Finance Co. Limited

Sd/-

Rakesh Jain

Chairman Cum Managing Director

DIN: 00061737

Date: 15.08.2026
Place : Delhi

Must remember agony of partition while celebrating Independence: DU Vice-Chancellor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi University Vice-Chancellor Prof Yogesh Singh on Saturday said nations become great not merely by remembering their glory but also by remembering the pain they have endured to ensure that such tragedies are never repeated.

Singh made the remarks after hoisting the national flag at the university on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day. DU's NCC cadets also presented a salute to the national flag.

Recalling the Partition, Singh said the tragedy remains one of the saddest events in modern history, resulting in the deaths of lakhs of people and forcing around 1.5 crore people to leave their homes and ancestral lands. "Along with celebrating India's independence, we must also



remember the agony of Partition," he said, stressing the need to preserve historical memory so that such an event does not happen again.

Singh also paid tribute to the freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the country, saying

they were guided by national interest rather than self-interest.

He emphasised the importance of fulfilling one's duties, saying that when individuals perform their duties, the rights of others are automatically protected. Calling upon DU teachers, officials, staff and students to contribute towards the goal of a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, Singh also said the university should work towards securing a place among the world's top 200 universities.

The celebrations were attended by Dean of Colleges Balaram Pani, Director of South Campus Rajni Abbi, Registrar Vikas Gupta, Dean of Academic Activities K Ratnabali and NCC Coordinator Major Sanjay Kumar, among others.

Hindu College also celebrated Independence Day with flag hoisting, the singing of 'Vande

Mataram' and the national anthem.

Faculty members, students, non-teaching staff, frontline workers, NSS volunteers and NCC cadets from the Navy and Army wings participated in the celebrations.

"A grand Tiranga Rally was organised on the campus, led by teachers and joined enthusiastically by students, staff and volunteers. The rally resonated with patriotic slogans and the colours of the tricolour, symbolising unity, diversity and national pride," the college said in a statement.

As part of the Independence Day events, teachers and NSS volunteers of Hindu College also participated in commemorating Partition Horrors Remembrance Day at Delhi University's Multipurpose Hall on Friday.

Delhi: Anand Vihar, Kashmir Gate, Sarai Kale Khan to become multi-modal transport hubs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

To provide different types of transportation services in a single area, the Master Plan of Delhi 2047 proposes developing Multi-Modal Transport Hubs (MMTHs), where metro, bus, railway and other facilities are available in close proximity, officials said on Saturday.

Three locations, including Anand Vihar-Karkardooma, Kashmir Gate and Nizamuddin-Sarai Kale Khan Road stretches, will be developed as multi-modal transit hubs integrating rail, metro, bus, paratransit and non-motorised transport to improve last-mile connectivity. "Delhi will develop high-foot-fall transit nodes with multiple modes of transport located at a single location as Multi-Modal Transport Hubs (MMTHs), with comprehensive plans to be prepared jointly by all concerned transit agencies," an official added.

According to the draft MPD plan, the concerned transit agencies will undertake coordinated plans for execution of such projects. Beyond the aforementioned roads, additional areas



will also be identified for the establishment of such hubs.

"Agencies may amalgamate their land and integrate multiple modes within the same building or complex. In cases where non-contiguous land parcels are separated by features such as railway tracks or roads, integration of buildings using connectors such as skywalks and subways will be permitted, subject to statutory clearances," the draft states.

The MMTH projects will facilitate

tate easy interchange between different modes of transport within an integrated complex through multi-level interchange facilities and active spaces such as retail podiums, it added.

"Separate parcels may also be connected through skywalks, subways and pedestrian bridges, subject to necessary approvals. The hubs will promote safety, public interaction and economic activity through cultural and public spaces," the draft MPD said.

To improve public transportation for the public, the MPD suggests that transit agencies work on Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) and AI-based passenger and traffic management systems to support data integration, better enforcement and smoother movement between different transport modes.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) project within a 500-metre radius of an MMTH will be considered for approval only after integration with the plan.

Jasbir Pal Singh’s Partition story: From Peshawar to a new beginning

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA
■ New Delhi

There are homes that leave us, and there are homes we are made to leave. Jasbir Pal Singh belongs to the second kind of memory, the kind that does not fade so much as settle, like dust that never quite finds the floor. He was eight years old when Peshawar stopped being his city after the announcement of Partition in 1947.

Now touching 90 and a successful businessman, he still vividly remembers what all happened in those days of upheaval. It had not felt precarious before that. His

father ran Khalsa School with the quiet authority of a man respected across community lines, and the Singh household sat comfortably, if a little conspicuously, among Muslim neighbours who outnumbered them many times over. Peshawar was not hostile. It was simply, in the arithmetic of that year, becoming someone else’s.

The first crack came from a shop, not a street. Sushil ran a furniture business near the Singh home, the kind of shop where wood shavings gathered in corners and customers lingered to talk. One afternoon, men walked in as though the place already belonged

to them and shot him where he stood. No warning. No argument. Just the flat, terrible efficiency of it.

Then came a rumour, softer at first, about a doctor’s daughter. Dr Sindhvani’s girl, young, well liked, the kind of presence a neighbourhood notices, simply stopped being seen. The first version of the story was almost gentle, an elopement, a girl following her heart. The real story arrived later, uglier and colder. She had been taken.

Two deaths, one visible and one whispered, were enough to tell a family which way the wind had turned. But it was not fear alone that moved the Singhs out of



Jasbir Pal Singh

Peshawar. It was friendship, oddly enough, the kind built in classrooms rather than courtrooms. Jasbir’s father had spent years teaching Muslim boys who now, in a moment of crisis, became the very hands that guided his family to safety. Loyalty, it turned out, could outlive politics, at least for a while, at least for one family.

Dehradun offered shelter but not comfort. The city spoke a language Jasbir did not know. He arrived carrying Urdu and Gurumukhi in his head, two tongues that meant nothing in a classroom built around Hindi and English. Imagine an eight-

year-old staring at a blackboard full of letters that refuse to resolve into meaning, homesick not just for a house but for the very sounds of thought.

He did not simply survive that alphabet. He conquered it. Within that unfamiliar script, Jasbir found his footing and then his stride until the boy who had once understood nothing on the blackboard was standing at the top of his class.

There is a particular kind of resilience that history rarely photographs, the resilience of a child relearning how to think in a new language while his old world still burns somewhere behind him.

Jasbir Pal Singh carries that resilience still, nearly eight decades later, not as a wound but as a quiet, stubborn proof that something in him refused to be partitioned along with the land.

Scores of uprooted people found a new abode in Delhi and within a few years shed off the tag of a “refugee,” through sheer dint of hard work, hardships notwithstanding, in a new environment. Their fourth generation are now running successful businesses, while many others excelled in other fields, including academics, medicine, administration and even sports.



School students wave the national flags during the 80th Independence Day celebrations at Chhatrasal Stadium in New Delhi



School students march with flags during the 80th Independence Day celebrations at Chhatrasal Stadium in New Delhi



A participant displays a decorated kite with social messages calling for women’s empowerment, education during the 80th I-Day celebrations at the AICC headquarters in New Delhi

CM Rekha cautions youth against Urban Naxals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Saturday echoed Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Independence Day warning on “dimaagi (intellectual) Naxal”, urging the youth to remain alert to what she described as the influence of “urban Naxals” and channel their energy towards nation-building.

Cautioning the youth against ‘dimaagi naxal’, the chief minister said it was the reason for India’s battle at two and a half fronts. The two fronts lay outside, while the half-front existed inside the country, she said. “Be cautious of one group known as Urban Naxalism because of whom India has to battle at two and a half fronts. This half-front (Urban Naxals) keeps on insulting the country and its armed forces,” she charged.

Her remarks came hours after PM Modi, in his Independence Day address from the Red Fort, said Naxalism had been eliminated from the country but cautioned that “armed Naxals may have gone, but dimaagi (intellectual) Naxals are lurking around.”

Addressing the Delhi government’s Independence Day function at Chhatrasaal stadium, the chief minister also urged young people to look beyond social media and use their ideas, creativity and talent for innovation, research and public service.

“The youth of Delhi are not just job seekers; they also have the capability to provide jobs. They do not just use technology, they



(Left) Chief Minister Rekha Gupta addressing audience during the 80th Independence Day celebrations at Chhatrasal Stadium; (right) Chief Minister Rekha Gupta along with Delhi Ministers Manjinder Singh Sirsa, Parvesh Verma, Ashish Sood, Kapil Mishra, Ravinder Indraj Singh, and school students releases tricolour balloons into the sky to celebrate the country’s 80th Independence Day at Chhatrasal Stadium in New Delhi

PANKAJ KUMAR

also create it. They not just watch the world but also know how to face it, she stated.

“I want to say to my young friends: Do not limit your strength to social media. Use your ideas for start-ups and your creativity for innovation. Turn your questions into research, use your sensitivity for service and channel your talent towards nation-building,” she said.

“The Youth of India are different - they are aware, ask questions, know technology, understand the world, and are sensitive to issues like mental health, climate change, gender equality and social justice,” she said.

The chief minister praised the youth as the “Amrit generation” of the country, saying they were aware, talented and did not hesitate to ask questions. The chief minister said the national capital was leading the way

towards “Viksit Bharat” and the Delhi model could become the benchmark for other states.

The chief minister also highlighted her government’s achievements in the last 18 months. “The development model created in Delhi can become a benchmark for other cities. Delhi will take the first step towards the threshold of a developed India, because it is active, attentive, and attractive,” she said. The chief minister cited various initiatives by her government to empower women, boost health and education sectors, fight pollution by making Delhi an EV city, clean the Yamuna river and remove “three garbage mountains”.

The chief minister hoisted the national flag at the event. A ceremonial parade was held by contingents from Delhi Police, Fire



Services, NCC cadets and students of Delhi government schools.

The chief minister said the people of Delhi had given her government a mandate not merely to run the administration but to bring a new direction to governance, transparency and development.

She said her government implemented the Ayushman Bharat health insurance programme, under which over nine lakh beneficiaries have been registered so far, while 3 lakh are registered under the ‘Vaya Vandana’ pension scheme for the elderly.

Over 18 lakh women and transgender people were issued ‘Pink cards’ by the government to provide them free bus travel.

Also, under the Durga scheme, the Delhi government will provide e-auto permits to 1000 women and 100 transgenders, she said.

On education, she said the government has introduced courses such as Neev and Rashtra Neeti and opened 75 new CM Shri schools.

The chief minister also outlined cooperation between the Centre and the Delhi government to achieve the targets of ‘Viksit Bharat’ and ‘Viksit Delhi’. She said the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has become the ‘official banker’ of Delhi now and there will be no paucity of funds for development.

She also noted that the Centre has sanctioned a sum of Rs 2,600 crore, which will help the Delhi government undertake 61 new projects. Describing pollution as a big challenge before Delhi, she said that it will not be solved through a blame game.

The chief minister said that Delhi, while marching on the path of development, is also connected to its heritage and cultural roots.

Nation marks 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The nation commemorated the 80th Independence Day on August 15, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading the celebrations at the Red Fort complex amid patriotic fervour and multi-layer security. An Army band played the tune of ‘Vande Mataram’ as the guests present on the occasion sang the national song. This was followed by the prime minister hoisting the national flag, and then the National Anthem was recited. For the first time, the national song, ‘Vande Mataram’, was rendered during the celebrations at the Red Fort.

The National Anthem rendition was synchronised with the 21-gun salute by the gunners of the 1721 Field Battery (Ceremonial), utilising the indigenous 105mm Light Field Guns.

Floral decoration on the ramparts depicted the national flag at the centre, flanked by ‘Vande Mataram’ in Hindi.

After the flag hoisting, the tricolour received a ‘Rashtriya Salute’. Following this, flower petals were showered at the venue by two Mi-17 helicopters of the Indian Air Force – one trooping the national flag and the other carrying a flag depicting ‘Vande Mataram’.

Upon his arrival at the Red Fort, Modi was received by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, his deputy Sanjay Seth and Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh.



Armed Forces personnel during the 80th Independence Day celebrations at Red Fort in New Delhi

General Officer Commanding (GOC), Delhi Area, Lt Gen Rajesh Sethi, conducted the prime minister to the saluting base. Thereafter, Modi inspected the guard of honour.

The PM delivered a 75-minute address on the occasion, which was attended by various Union ministers, including Amit Shah, Kiren Rijiju, Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, and other senior government officials and military officers.

However, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha leaders of the opposition, Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge, respectively, skipped the event for the second time.

At the conclusion of his speech, a large number of National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets and My Bharat volunteers sang ‘Vande Mataram’, followed by the National Anthem. The NCC cadets and My Bharat volunteers were

seated on Gyanpath, opposite the ramparts, forming the words ‘Vande Mataram’. View cutters depicting the theme ‘Viksit Bharat @2047’ were installed at Gyanpath.

The mega function also commemorated 150 years of the enduring legacy of ‘Vande Mataram’ and ‘celebrated the energy, aspirations and pivotal contribution of ‘Yuva Shakti’ in driving India’s journey towards Viksit Bharat by 2047”, according to the defence ministry.

Invitation cards for the 80th Independence Day celebrations at the Red Fort prominently depict the newly built Seva Teerth complex, which houses the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), the National Security Council Secretariat and the Cabinet Secretariat.

A ‘Dharm Chakra’, symbolising the “eternal movement of righteous duty and continuous selfless action”, has also been portrayed on the invitation cards.

From Saare Jahan se Accha to Vande Mataram: Songs that continue to define spirit of I-Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

“Saare Jahan se Accha, Hindustan Hamara. Hum Bulbule Hain Iski, ye Gulsitan Hamara...” The early morning breeze across cities carried strains of music, echoing the idea of freedom that India’s founding fathers envisioned for a nation proud of its syncretic culture, pluralism and diversity.

Songs, including those written long before India attained freedom on this day in 1947, have continued to rekindle the emotions that fuelled the nation’s freedom struggle and, in the years since, have come to embody its pride in memorable melodies that are still sung in harmony.

One of the most memo-

orable songs of these remains “Saare Jahan se Accha”, written by Muhammad Iqbal in 1904, which has remained popular for more than a century across generations.

Apart from being played by the Indian armed forces on different occasions, the verses achieved a more popular status as patriotic songs in school assemblies. The words have been adapted to different tunes by filmmakers in “Bhai Bahen” (1959), “Yeh Gulsitan Hamara” (1972), and “Love Boy” (1985).

Another song that tugs at the deepest emotions of Indian hearts is “Vande Mataram”, written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and rendered to different tunes over the years as well as made part of films such as “Anand Math” (1954) and “Leader”

(1964). The national song of India has been sung by some of the most noted singers, including Lata Mangeshkar and K.S. Chittra. A.R. Rahman’s eponymous studio album included two arrangements of the poem in songs “Revival” and “Missing”.

The national song, with a full six stanzas, was rendered at the Red Fort complex on the occasion of Independence Day on Saturday, followed by the recitation of the national anthem.

The 1954 Hindi movie “Jagriti” has continued to resonate for over seven decades through its most popular song “Aao Bacchon Tumhe Dikhaeyin Jhanki Hindustan Ki”.

The song, written and sung by Kavi Pradeep, introduced



children to India’s history of brave leaders, including Maharana Pratap and Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, as well as invoked the sacrifices of Jallianwala Bagh.

“Sarfaroshi Ki Tamanna”, originally written in 1921 by poet and freedom fighter

Bismil Azimabadi, was later adapted by Prem Dhawan to the voices of Mohammad Rafi, Manna Dey, and Rajendra Mehta for “Shaheed” in 1965.

The film, based on the life of Bhagat Singh, gave timeless patriotic songs such as

“Ae Watan, Ae Watan, Humko Teri Kasam”, “O Mera Rang De Basanti Chola”, and “Pagadi Sambhal Jatta”.

The poem, written in response to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, was immortalised by freedom fighters, including Bhagat Singh, Ram Prasad Bismil, and Chandrashekhar Azad.

“Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon”, a more soulful song against Bismil’s passionate war cry that is sung and played on Independence Day, was originally written by Kavi Pradeep in 1963 to commemorate the Indian soldiers who died during the India-China war of 1962.

The song was first sung by Lata Mangeshkar in Delhi on January 26, 1963, in the presence of then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who was

reportedly moved to tears by the heart-rending poem.

There are few songs that stir emotions like A.R. Rahman’s “Maa Tuihe Salaam” from his album “Vande Mataram”.

Written by Mehboob and sung by Rahman, the song addresses India as a mother and, unlike traditional patriotic songs, is both intimate and monumental in its soaring melody and repeated invocation of “Maa Tuihe Salaam” (Mother, I salute you).

Few songs have managed to evoke the sense of India’s diversity and pluralism like “Mile Sur Mera Tumhara”. Released on August 15, 1988, the song was written by Piyush Pandey and composed by Pandit Bhimsen Joshi. The song, with an accompanying video, highlights India’s differ-

ent linguistic communities, its various traditions, cultures, and heritage.

The song had 14 languages, including Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Punjabi, Odia, Tamil, Malayalam, Bangla, and Assamese, and was sung by some of the most popular singers of the time, such as Lata Mangeshkar, Kavita Krishnamurthy, Suchitra Mitra, Ananda Shankar, and M. Balamuralikrishna.

Monumental in scale, the song was shot at locations across India and featured celebrities from cinema, sports, dance, and literature, including Amitabh Bachchan, Jeetendra, Waheeda Rahman, Hema Malini, Tanuja, Mithun Chakraborty, Kamal Haasan, Prakash Padukone, Javed Akhtar, Arun Lal, and Mrinal Sen.

IN FOCUS



The India Gate is illuminated in the Indian Tricolour on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day in New Delhi on Saturday

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BCI chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra issues apology to law students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

After taking sereis of u-turns on his decisions in the last two days, Bar Council of India (BCI) chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra on Saturday issued an apology to law students. The apology follows criticism from students at National Academy of Legal Studies and Research (NALSAR) University of Law at Hyderabad and National Law School of India University (NLSIU) Bangalore over BCI's handling of the row surrounding Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant's participation in NALSAR's 2026 convocation. Though the apology does not name the university or dispute directly, it refers to recent developments which



he said had caused concern among students. "If anything connected with the present controversy, any of my words, or letter, has hurt the feelings of our law students, I sincerely regret and apologise for the same. There should be no hesitation in saying so. An expression of regret is not a matter of prestige or ego. It is simply an acknowledgment that the feelings and concerns of our students matter," the statement said. The controversy began after the BCI on August 13 ordered a halt on the enrolment for NALSAR's graduating batch of 2026 for objecting to the participation of CJI Surya Kant as the chief guest for their convocation. However, the BCI reversed its decision within hours, after criticism from legal fraternity. NALSAR's Student Bar Council later issued a statement demanding a public apology from Mishra over BCI's handling of the episode. NLSIU's graduating students, current students and alumni also followed with a joint statement making a similar demand. NLSIU students also rejected the presence of the BCI Chairperson and the CJI at

their own convocation. He praised the students at National Law Universities (NLUs) as among the country's most informed and discerning young citizens and said that their conduct and choices are noticed across the legal education system and often influence the manner in which students of other Centres of Legal Education (CLEs) view similar issues. "The young men and women studying there today will tomorrow become Advocates, Senior Advocates, Teachers, Scholars and Judges. Some among them may one day occupy the highest positions in the legal and judicial system. That is why their decisions carry significance beyond a single event or controversy," Mishra said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday urged India's youth to pursue ambitious goals, assuring them of government support and resources. He highlighted the expansion of the country's startup ecosystem and referenced the ₹1 lakh crore Innovation Fund established to promote new ideas and talent. In his address on the 80th Independence Day, Modi stated that young Indians are central to the country's progress towards developed nation status. He emphasised their significant role in achieving this objective and noted that they stand to benefit most from these efforts. Modi stated that more than 2.5 lakh registered startups have been launched under the Startup India campaign, with young entrepreneurs generating employment opportunities for themselves and others. "Today, through the Startup India campaign, more than 2.5 lakh registered startups have been created across the country. The youth of the country are not only working for themselves, but are also providing employment to many others," the PM said. He highlighted the Government's ₹1 lakh crore Innovation Fund and encouraged young Indians to contribute their ideas. "The Government of India has 'The Government of India has announced a ₹1 lakh crore Innovation Fund. I want to tell the youth of the country: bring your

PM to youth: Bring your ideas, ₹1 lakh cr innovation fund ready

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday urged India's youth to pursue ambitious goals, assuring them of government support and resources. He highlighted the expansion of the country's startup ecosystem and referenced the ₹1 lakh crore Innovation Fund established to promote new ideas and talent. In his address on the 80th Independence Day, Modi stated that young Indians are central to the country's progress towards developed nation status. He emphasised their significant role in achieving this objective and noted that they stand to benefit most from these efforts. Modi stated that more than 2.5 lakh registered startups have been launched under the Startup India campaign, with young entrepreneurs generating employment opportunities for themselves and others. "Today, through the Startup India campaign, more than 2.5 lakh registered startups have been created across the country. The youth of the country are not only working for themselves, but are also providing employment to many others," the PM said. He highlighted the Government's ₹1 lakh crore Innovation Fund and encouraged young Indians to contribute their ideas. "The Government of India has 'The Government of India has announced a ₹1 lakh crore Innovation Fund. I want to tell the youth of the country: bring your



dreams; we will ensure there is no shortage of resources," he said. He added that the fund is meant to empower talent and ideas. Enablers, he said, have expanded opportunities for the youth, including Digital India, affordable data, and Skill India. "If there is affordable data anywhere in the world, it is on the soil of India. And this has given new strength to the youth of the country," Modi said. India is currently the third-largest startup hub globally, following the United States and China. The government has supported the expansion of the entrepreneurial ecosystem through multiple schemes and initiatives aimed at innovators, entrepreneurs, and startups nationwide. Under the Startup India initiative, the government has introduced schemes such as the Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS), the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS), and the Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS). These programmes provide funding to startups across various sectors and stages of development. The FFS was established to boost venture capital investment.

Tricolour proudly flies on former Naxal stronghold of Kuregutta Hills, J&K: Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said the Tricolour now proudly flies on the hill of Kuregutta, once a stronghold of Naxal terror, and in Jammu and Kashmir, where hoisting it used to invite threats. In an X post, Shah said the festival of Independence is being celebrated with great pomp on the hill. "Where once guns roared, now patriotism echoes. The Tricolour waving over the red soil is a symbol of the strength, progress and self-confidence of a Naxal-free

new Bastar," he said. The three-day Bastar Tiranga Yatra, which covered nearly 600 kilometres through areas once considered Maoist strongholds, culminated on Friday with the hoisting of the national flag at Kuregutta hills in Bijapur district, adding a new chapter in the region's history. Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma and Forest Minister Kedar Kashyap led the motorcycle procession, joined by several public representatives, locals and community leaders. The final destination was Kuregutta, a hill range that had long been regarded as a



Union Ministers Amit Shah along with wife Sonal Shah during the 80th Independence Day celebrations at Red Fort in New Delhi

PTI

formidable Maoist hideout on the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border and witnessed an extensive anti-Maoist operation by security forces. On the Tiranga Yatra in Jammu and Kashmir, Shah said millions waved the national flag with joy and pride. "Jammu and Kashmir has charted a journey from fear to freedom under the leadership of Modi ji. Where hoisting the Tiranga once invited threats, J&K now hosts Tiranga Yatras, with millions waving our National Flag with joy and pride," he said in another X post.

Jharkhand job aspirants take out Tiranga Yatra in Ranchi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ranchi

Students protesting alleged irregularities in Jharkhand's recruitment examinations took out a 'Tiranga Yatra' in Ranchi on Saturday, marking the country's 80th Independence Day and pressing their demand for greater transparency and reforms in the examination system. The march, organised under the banner of the JPSC-JSSC Reforms Manch, began at the Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium, the site of the ongoing agitation, and culminated at Albert Ekka Chowk. Thousands of job aspirants and supporters participated, carrying the national flag and raising slogans including 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' and 'Vande Mataram'. The protest entered its 22nd day on Saturday, with the demonstrators demanding cancellation of certain tests and an independent probe by the CBI or a panel of retired judges from outside Jharkhand into alleged irregularities. The agi-



tation also drew attention to the condition of JLMK leader Devendra Mahto, who has been on a fast for 14 days. Mahto alleged that police prevented him from leaving Sadar Hospital to participate in the march. Videos purportedly showing him scuffling with security personnel while attempting to leave the hospital were widely circulated on social media. The protesters said their struggle was not merely about individual examinations but about ensuring equal opportunities and restoring confidence among young job aspirants. "Independence doesn't just mean freedom from the British, but also freedom from inequality of opportunities, corruption and injustice," the

JPSC-JSSC Reforms Manch said, urging young people to raise their voices peacefully for their rights. The agitation came against the backdrop of assurances by Chief Minister Hemant Soren that the hard work of job aspirants would not be allowed to fall victim to paper leaks, corruption or irregularities. In his Independence Day address, Soren said questions surrounding recruitment examinations had shaken the trust of an entire generation and assured students that investigations into alleged irregularities would be conducted impartially. He said anyone found guilty would face strict legal action, irrespective of their influence or position. At the same time, Soren cautioned against declaring

anyone guilty without evidence, saying justice must be based on facts. "Merely apprehending the guilty is not the solution," he said, stressing the need for systemic reforms to prevent manipulation of examinations in the future. The chief minister outlined measures including a time-bound annual examination calendar, technology-secured examinations, timely publication of answer keys and OMR sheets, and multi-level accountability in the recruitment process. The State Government has also launched the "Students' Voice with Students" campaign to gather suggestions from students, teachers, educationists and parents on reforms in the examination system. Soren said employment remained among the government's top priorities, adding that the objective was not merely to fill vacant government posts but to create wider employment opportunities through recruitment agencies and other avenues.

He also described paper leaks as a national problem, while asserting that developments in other states could not reduce Jharkhand's responsibility to ensure fair and credible examinations. Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar, too, expressed concern over examination malpractice, saying question paper leaks undermine the morale and prospects of students who seek to succeed through hard work and talent. "Question paper leaks and malpractices of any kind in examinations cannot be accepted," Gangwar said, calling for a thorough review of shortcomings in the state's examination system and concrete measures to address them. The governor said Jharkhand's youth were talented and had a strong work ethic. He also stressed the need to expand employment opportunities in line with young people's qualifications and capabilities, including opportunities in the private sector and avenues for self-employment.

BJP MP flags off train at J&K's Samba, 6 train stoppages restored

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

BJP MP Jugal Kishore Sharma on Saturday flagged off Jammu Mail from Samba railway station as the Northern Railway restored the stoppage of six important trains at the station on the occasion of Independence Day, officials said. Sharma flagged off the train at 5:26 pm. It will run between Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra and Subedarganj near Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh. BJP MLA Surjeet Singh Slathia attended the event as the guest of honour. Jammu Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Uchit Singhal, along with other railway officers, staff and local residents, were also present at the programme. The six trains whose stoppages have been restored at Samba are Train numbers - 20434, 16787, 14803, 14804,



BJP MP Jugal Kishore Sharma flagged off Jammu Mail from Samba railway station

PTI

16317 and 16031. The stoppage of Train numbers 19223/19224 Sabarmati-Jammu Tawi Express will also be provided at Samba from October, they said. Speaking on the occasion, Sharma and Slathia said the restoration of the stoppages fulfilled a long-standing demand of the people of Samba and would improve direct rail connectivity for pil-

grims, students, employees and traders. "Jammu Division is continuously committed to passenger convenience, and such demands will be considered positively in the future as well," he said. The railway administration advised passengers to check train schedules through the official railway website, NTES app or by dialing 139.

'Vande Mataram' rendered at Red Fort...

The Government last November launched a year-long celebration to mark 150 years of 'Vande Mataram'. 'Vande Mataram' was initially composed independently and later included in Chatterjee's novel 'Anandamath'. It was first sung by Rabindranath Tagore at the 1896 Congress Session in Calcutta (now Kolkata). The chant 'Vande Mataram' as a political slogan was first used on August 7, 1905, according to a note, '150 years of Vande Mataram: A Melody That Became a Movement', shared by the Government on November 6 last year. 'Vande Mataram' was first published in the literary journal 'Bangadarshan' on November 7, 1875. Later, Chatterjee incorporated the hymn in his novel 'Anandamath', which was published in 1882. It was set to music by Tagore, it is said.

Vande Mataram row erupts at Congress...

"Rather, they were casually talking to each other and even calling someone. This shows their utter disrespect towards the National Song Vande Mataram. It was a historic occasion, but a very ugly moment was seen at the Congress party's head office," the BJP Rajya Sabha MP told reporters here. Trivedi demanded an "apology and a clarification" from the Congress and its leadership, saying people of the country are hurt by their "objectionable and deplorable act". Congress asserted that the full version of the National Song was sung on Saturday. "But today, at Indira Bhawan, the full version was sung; there is no question of a controversy over it," he added. Asked about the row, Ramesh said,

"On October 28, 1937, in Calcutta, a meeting of the Congress Working Committee was held in the presence of Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Govind Ballabh Pant and C Rajagopalachari, and on the advice of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, they decided that the initial stanzas of Vande Mataram would be sung at the Congress sessions." Last month, Parliament passed a bill that makes any insult to the national song a punishable offence. The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, was passed by a voice vote in the Lok Sabha on July 30, a day after it was approved by the Rajya Sabha. The law grants status to Vande Mataram on par with the National Anthem, Jana Gana Mana.

TN BJP chief's remarks against Vijay...

Vijay had narrated a "kutti kathai" in the Assembly following the DMK's defeat in the April 2026 Assembly election, referring humorously to the whereabouts of the Opposition leader's "father" in an apparent allusion to Stalin's electoral defeat in the Kolathur Assembly constituency. Several political parties, including the DMK, had criticised Vijay's remarks. Speaking to the media, Rajmohan strongly condemned the BJP State chief's remarks, calling them "uncivilised and inappropriate" for a political leader. He said Vijay had taught his colleagues to engage in civilised politics regardless of provocations or personal attacks. Former BJP president K Annamalai also condemned Nagenthiran's remarks, saying he had crossed the boundaries of political decorum and civility. Annamalai said political disagreements and questioning the gov-

FROM PAGE - 1

ernment's actions were part of democratic discourse. However, he said personal attacks against a leader's family, particularly their mother, were unacceptable. He described such remarks as a regressive, "third-rate" form of politics that should not be encouraged among the younger generation.

Modi's seven streams to power India's 2047...

Reaching out to the youth in a big way in his address on the 80th Independence Day, weeks after widespread student protests over paper leaks and irregularities in exams, the Prime Minister made a series of announcements — free online coaching for competitive exams, AI training for one crore youth, a sports talent hunt and a vibrant civil defence network. He also listed opportunities for them in areas ranging from manufacturing, space and nuclear to semiconductors. Modi struck an emotive note while highlighting how coaching classes had become a burden for the poor and middle class. "Keeping the concerns of poor and middle-class families in mind, we want to help save them the thousands of crores of rupees they spend on coaching. Our young people should be able to stay close to their families, receive their care, and avoid placing an additional financial burden on them," he said while announcing free online coaching for competitive exams. Modi also set a target of raising India's nuclear power capacity to 100 GW by 2047, announced plans for more semiconductor plants and said the government would aim to create six crore "Lakshpati Didis", doubling its earlier target. With India looking to host the 2036 Olympics, Modi announced a nationwide talent hunt to identify promising sportspersons between the ages of five and 15 in villages, cities and schools.

PM also credited the efforts of the past 12 years for lifting 25 crore people out of poverty and transforming society. India has gone from being part of the 'Fragile Five' to becoming one of the world's fastest-growing major economies. The entire railway network was electrified in the last decade, up from only 30 per cent in the previous 90 years. India also launched its first and most powerful hydrogen-powered train. The "Samudra Manthan" deep-sea project, with ₹85,000 crore funding, has opened almost all of India's coastline for exploration. He said India's preparedness helped the country get through global crises like COVID-19 and tensions in West Asia without running out of fuel, gas, or urea, even though many expected shortages. India has also signed Free Trade Agreements with about 40 countries, creating new opportunities for small businesses, farmers, and fishermen, especially in the seafood sector. He encouraged everyone to take advantage of these agreements. Announcements included: AI skill training for 1 crore youth over the next year so they can lead in the AI era. Free online coaching for various competitive exams to ease the financial burden on poor and middle-class families (leveraging digital infrastructure). Over ₹1 lakh crore innovation fund already allocated; benefits from Digital India, Skill India, Khelo India, and New Education Policy. Nationwide sports talent hunt targeting children aged 515 years to increase participation (including previously untapped categories) in the 2036 Olympics. Modi ended his speech by urging people to let go of any lingering mentality of slavery, highlighting the strength of the Sapta Dharma, and calling on everyone to work together for a developed India. The speech focused on ongoing reforms and a greater emphasis on technology, energy independence, youth, and inclusive growth for the 2047 goal.

75-minute address among Modi's shortest...

Nehru's 1947 Independence Day speech lasted 72 minutes, while IK Gujral spoke for 71 minutes in 1997. Among the shortest addresses, Nehru and Indira Gandhi each spoke for 14 minutes in 1954 and 1966, respectively. Manmohan Singh's 2012 and 2013 speeches lasted 32 and 35 minutes, while Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke for 25 minutes in 2002 and 30 minutes in 2003. Given the rather hot and humid conditions even in the early morning, Modi could be seen taking a sip of water a few times during his address to the nation. He also maintained his practice of mixing with people after his speech, making it rather tough for his security team. Nonetheless, like last year, Modi shook hands with young attendees at the venue and spent considerable time with them. Many of them were also seen taking photos of the Prime Minister up close on their mobiles. The Prime Minister also goes up to the people after the Republic Day ends at the Kartavya Path.

DAE mandates insurance cover for nuclear...

"Upon receipt of a valid 'in-principle approval', the applicant may proceed with negotiation with reactor technology vendors and for acquiring the land and other necessary infrastructure," the draft rules say. They also mention that there will be a single composite licence authorising the building, owning, operating and decommissioning of the nuclear power plant or reactor. "No licence shall be applied for, granted, divided, or severed ... in respect of any of those activities separately," the draft rules say.

Modi's I-Day roadmap: Education, agriculture, security

India to become defence manufacturing hub



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday called for India to become a global centre for defence manufacturing, highlighting the need for self-reliance in advanced areas such as hypersonic technology and drone systems.

During his Independence Day speech at the Red Fort, Modi spoke about the security threats India faces both inside and outside the country. He also announced plans to build a strong network of civil defence personnel. The PM added that work is ongoing on Sudarshan Chakra, an Indian-made air defence system.

Modi first announced the project on August 15 last year. The Sudarshan Chakra is designed to strengthen India's air defence, protect important military and civilian sites, and respond effectively to enemy threats.

The armed forces are developing the project amid security concerns from Pakistan and China.

The prime minister said expanding defence production in India is key to strengthening the country's strategic position. "We have

to become a global supplier by leveraging next-generation defence technology," he said.

He stressed the need for India to develop expertise in making drones, counter-drone systems, and hyper-sonic technologies. Modi also pointed out that India's defence production has been increasing. In the last few years, the Government has rolled out a series of policy initiatives to boost domestic defence manufacturing. The volume of India's domestic defence production was recorded at ₹1.78 lakh crore in the financial year 2025-26, compared with ₹46,000 crore in 2014, according to the latest Government data.

Defence exports have reached ₹38,424 crore in the financial year 2025-26.

Modi said that India's defence exports have grown 50-fold, and Indian military equipment is now supplied to almost 100 countries, though he did not provide a specific timeline.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday that military projects worth over ₹8.75 lakh crore were approved in the past year, showing the Modi Government's commitment to modernising the armed forces.

FREE ONLINE COACHING FOR COMPETITIVE EXAMS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Saturday that the Government will offer free online coaching to help candidates prepare for competitive exams. This move is meant to ease the financial burden on families. "Coaching classes burden the poor and the middle class. We will provide free online coaching for various exams," Modi said in his address to the nation on India's 80th Independence Day. "Every parent feels that if they do not send their child to a coaching class, they are not a prestigious family," he said.

He said this initiative should help families save money



they would otherwise spend on coaching classes and let students study from home. "And therefore, we have decided to provide free online coaching for various examinations for the youth. We have digital public infrastructure; we have excellent talent and teachers. By bringing these resources together, we are going to build a complete network to provide free coaching to the youth of the country," PM Modi said.

PM urges farmers to adopt chemical-free farming

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday urged farmers to adopt chemical-free farming on a large scale, citing rising global demand for such produce.

In his Independence Day address, Modi outlined a seven-point reform framework, 'Sapta Dhara', aimed at driving India's development by 2047. The framework includes manufacturing, agro-food production and processing, technology and innovation, logistics, defence, green and blue economy, and soft power.

One of the 'Sapta Dhara' is agriculture and food production. "We must move forward in the direc-



tion of food processing as well. Our farmers now have access to global markets. Because of FTAs (free trade agreements), we have access to very large markets, and we must reach them. We must tap into that opportunity. We have to move from the farm to the export market," PM Modi said.

Modi said India has a wide range of traditional cuisine, millets, spices, fruits, and flowers that can be promoted internationally as global brands.



India needs pharma firms among global top 5: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that India needs at least one, if not two, pharmaceutical companies among the world's top five.

In his address on the 80th Independence Day, Modi reiterated the need for Indian pharmaceutical companies to be among the world's top firms. "We have done significant work in the pharmaceutical sector, but the need of the hour is for one or two Indian companies to feature prominently among the global top five. India must secure its place there," the prime minister said.

Official data shows that the Indian pharmaceutical industry is third in the world by volume and eleventh by value. The sector includes more than 3,000 companies and 10,500 manufacturing units. The domestic market is valued at \$60 billion and is projected to

reach \$130 billion by 2030.

The Economic Survey 2025-26 states that the pharmaceutical sector's annual turnover reached ₹4.72 lakh crore in FY25. Exports grew at a compound annual growth rate of 7 per cent from FY15 to FY25. India supplies about 20 per cent of the world's generic medicines and produces around 60,000 generic brands in 60 therapeutic categories. India is eleventh globally in pharmaceutical exports by value. In 2024-25, India exported medicines to 191 countries, with half of these exports going to regulated markets like the United States and Europe. Pharmaceutical exports in 2024-25 were \$30.5 billion, up from \$1.9 billion in 2000-01.

Despite this growth, Indian pharmaceutical companies are not yet among the world's top firms. Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd is one of the leading generic drug manufacturers.



Identify and separate 'dimagi Naxals'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday that Maoist extremism is ending in the country. He also urged people to identify and separate the "dimagi Naxals." In his speech on the 80th Independence Day, the prime minister said that Naxalism and Maoism have ruined the futures of many young people.

"For forty years, large regions and their people

lived under the threat of guns." "More than 3,500 security personnel died protecting people. This number is higher than those who die in war," he said.

"When we came to power in 2014, we promised to rid the country of Naxals. I am glad Maoist violence is almost over," he said. He added that many areas are now free of Naxalites and are developing.

Modi added, "For years, people with a Naxal mindset held positions of influence.

They served as advisors on Government committees, and their Maoist ideas affected policies."

"We have removed armed Naxals from the forests, but 'dimagi Naxals' (intellectual Naxals) are still trying to cause violence and unrest. They want to lead society in the wrong direction," he said.

"These 'dimagi Naxals' must be identified and isolated, and we need to connect young people with the mainstream," he added.

100% rail electrification achieved in last decade

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday highlighted the progress of railway electrification under his Government, stating that 70 per cent of the network was electrified in the past decade, compared to 30 per cent over the previous 90 years.

Addressing the nation from the Red Fort on the 80th Independence Day, Modi noted that railway electrification began in 1925. Still, only 30 per cent of the network was electrified over the next

90 years. He said that 100 per cent electrification was achieved within the last decade. Modi stated that electrification has reduced dependence on imported diesel and contributed to environmental benefits, with more trains now operating on electricity. According to Railway Board data, 99.6 per cent of the 70,142 broad-gauge route kilometres have been electrified.

The Railway Ministry informed Parliament that 21,801 route kilometres were electrified before 2014, while 48,072 kilometres were elec-



trified between 2014 and 2026. The ministry reported that Indian Railways' diesel consumption for traction decreased by 185 crore litres, from approximately 293

crore litres in 2015-16 to 108 crore litres in 2024-25.

"This has resulted in savings in precious foreign exchange for the Government of India's exche-

quer, which would otherwise have been required for the import of fuel," it said. PM Modi also spoke about India's move into the green hydrogen train sector, saying the country has launched a green hydrogen-powered train.

"What is special is that it is the longest and most powerful train, and India has also made its mark in the field of hydrogen trains in the world," he said. Modi flagged off India's first home-built hydrogen-powered train on July 17, marking a step toward the use of hydrogen technology in railways.

650 new universities, double medical seats since 2014

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the Government has established nearly 650 universities over the past decade, and the number of medical colleges has more than doubled since 2014.

In his address on the 80th Independence Day, Modi stated that the Government had implemented a new education policy after several decades, aimed at benefiting middle-class families.

"For 35 years, there had



been no new education policy; we have brought in a new Education Policy, and middle-class families have benefited from it," he said from the ramparts of the

Red Fort. Modi noted that from 2004 to 2014, there were fewer than 350 universities in the country. "And today, within these 10-12 years, nearly 650 new univer-

sities have been added. We are approaching the figure of 1,000," he said.

Modi also highlighted the expansion of medical education, noting that the number of medical colleges has more than doubled since 2014. "Before 2014, there were only around 400 medical seats; today, there are nearly 850 medical seats," he said. The prime minister further stated that India is becoming an attractive destination for foreign universities, enabling Indian students to earn foreign degrees while studying domestically.

"Not only that, but foreign universities are now also coming to Bharat. Arrangements have been made so that my young people can obtain degrees from foreign universities while studying in India," he said.

"We are working to ensure that young minds are engaged with technology from an early age. That is why we have established more than 10,000 Atal Tinkering Labs for children," Modi said. He added that the Government has also created new opportunities for startups.

PM Modi wears maroon Bandhani safa for 80th Independence Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day wardrobe has become a visual tradition, with his annual choice of turbans and traditional attire attracting almost as much attention as his address from the Red Fort. His Independence Day looks have ranged from fiery reds and bright yellows to saffron, pink and multi-coloured designs. Each appearance has offered a different take on traditional Indian headgear while reflecting the country's diverse cultural heritage.

To mark India's 80th Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi

appeared at the Red Fort in a maroon Bandhani safa, its yellow-and-white dotted pattern standing out against a white kurta-pyjama and chocolate brown vest as he delivered his 13th consecutive Independence Day address from the historic ramparts, next only to 17 by Jawaharlal Nehru in a row. He also sported three pocket squares of saffron, green and white colours.

The turban featured intricate red, green and white patterns, reflecting styles associated with Rajasthani and Gujarati traditions. Look closely at the fabric, and those tiny dots are not printed on it. They are made by tying the cloth before it is dyed. An artisan picks up

tiny portions of fabric, ties them tightly with thread and then dips the cloth into dye. The tied sections resist the colour, leaving behind the little dots and patterns that have come to define Bandhani. Bandhani is far older than its latest appearance at the Red Fort. PM Modi's safa is not just a brightly coloured turban with dots on it. It draws on a textile tradition in which colour, pattern, fabric and the way something is worn have long carried cultural meaning.

Bandhani, also called Bandheji or Bandhni in different regions, belongs to India's long tradition of resist dyeing. The name is linked to the Sanskrit root bandh, meaning to tie or bind. In



Gujarat, the craft is commonly known as Bandheji, while Bandhani or Bandhni is widely used in Rajasthan

and Madhya Pradesh.

In Gujarat, Bandhani became closely associated with the Khatri community,

whose artisans played a major role in developing and passing down the craft. The Ministry of Textiles says

Khatri introduced Bandhani to Kutch in the 12th century, where it subsequently became an important craft and eventually an export product. Today, Jamnagar and Kutch remain major Bandhani centres.

Jamnagari Bandhani even has a Geographical Indication (GI) registration, with Jamnagar identified as the main production centre in Saurashtra and Bandhani also produced across Kutch. The fabric itself can vary too. Traditional Bandhani has been made on cotton, silk and other fabrics, with natural dyes historically used before chemical dyes became widespread.

Rajasthan developed a rich vocabulary of turbans and safas, with different commu-

nities and occasions having their own ways of tying and wearing them. Bandhani became one of the fabrics used to make these head coverings particularly striking. Since his first address as Prime Minister in 2014, he has chosen safas and turbans in a wide range of colours, patterns and regional styles, often bringing India's rich textile heritage and craftsmanship into focus. From Rajasthan's bandheji and leheriya to tricolour-inspired designs, his choice of headgear has evolved from year to year while retaining its traditional character.

In 2023, he opted for a bandhani print in shades of yellow, green and red, and paired it with a black V-neck jacket.

States Focus



YOUTH ARE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND: MOHAN BHAGWAT

Describing youth as a demographic dividend, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Saturday said if their potential is harnessed properly, the nation will become a Vishwaguru; otherwise, it will become a heavy burden as this generation will become old after 30 years.

He also stressed that opposition and movements are an essential part of democracy when issues of public benefit are being raised. "Dialogue and debate must continue without harming Constitution or laws of the country," he added. Addressing youngsters at an event organised by the Lokmat Media Group at Kasturchand Park, Bhagwat said youth will age after 30 years, and advised them not to think only of themselves but also to be sensitive to the needs of future generations. He urged youth to be courageous and face the future with confidence, saying they must work to shape their own destiny as well as that of nation. Bhagwat hoisted a 200-foot-high national flag erected by Lokmat Media Group at Kasturchand Park in collaboration with the municipal corporation. (PTI)



DEVELOPED WEST BENGAL KEY TO VIKSIT BHARAT 2047: CM

West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari on Saturday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat in 2047 can only be realised through an all-round advancement of the State.

Remembering Bharatiya Jana Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Bharat Sevashram Sangh founder Swami Pranavananda for their efforts to retain West Bengal as part of India during the partition which accompanied Independence, Adhikari said the priority of his dispensation was to restore the previous glory of the State. "By creating more and more job opportunities, ensuring women's empowerment, advancing security and tightening the law and order situation, we want to bring about an all-round development across all corners of the State," Adhikari said. (PTI)

GDA campus illuminated in Tricolour on Independence Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ghaziabad

The 80th Independence Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm at the Ghaziabad Development Authority (GDA) campus. Following the unfurling of the National Flag and the singing of the National Anthem, GDA Vice-Chairman Nand Kishore Kalal called upon officers to reflect on their duties, stating that resolving citizens' issues efficiently and transparently represents the true spirit of patriotism. As evening fell, the campus was magnificently illuminated in Tricolour lights.

The ceremony was attended by GDA Secretary Vivek Kumar Mishra, Additional Secretary Pradeep Kumar Singh, Special Officers Rajiv Ratan Singh and Kanika Kaushik, In-charge Chief Engineer Alok Ranjan, along with all Executive Engineers,



Assistant Engineers, Junior Engineers and other officers and employees of the Authority. All participants enthusiastically joined the celebrations and expressed their commitment to the unity, integrity and progress of the nation.

CM Omar Abdullah pledges Statehood drive for J&K; BJP slams speech

MOHIT KANDHARI
■ Jammu

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday invited trouble for himself by once again reiterating that his Government was committed to fighting for the restoration of the constitutional guarantees of Jammu & Kashmir and regaining its Statehood.

"Whether it is to bring Jammu & Kashmir to that level again, whether it is to restore the constitutional guarantees, whether it is to regain the special status, or whether it is to start a new era of progress in J&K, your Government is not only a promise for all these things, but your Government will make it a reality," Omar said after hoisting the National Flag at the 80th Independence Day function at Bakhshi Stadium, Srinagar.

Leader of Opposition in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly and senior BJP leader Sunil Sharma criti-

cised Chief Minister Omar Abdullah for referring to political issues during his Independence Day address.

"I don't want to talk about politics, but I was very shocked when such a stage was used by the Chief Minister for political purposes," he said.

Sharma said the Independence Day platform represented the history and glory of the country and should not be treated as a platform belonging to any political party or individual.

"This stage represents the glorious history of India. This stage is not the stage of a party or a person. This stage is for the glory of the flag. It is irresponsible to talk about politics here by the Chief Minister," he said.

The Independence Day function in Srinagar was attended by former Chief Minister Dr Farooq Abdullah, several Members of the Legislative Assembly, senior officers of the J&K civil and police administration, and a

large gathering of people. Deputy CM Surinder Choudhary hoisted the flag inside MA Stadium in Jammu.

The Independence Day passed off peacefully at all other district headquarters where senior cabinet ministers and district development commissioners hoisted the tricolour.

In his carefully drafted speech, Omar attempted to convince the people by assuring them that the Government would continue to represent, serve and work for the people of Jammu & Kashmir and strive to fulfil the dreams of those who sacrificed their lives for the freedom and future of the region.

Opening his speech with the famous patriotic verse, "Sare Jahan Se Achha, Hindustan Hamara...", the Chief Minister said the words beautifully capture the love, pride and emotional bond that people share with their country. He said Independence Day was an occasion to reflect on whether



TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said that ₹1.50 lakh crore will be invested in capital expenditure in the state in the next five years, of which ₹50,000 crore will be from its own resources.

Speaking after hoisting the National Flag at the Independence Day celebration in Guwahati, he also appealed to people from various parts of the country who have settled here to list 'Assamese' as their mother tongue during Census data collection.

He, however, added that people of Barak Valley and tribals may mention their own languages in that category. The Barak Valley has a predominantly Bengali-speaking population.

"For building a 'Vikshit Assam' by 2047, we shall be spending ₹50,000 crore in capital expenditure. The next four years will see investment in roads, schools, urbanisation, rural growth, etc, and this will be from our own funds," Sarma said in his

first Independence Day speech after retaining the chief minister's position for the second term.

"In the next five years, we shall try to get ₹1 lakh crore from the Central Government. From 2026 to 2031, the State will spend ₹1.50 lakh crore on infrastructure," Sarma added.

He said the State's economy has tripled in a decade and the State is now known from 'chai' to 'chip' of semiconductors, referring to the upcoming Tata factory in the State.

"We don't have the sea and resources like Odisha; faced decades of insurgency; but the 'Assam model of development' is shining now," the CM asserted.

He said schemes like 'Orunodoi' for women empowerment, transparently providing 1.65 lakh Government jobs, digitalisation of administration, etc., are measures taken in the last five years that have transformed the State's image.

Thanking the people for reaffirming their trust in the BJP-led Government in the April elections, Sarma said development will be further



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma during the Independence Day celebrations in Guwahati on Saturday PIONEER PHOTO

accelerated, and it can be seen through the steps taken in the first 100 days of the new regime, including bringing the Uniform Civil Code.

He also expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for allotting massive infrastructure and other projects to the State, from highways to semiconductors, and from underwater tunnels to the Kaziranga Elevated Corridor, without the State even having to demand these.

Sarma maintained that mandatory rendition of the complete six stanzas of the Vande Mataram for the first

time since independence made the occasion more special.

Blaming the Congress for the previous shorter version of the National Song being sung, he said, "For their own political interest, a section of Congress leaders had fragmented it. It is under PM Modi that all six stanzas of the song have been given the same status as the National Anthem."

Condoling the loss of lives in the recent floods, which especially devastated four eastern districts, Sarma said that funds for rehabilitation of the affected people and

CM Shivkumar announces AI education programme for schools in Karnataka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

Karnataka Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday announced the AI Akshara Abhiyana and Coding Gurukula programme to introduce artificial intelligence education in schools across the State and equip students to compete at the global level.

"We are now entering a new technological era. The AI campaign and Coding Gurukula - this is your era, a new era," Shivakumar said in his Independence Day speech from the sprawling Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw Parade Ground.

"Today I am announcing an important programme called the 'AI Akshara Abhiyana and Coding Gurukula'," he said.

The Chief Minister explained that AI education would be introduced in all



schools from Class 6.

Shivakumar also said his Government was working to establish India's first Government-owned AI university in Bengaluru.

Stressing the need to improve the quality of schools and colleges, the CM said an expert committee constituted to reform the examination system would submit its report within two months.

Outlining his vision for Karnataka, Shivakumar said

"Youth Karnataka, New India" was his Government's slogan and said the State had set a target of taking its economy to \$3 trillion, or ₹320 lakh crore, by 2047.

Karnataka's per capita income, he said, had reached ₹4.33 lakh, nearly twice the national average, while the State ranked second in GST and income-tax collection.

He announced a number of measures focused on youth and employment, including filling around 72,000

Government vacancies within six months, Udyoga Sethu for private-sector job seekers and Udyoga Nidhi. Industries creating new jobs would receive an incentive of around ₹2,500 per job per month for two years, benefiting up to one lakh jobs. The Government would establish 10,000 Bharat Jodo Yuva Sangha across Karnataka, each receiving an annual grant of ₹10 lakh, involving a total outlay of ₹1,000 crore.

An Advanced Manufacturing Cluster at Doddaballapur is expected to attract around ₹20,000 crore investment and create about three lakh jobs. For rural students, the Government would implement the Sahaya Hasta/Hosa Hasta scheme and provide 7.5 per cent reservation for students of rural Government schools in professional higher education, including medicine and engineering.

Maharashtra CM Fadnavis backs PM Modi's 'dimagi Naxal' remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday backed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "dimagi Naxals" remarks, saying the reference was appropriate and could be seen at the Congress programme on Independence Day.

Talking to reporters, Fadnavis said armed Naxalism had been defeated, but an ideological form of Naxalism promoting anarchy was still visible.

PM Modi addressed the



country from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day, where he warned about the intellectual Naxals (dimagi Naxals) who have allegedly entrenched themselves in the system and continue to pose a threat to society by manipulating poli-

cies. The PM also urged the citizens to "identify and isolate" them.

Fadnavis said, "I think the Prime Minister has made a very appropriate reference. Naxalism with a gun has ended. But, more dangerous than that, we are seeing a kind of 'dimagi Naxalism' among people whose minds are filled with anarchy."

"Unfortunately, we saw one such example even at today's Congress programme. The decision to play the complete Vande Mataram on August 15 was taken within the constitutional powers of the country," he said.

areas will not be a constraint.

He appreciated the help extended by NDRF, SDRF, IAF and Army, besides the outpour of assistance from various social, religious, business organisations, students' bodies and individuals.

Affirming the Government's commitment to protect the indigenous people, he said the right to sale and purchase of land in 40 revenue circles will soon be restricted to dwellers for three generations of that area.

Sarma also announced a 30-day special crackdown on child marriage from Nov 1 and affirmed that the Government will not rest till underage weddings and polygamy are eradicated.

He added that 12,196 cases against child marriage had been registered and 11,196 arrests made in the last five years.

Dismissing the concepts of Gen Z and Alpha as "European" ones, the CM announced the formation of a new Youth Development and Empowerment department that will work for the skill enhancement and all-round growth of the youth.

He also urged the parents to invest in the education of their children, while calling upon the youth to draw inspiration from their own culture and history and work for a self-reliant Assam.

He also announced eight new co-districts and the disposal of pending Government files in mission mode, among other measures to make governance smooth and closer to the people.

The CM added that the State will commemorate 800 years of the arrival of Swargadeo Chaolung Sukapha of the Ahom dynasty, which ruled the State for 600 years and was credited with first integrating the State.

The State will also commemorate 200 years of the revolt of Gomedhar Konwar against the colonial rulers this year, he said.

Lauding the recent victories of boxer Lovlina Borgohain and shuttler Ashmita Chaliha, Sarma said 'Khel Maharan 3.0' will be conducted in a grand fashion and corporates will be roped in to nurture identified sporting talents.

Gujarat has become a global growth engine: CM Patel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Amreli

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel on Saturday said the State's development journey has attracted global attention and positioned Gujarat as one of the country's key growth engines.

Addressing the State-level Independence Day celebrations at the Police Parade Ground in Amreli, Patel unfurled the national flag and inspected the ceremonial parade in an open jeep. Contingents of the Gujarat Police, women police personnel, Home Guards, traffic brigade, NCC and dog squad participated in the march-past.

The Chief Minister paid tribute to freedom fighters and martyrs who made the supreme sacrifice for the country. He also recalled the historic contribution of Amreli and Saurashtra to the freedom movement and remembered the leadership of Gujarat's first Chief Minister, Dr Jivraj Mehta.

Highlighting Gujarat's development priorities, Patel said the state has succeeded in attracting investment while adding new sectors to accelerate economic growth. He described Gujarat as a "growth engine" for India and said the State's progress has now drawn the attention of the world.

Patel said the Government was focusing on balanced development of both urban and rural areas, with the benefits of development reaching districts such as Kutch as well. He also highlighted progress in healthcare, education, agriculture, infrastructure and welfare schemes as part of the broader vision of 'Viksit Bharat @ 2047' and 'Viksit Gujarat @ 2047'.

According to the Chief Minister, 25 new medical colleges have become operational in Gujarat over the past two decades. He also highlighted a Government healthcare initiative providing free treatment of up to ₹10 lakh to eligible poor and middle-class families.

The Chief Minister also referred to Gujarat's preparations to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games, expressing confidence that the State would organise the event successfully. He announced that roads across the state would undergo renovation at an estimated cost of ₹3,428 crore.



Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel poses with children during the State-level 80th Independence Day celebrations in Amreli, Gujarat PTI



PROSPECT



Nagaland BJP President Benjamin Yephthomi hoisting the National Flag at Westward Colony, Dimapur

Yamuna Authority CEO hoists Tricolour on 80th Independence Day

On the occasion of the 80th Independence Day, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Yamuna Authority, Rakesh Kumar Singh, hoisted the flag and saluted the Tricolour at the Authority's office.

In his address, he spoke at length about the sacrifices made to attain independence and the significance of that freedom. Highlighting the authority's achievements, he emphasised the action plan for future development and the need to implement on the ground the directives issued by the government to achieve the goal of a 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India). The nature and prospects of investment and development regarding industrial cluster-based parks-such as Medical Device Parks, Apparel Parks, Toy Parks, MSME Parks, Handicraft Parks, Data Centre Parks, and Semiconductor Parks-were highlighted by the authority.



VIT-AP University honours nine unsung heroes from AP Police, fire services and APSRTC

The 80th Independence Day was celebrated grandly at VIT-AP University. The chief guest, Matli Venu Gopal Reddy, IAS, Director, Department of Women Development and Child Welfare, Government of Andhra Pradesh, attended the celebrations and unfurled the national flag.

The Chief Guest felicitated a total of nine unsung heroes from AP Police, AP Fire Services and APSRTC on the occasion (three firefighters, three APSRTC employees, and three police personnel) and presented them with mementos. Each awardee was also given a cash reward of ₹25,000.

Speaking on the occasion, Matli Venu Gopal Reddy, IAS, Director, Department of Women Development and Child Welfare, Government of Andhra Pradesh, appreciated VIT-AP University for its social responsibility initiatives. He particularly commended the university for recognising and honouring the services of several unsung heroes every year on Independence Day and Republic Day-individuals who have made significant contributions to society and, in some cases, even sacrificed their lives while saving others.



HUDCO celebrates Har Ghar Tiranga

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Housing and Urban Development Corporation Limited (HUDCO), a Navratna NBFC-IFC under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), organised a vibrant celebration of the Har Ghar Tiranga campaign at the India Habitat Centre (IHC), New Delhi, as part of the nationwide campaign being observed from 9th to 17th August 2026 under the aegis of the Government of India.

Manohar Lal, Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs and Power, the Chief Guest, inaugurated the Har Ghar Tiranga kiosk in the presence of Shri Sanjay Kulshrestha, CMD, HUDCO, Prof K G Suresh, Director IHC, Dr Vibha Dhawan, Director



General, TERI, officials of HUDCO and IHC representatives from various organisations located in India Habitat Centre and school children. Speaking on the occasion, Union Minister called upon citizens to participate wholeheartedly in the Har Ghar Tiranga campaign and proudly hoist the National Flag at their homes.

Interacting with the children Manohar Lal highlighted that the Tiranga is far

MANGESH JOSHI

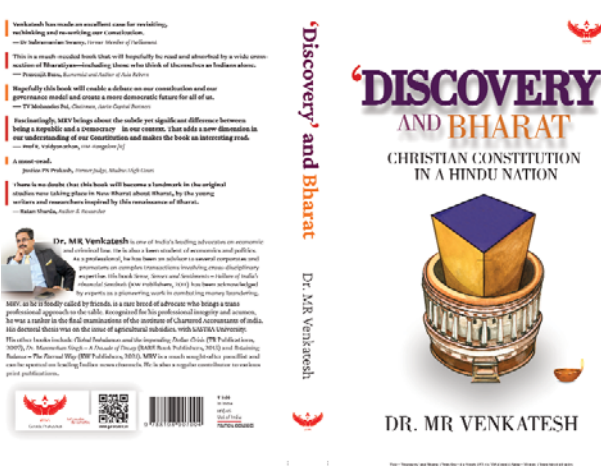
In the annals of modern Indian history, scarcely any speeches hold a candle to Jawaharlal Nehru's address on the eve of India's Independence, for the celebrated "Tryst with Destiny" heralded a historic shift. Interestingly though, on the surface, it may appear to be another innocuous, flowery discourse, characteristic, of course, of Nehru's usual idiolect. Upon closer review, however, one sees that there is more to it than meets the eye. Nehru proclaimed in his monologue, with a sense of the propitious gravitas of the hour, that a moment had arrived when "the soul of a nation, long suppressed," would find "utterance."

This statement is remarkable, to say the least, for it essentially admits that the "freedom at midnight" marked not a birth of a nation but rather emancipation of a pre-existing, long-standing nation. And that is the marrow of Discovery and Bharat, an undoubtable magnum opus by Dr MR Venkatesh.

Does the Constitution of India, deemed as a "Holy Book" by several illustrious politicians of India, acknowl-

edge modern India as but a continuation of this pre-existing nation? And is the Constitution "independent" enough to take a leaf out of the ancient Indian jurisprudence and political system? Most importantly, as we will celebrate the 80th Independence Day this month, Dr. Venkatesh poses a more fundamental question: did the constitutional edifice raised, so to speak, in Delhi in 1950 truly allow the "soul of a nation" to find its natural "utterance"?

It is fair to say that perhaps every major treatise on constitutional law carries a distinct fountainhead. Interestingly, it seems that for Dr. Venkatesh, a lawyer and chartered accountant, the catalyst was the landmark 2018 Sabarimala Verdict. On that fateful day, while millions helplessly watched the Indian Supreme Court rule 4:1 against long-standing temple traditions on the grounds of "constitutional morality," Venkatesh recounts what can only be termed a profound personal shift. It must be noted that his displeasure lies not with the judiciary but the foundational instrument that the judges were sworn to interpret: the Constitution of India itself. His central thesis, in fact, holds that the framers



of the Constitution, presumably operating under the pressing exigencies of the Partition and administrative panic, essentially performed a copy-paste exercise upon several documents, the chief amongst those being the colonial Government of India Act of 1935.

Venkatesh starts by showing, with examples, how the Indian freedom struggle was propelled by Swaraj and how, post Independence, when it came to actually implementing the ideas of Swaraj, the Constituent Assembly, by adopting the Government of India Act 1935 almost wholesale, prioritised superficial administrative con-

venience over Swaraj and Swatantrata. In addition, he traces the roots of the modern apparatus of the Indian State to Christendom, particularly the Magna Carta and the Catholic-Protestant conflict that triggered the Thirty Years' War post Protestant Reformation.

Venkatesh further demonstrates how the English Puritan thought process inspired "the reformation of the world." And most importantly, he examines the constant friction between Protestant Individualism and Catholic Collectivism and how we, in spite of their mutual incompatibility, muddled the conflicting ideas in the Indian

The Constitutional Mismatch

A Review of MR Venkatesh's Discovery and Bharat

Constitution. It is no surprise then that, in Venkatesh's words, "every limb of the Constitution begins to act as a reformist champion." The end result being, we are saddled with an atomised, individualised society on one hand and a highly centralised state on the other.

Venkatesh sees folly in this. At its core, his thesis posits that decentralisation cannot be at the cost of national unity and centralisation cannot be at the cost of the diversity of traditions and customs: local autonomy should not threaten national cohesion, and central authority should not crush our cultural diversity. Imposing the Western individualist, rights-based paradigms onto a society built on duty-based local autonomy, Venkatesh argues, sets up an ongoing conflict.

The title of the book, Discovery, is interesting; it is both quotidian and unique. The run-of-the-mill explanation is, of course, the Doctrine of Discovery, the religious-legal concept tracing its roots to Papal Bulls such as Inter caetera (1493) issued by the Vatican. The doctrine sanctioned colonisation of non-Christian lands. The more nonpareil justification of the title, I feel, is that, during and

post colonisation, we "discovered" the common cliché of "universal values," which arguably feels good but means little. One is reminded thus of Thomas More's Utopia, which is also analysed and discussed at length in Venkatesh's book.

All in all, if one were to summarise the fundamental contention of the book, it is to examine how Indian the Indian Constitution truly is. The book meticulously traces how this constitutional structure plays out in modern Indian jurisprudence, citing high-profile judicial interventions as evidence of an inherent conflict between Western legalism and ancient civilisational traditions.

Irrespective of whether one agrees or disagrees with this proposition, there is no gain-saying the painstaking research and intellectual vigour on display here. It is a provocative, deeply earnest volume that will hopefully stir spirited debate amongst lawyers, parliamentarians, students of Indian statecraft, but most importantly ordinary Indians who are unfortunately oblivious of the foreignness of the modern Indian polity.

The writer is mechanical engineer and student of Indian history

BSF Personnel conferred with Gallantry, President's Medal



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

On the occasion of 80th Independence Day 2026, 20 BSF personnel have been awarded with Medal for Gallantry, 5 have been awarded with President's Medal for Distinguished Service (PSM) and 42 have

been awarded with Medal for Meritorious Service (MSM).

20 BSF personnel of 94 Battalion BSF have been awarded with Medal for Gallantry in recognition of their conspicuous bravery during a meticulously planned Anti-Naxal operation on 15/16 April 2024.

This operation was carried

out jointly by troops of 94 Battalion BSF and DRG of Chhattisgarh Police in area of village Binagunda and Kalpar in the highly Naxal affected District Kanker of Chhattisgarh.

The operation resulted in elimination of 29 hard-core Naxal cadres and also in recovery of huge cache of arms & ammunition.

NHPC celebrates 80th Independence Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Faridabad

NHPC celebrated India's 80th Independence Day on Saturday at the NHPC Corporate Office, Faridabad, with patriotic fervour and enthusiasm. The programme commenced with a group singing of the National Song. Thereafter, Bhupender Gupta, Chairman & Managing Director, NHPC, hoisted the National Flag, followed by the collective singing of the National Anthem.

On the occasion, Sanjay Kumar Singh, Director (Projects), Suprakash Adhikari, Director (Technical), Mahesh Kumar Sharma, Director (Finance), Paresh R. Ranpara, Director (Personnel), NHPC, along with other senior officers and employees of the Corporation and their family members, were



present. Senior officers and employees of NHPC's various regional offices, power stations, projects and units located across the country also joined the celebrations through live webcast.

On this occasion, Bhupender Gupta extended Independence Day greetings to the entire NHPC family and highlighted the important role of the energy sector in achieving the goal of a developed India. He said that

energy security and energy self-reliance are the cornerstones of a developed India, and NHPC is playing an important role in providing reliable and clean energy to the nation.

He stated that the responsibilities entrusted to NHPC in the areas of renewable energy, pumped storage and energy storage reflect the Government of India's confidence in NHPC's expertise and capabilities.

GAIL CMD Deepak Gupta hoists National Flag at corporate office

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Deepak Gupta, Chairman & Managing Director, GAIL, hoisted the National Flag at GAIL Corporate Office, New Delhi, on the occasion of Independence Day.

Ayush Gupta, Director (HR), Sanjay Kumar Singhal, Director (Business Development) & SK Sinha, Director Finance, Rajnesh Singh, Chief Vigilance Officer and senior officials and employees, along with their families, were present on the occasion. In a deeply evocative moment, employees joined voices to sing Vande Mataram, commemorating 150 years of the



timeless national song, followed by the National Anthem

Addressing the gathering, Deepak Gupta highlighted GAIL's significant role in India's nation-building journey and emphasised the importance of energy as a foundation for economic growth and national development and added that with a diversified LNG port-

folio, GAIL is reinforcing India's energy resilience amid shifting global dynamics and growing geopolitical challenges.

Speaking on the occasion, Gupta said, "GAIL is not merely an energy company; it is an important partner in nation-building. Energy is not just a business-it is the foundation of a nation's progress."

NCC cadets participate in I-Day parades in Guwahati, Nalbari

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Cadets of the 1 Assam Battalion NCC, Guwahati Group, took part in Independence Day ceremonial parades across Guwahati and Nalbari, displaying discipline and coordinated drill performances during the 80th Independence Day celebrations.

At the Central Parade Ground in Khanapara, Guwahati, NCC cadets participated in the main state-level parade. The 1 Assam Bn NCC Junior Wing Girls Band Contingent secured the first runners-up position. The trophy was presented by the Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma. The St Francis De Sales



School Brass Band, associated with the NCC, also performed at the venue. The band's coordinated musical presentation drew appreciation from the audience.

A separate NCC contingent from 1 Assam Bn NCC participated in the Independence Day programme at the Gauhati High Court. The event was presided over by Chief Justice of Assam Ashutosh

Kumar. The cadets took part in the ceremonial proceedings with standard drill discipline.

In Nalbari, the NCC contingent of Nalbari College secured the first runners-up position at the district-level parade held at the Central Parade Ground. The trophy was presented by Finance Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah.

DFCCIL marks 80th Independence Day with vision for stronger freight network

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Noida

The Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited (DFCCIL) celebrated the 80th Independence Day at its Corporate Office in Sector-145, Noida, with enthusiasm and patriotic spirit. Praveen Kumar, Managing Director, DFCCIL, was the Chief Guest on the occasion. He paid tribute to the freedom fighters and remembered their courage and sacrifices that continue to inspire nation-building.

The programme featured the singing of the National Song, "Vande Mataram." The newly commissioned Track Recording Car (TRC), OHE Recording Car (ORC), and Bridge Inspection



Vehicle (BIV) were also flagged off. These advanced inspection assets will significantly strengthen infrastructure monitoring and maintenance across the DFC network and mark an important step towards DFCCIL's transition to a predictive maintenance

regime, enhancing asset reliability, safety and operational efficiency.

The occasion also witnessed the release of DFCCIL's updated History Book, Coffee Table Book, book on CTP-14, Land Manual and Hindi MOP (Manual of Procedure).

Kuwaiti Ambassador Meshal Mustafa Al-Shamali affirms deep historical ties with India



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Kuwaiti Ambassador to India, Meshaal Mustafa Al-Shamali, affirmed the strength of Kuwaiti-Indian relations on Saturday while attending the annual celebration held at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi to mark the 80th anniversary of independence.

Ambassador Al-Shamali extended his warmest congratulations and best wishes to the leadership and friendly people of the Republic of India, praising the Indian people's journey toward freedom, progress, prosperity, and the pluralism that has characterized the nation over the decades.

Al-Shamali took the opportunity to highlight the solid historical ties between the State of Kuwait and the Republic of India—relationships rooted in long-standing traditions of trade, cultural, and human exchange that predate the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in the early 1960s. He noted the continued, brilliant trajectory of bilateral relations across political, economic, and investment sectors, as well as the spirit of mutual benefit. Furthermore, the Ambassador commended the positive role played by the Indian community residing in Kuwait, describing it as a vibrant bridge connecting the two friendly peoples.

FROM THE

WORLD

US

6 killed in home shooting spree

Six persons including a suspect were found dead Friday in Michigan, where an extensive search unfolded around two homes and a wooded area, according to police.

Law enforcement was responding to reports of a shooting at a home in Missaukee County, about 272 km northwest of Detroit, just before noon when they found three people dead and another in critical condition, Michigan State Police said in a statement.

The suspect, Chad Hickman, 39, fled before law enforcement got to the home, according to police. As law enforcement conducted a large-scale search for him, they found a fourth person dead at another home, according to officials. Police warned the public in a post on X that Hickman was armed and dangerous and told community members not to approach him. (AP)

PAKISTAN

Five teenagers killed in Lahore

Five teenagers were killed on Saturday after a car, reportedly involved in a race, went out of control and crashed into a tree in Lahore, the capital city of Pakistan's Punjab province, police said.

Three car passengers and two pedestrians were killed in the incident, while another pedestrian was injured in the crash.

All the deceased individuals were men aged between 15 and 19 years, police said.

According to the police, the accident occurred in the early hours of the day on Canal Road, Harbanspura.

Speaking to PTI, a police official said two cars were racing at excessive speed when one of them went out of control and slammed into a roadside tree.

The bodies were taken to a hospital for medico-legal examination as police launched an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the crash. (PTI)

Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon kills 11: Health Ministry

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Beirut

Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon killed at least 11 people Saturday, in the deadliest attacks since a precarious truce between Israel and Hezbollah went into effect on June 20.

Lebanon's Health Ministry and state news agency said one of the airstrikes that targeted a home on the edge of the village of Ansar killed seven people, including three children, and wounded two. The second, on the village of Deir al-Zahrani, killed four and wounded 17.

Israel and the Lebanese government announced a "framework agreement" on June 26, laying out a plan for Israeli forces to withdraw from southern Lebanon, in exchange for the disarmament between the two countries, which technically remain in a state of war nearly 80 years after Israel's establishment.

Hezbollah has refused direct talks and wasn't party to the deal.

Prime minister says Israeli strikes undermine efforts at stability

Saturday's strikes are the deadliest since the truce went into effect two months ago. On July 6, four people were killed in strikes on the town of Nabatiyeh Fawqa.

On June 19, a day before the truce went into effect, Israeli strikes on Lebanon killed 83 and wounded 141, according



to the health ministry.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam criticised Israel's airstrikes on southern Lebanon, saying they intimidate "residents in their homes" and undermine efforts to stabilise the situation in the south.

"The seven martyrs of the Israeli airstrike on the town of Ansar are not military infrastructure and the children and women killed were not military targets," Salam said in comments posted on X. He added that it is the job of the Lebanese state to deal with any military infrastructure in the country.

"Israel must halt this escalation," Salam said. He added that the security of the Lebanese people and their right to life on their land "are not subject to negotiation or bargaining."

President Joseph Aoun said in comments released by his office that the strikes are "a clear message to the negotiation track and to the American efforts aimed at implementing this agreement."

Israel says it was responding to action against its soldiers

Intense Israeli airstrikes early Saturday also hit the strategic Ali Taher hill, which overlooks parts of the southern city of Nabatiyeh and main roads leading to it, NNA reported. Despite the truce, Israel's military has continued its almost daily attacks on the area, which is north of the Litani River and has been a de facto boundary in Lebanon, with large areas to the south under Israeli military control.

The Israeli military said in a statement that it struck Hezbollah infrastructure in the areas of Ali Taher and Ansar in response to an action against Israeli soldiers in the area. The military added that it will not allow Hezbollah to harm Israeli civilians or soldiers "and will continue to operate to remove threats."

A Hezbollah official did not immediately respond when asked for comment on whether they carried out any attacks on Israeli forces in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah later called on the Lebanese state to find

ways to halt "this aggression" rather than going after U.S.-sponsored direct talks with Israel, as it will be giving "free gifts for the enemy despite the crimes and aggression it is carrying out."

"The American side is a partner of the Israeli enemy in its crimes and massacres," Hezbollah added in the statement. The group said that Israel must clearly understand that "its acts of aggression, violations and attempts to impose a fait accompli cannot continue" and they will be met with an appropriate response by Hezbollah.

Earlier this month, two Israeli soldiers were killed in an explosion in southern Lebanon, the first Israeli deaths since the shaky truce. Hezbollah did not comment on the blast.

Lebanon and Israel have held seven rounds of talks; the most recent took place in Rome earlier this month.

The Iran-backed Hezbollah has refused to disarm and accuses the Lebanese government of making too many concessions without guaranteeing an Israeli withdrawal.

The latest Israel-Hezbollah war erupted on March 2, when Hezbollah fired rockets across the border two days after the US and Israel launched their attacks on Iran. More than 4,000 people have been killed by Israeli strikes in Lebanon since then, including hundreds of civilians. About 40 soldiers and three civilians — including a military contractor — have been killed on the Israeli side. (AP)

Ukraine attacks Russia's Samara industrial site as Kyiv ramps up long-range strikes

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Kyiv



A large-scale Ukrainian attack struck industrial infrastructure in Russia's southwestern Samara region Saturday, a Russian official said.

Ivan Noskov, head of the region's capital, Samara, said air defence forces had repelled a "massive" missile attack, with "localised damage" to the city's industrial sites. He also said that medical assistance has been provided to those injured in the attack, but did not give further details.

Ukraine has stepped up its long-range aerial attacks on Russian military industries and energy facilities, aiming to cut Moscow's revenue for the war and make Russians feel the consequences of the invasion, now in its fifth year.

Zelenskyy says need for peace has to be felt in Russia

Writing on social media, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Kyiv's forces had carried out a strike against Samara's Progress Centre, which operates under Russian space agency Roscosmos and is involved in producing rocket technology and electronics.

He said that the strike used Ukraine's domestically produced Flamingo missiles to hit the site, which is approximately 900 kilometres from the Ukrainian border. Zelenskyy also said Russia's Savasleyka air base, some 700 kilometres from the front line, had also been hit.

"Peace is needed, and this must be evident in

Russia -- through concrete damage to specific facilities," Zelenskyy wrote.

While most of Ukraine's strikes have a range of less than 200 kilometres, its longer-range attacks have increased dramatically this year. It launched three times as many of those strikes in July as it did in January, according to data from ACLED, an independent conflict monitor.

Repeatedly hitting deep into Russia has forced its military to stretch air defences over a larger area.

Russia's Ministry of Defence said Saturday that it had shot down 598 Ukrainian drones over 19 Russian regions, as well as the Black and Azov Seas and the annexed Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea.

Separately, two people, including a nine-year-old child, were wounded when a Ukrainian drone attack hit a private home in the town of Shatura in the Moscow region, local official Andrey Vorobyov said.

Child killed in drone strike

Elsewhere, a Russian strike on an apartment block in southeastern Ukraine Saturday killed a three-month-old baby and wounded 11 people, local officials said.

Drones hit the building in the town of Marhanets, said Oleksandr Hanzha, head of the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Military Administration.

Russia's Ministry of Defence also said that it had targeted warehouses and infrastructure at the Ukrainian ports of Odesa, Izmail and Yuzhnyi.

Ukraine's Air Force said that Russia launched 152 drones over the country Saturday, of which 124 were destroyed. (AP)

Trump focuses on violent-crime reduction; boosts GOP candidates at New York Police academy

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ New York

US President Donald Trump highlighted his record on crime and safety during a visit to New York on Friday, pivoting to one of his strongest issues as he looks to boost Republicans in battleground races ahead of the November midterms.

Trump was visiting the Nassau County police academy in suburban Long Island, where he was expected to promote new FBI crime statistics being released Friday showing a decrease in violent crime for 2025.

But despite the setting and an array of uniformed local police officers behind him on stage, the event was overwhelmingly a political one, with Trump lashing Democrats and promoting his

record and his party's candidates.

Trump's visit aimed at boosting Republicans in closely contested races across his home state, but just how much his presence will help is in question as he faces lagging approval ratings and a deeply unpopular war in Iran with no end in sight.

Trump briefly touched on the new crime statistics, but before long he was returning to familiar attacking lines, calling his opponents "Radical Left Democrats" and his predecessor, former President Joe Biden, "Sleepy Joe".

"We call them Dumb-ocrats now because their policies are so dumb. Fighting to defund the police. Does that play well in this room?" Trump said at one point, turning around to look at the officers behind him.



President Donald Trump departs after speaking at the David Mack Center for Training and Intelligence on Friday in Garden City, New York

Trump slams Democrats; promotes policies on crime, tariffs

He criticised the state's Democratic Gov Kathy Hochul and insulted the state's Attorney General, Letitia James, as "a real slob" and "a disgrace".

James successfully sued the president and his companies for financial fraud. The Justice

Trump asks Supreme Court to let White House ballroom construction continue during appeal

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington



The Trumps administration on Friday asked the US Supreme Court to allow the White House to continue construction on its USD 400 million ballroom project while it appeals a lower court's order to halt the work.

Trump's solicitor general petitioned the high court to suspend last week's decision by a three-judge panel from the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Chief Justice John Roberts set a deadline of Tuesday for a response by plaintiffs challenging the ballroom project.

The divided appeals court panel ruled last week Trump must stop the White House ballroom's construction because Congress has not approved the project. The panel's majority said Trump doesn't have the unilateral authority to build a 90,000-square-foot ballroom where the White House's East Wing stood before he ordered its demolition last fall.

The lower court suspended its own ruling for two weeks to give Trump's Republican administration time to appeal to the Supreme Court. Solicitor General D John Sauer asked the Supreme Court to rule on its stay petition before the appeals court panel's decision takes effect on Aug 21.

"This case involves an extraordinary and unlawful injunction that will halt the ongoing construction of the

integrated military complex, including a totally secure ballroom space, at the East Wing of the White House, which is vitally required by national security," Sauer wrote.

Friday's court filing includes the administration's first confirmation that a threatened missile attack on Air Force One prompted the Secret Service to secretly fly Trump out of Turkey last month on an alternate military aircraft.

In arguing for the need for a secure ballroom space, the filing cites "the threat of a missile attack against Air Force One on July 8" in a list of recent assassination attempts against Trump.

The filing also asserts that the project is "on time and under budget" with approximately USD 400 million in private donations obviating the need for any taxpayer dollars to be spent. However, Democrats in Congress have said it appears that funds from Trump's "big, beautiful" tax

cuts bill appear to be paying for ballroom work. The administration also has requested additional funding from Congress for the project, but lawmakers haven't approved it.

In April, a district court judge ordered a stop to aboveground construction of the planned ballroom. But the judge stressed that the White House was free to proceed with underground work, including the construction of any bunkers, military installations and medical facilities.

The DC Circuit panel's 2-1 decision upheld an order to pause aboveground construction on the project, siding with historic preservationists who sued to stop construction of the ballroom.

"Whether or not a massive ballroom should be constructed is for Congress to decide and is not a matter for Executive self-help," wrote the majority's two judges, both appointed by Democratic presidents.

Five people shot at Virginia State University as police investigate multiple shooters

PATRICK WHITTLE ■ Petersburg

A shooting involving multiple suspects and five people shot at Virginia State University prompted a campus lockdown early Saturday.

It happened near the university's Quad Annexes, where campus police and Chesterfield County officers discovered five people suffering from gunshot wounds outside campus dormitories. Officers responded just before 1:30 am and the lockdown was lifted at about 9 am, county police said.

The five were transported to hospitals, and one initially listed as having life-threatening injuries has been upgraded to critical condition, county police said. The others sustained non-life-threatening injuries, police said.

The university said in a statement that the shooting involves "multiple suspects." The statement asked people to avoid the immediate area.

"A significant law enforcement presence remains on campus as the investigation into this morning's shooting continues," the university said after the lockdown was lifted.



The campus had a large law enforcement presence on Saturday morning. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Hanover County Sheriff's Office were assisting, county police said.

Virginia State Police deferred questions to local police, who they said are leading the investigation. County police and campus officials said there would be more information later in the day.

Virginia State University is a historically Black university located in Ettrick, Virginia, about 24 miles south of the state capital of Richmond. The public university has about 5,700 students and was the first fully state-supported four-year college for Black Americans. Most of its students are undergraduates.

The shootings happened just before the start of the academic year at Virginia State. According to the university's website, residence halls opened for students a week ago, and classes are set to begin on Monday. Many students had just completed the university's "New Trojans Experience" for incoming students. (AP)

Over 300,000 Rohingya refugees verified for repatriation as exodus enters 9 year: Myanmar

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bangkok



Myanmar's military-backed government said Saturday that more than 300,000 Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh are former residents of western Rakhine state and that it will accept their return once security conditions improve.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement comes as the Rohingya refugee crisis enters its ninth year, with hundreds of thousands of refugees still living in camps in Bangladesh after fleeing Myanmar in August 2017 when the military launched a crackdown following attacks by a Rohingya insurgent group on guard posts in Rakhine.

The operation drove more than 700,000 Rohingya across the border into Bangladesh, joining hundreds of thousands of others already living there for decades in the wake of waves of previous violence perpetrated by Myanmar's military.

The scale, organisation and ferocity of the operation led to accusations of ethnic cleansing and genocide from the international community, including the UN.

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, does not recognise the Rohingya as one of the country's 135 lawful ethnic minorities, instead referring to them as Bengalis to imply they are natives from Bangladesh and are illegally settled in

Myanmar. Myanmar said it had verified 426,545 of the 828,824 refugees on a list provided by Bangladesh as of the end of July, and determined that 308,797 of those verified were former residents of Rakhine.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said 113,507 people could not be verified and that 4,241 people were found to have been involved in what it called terrorist activities.

The statement said it will continue working with Bangladesh to receive verified former residents when the security situation in Rakhine becomes more stable.

The ministry also rejected claims that more than 1 million people were displaced from Rakhine, saying that more than 540,000 people crossed into Bangladesh after the violence in 2017 while more than 200,000 remained in northern Rakhine.

Myanmar and Bangladesh agreed to a two-year repatriation process in 2018. However, security in Myanmar worsened following an army takeover in 2021 that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, triggering widespread armed resistance. Plans to repatriate the refugees have not succeeded.

The renewed chaos brought about by fighting between the Rakhine-based ethnic Arakan Army group and the military over control of the region in 2023 forced more refugees to flee toward Bangladesh and elsewhere in a desperate move to save their lives. The Arakan Army controls much of Rakhine after capturing territory from the military in recent years.

In recent years, poor conditions in refugee camps, steep cuts to foreign aid and the lack of safe prospects for returning to Myanmar have led to an increasing number of Rohingya refugees attempting to make the dangerous ocean crossing to Malaysia and Indonesia on rickety boats.

Global partners extend greetings to India on 80th I-Day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kathmandu/Singapore

India's global partners, including France, Russia and Australia, on Saturday extended greetings to the country on its 80th Independence Day, reaffirming their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties and regional cooperation.

French President Emmanuel Macron, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu were among leaders who hailed ties with India on the occasion.

Macron took to X to extend his greetings.

"Congratulations to the Indian people on your 80th Independence Day!" he said.

Putin greeted his Indian counterpart Droupadi Murmu as well as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, expressing confidence that the constructive bilateral partnership will help enhance international

security and stability. Putin said Russia-India relations are developing successfully in the spirit of a "particularly privileged strategic partnership".

He pointed out that Moscow and New Delhi are engaged in "fruitful cooperation" across a wide range of areas and coordinate closely within the framework of the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, BRICS, and other multilateral institutions.

"I am confident that, through our joint efforts, we will continue to comprehensively strengthen the constructive Russia-India partnership for the benefit of our friendly peoples and in the interests of enhancing international security and stability," the Russian president said.

Australian Prime Minister Albanese also conveyed his greetings on the occasion, asserting that India has gone "from strength to strength" in the eight decades since its independence.

In a statement, he said that



Indian Ambassador to Russia Vinay Kumar salutes the national flag after hoisting it on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day celebrations at the Embassy of India in Moscow

India, as the world's largest democracy and fastest-growing major economy, "fills us with awe at the scale of its achievements and the vastness of its potential".

Albanese recalled his "friend" Modi's recent visit to Australia, where he told the Indian prime minister, "Our

relationship has never been more consequential".

"We are excited to further deepen Australia and India's engagement in new and growing areas with the support of the many Australians of Indian heritage who are the living bridge in our valued friendship.

"I join you in celebrating India's history and culture, rich diversity and extraordinary achievements - and in celebrating the promise our shared future holds," he said.

In his greeting, Maldivian leader Muizzu reiterated the archipelago's commitment to enhance bilateral ties with

India. "Eight decades of Independence reflect the aspirations, resilience and enduring spirit of the Government and people of India.

"On this auspicious occasion, I reaffirm the commitment of the Government of Maldives to further advance our close partnership built upon mutual respect, shared prosperity and enduring friendship between our two peoples," he said on X.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog also wished India's top leadership and the "wonderful people" of the country on Independence Day.

"May we continue to strengthen the beautiful friendship between Israel and India," he said in a social media post.

In a letter to President Murmu, her Singaporean counterpart Tharman Shanmugaratnam congratulated her and the people of India on the occasion, asserting that both countries share an "enduring interest in a peaceful, open, and connected region".

Indians celebrate Independence Day across world with cultural events, flag hoisting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Washington/Beijing

From the Pacific islands and East Asia to Europe, the Gulf and the Americas, Indians joined celebrations with their friends and families, marking the country's 80th Independence Day on Saturday, as key partners including France, Russia and Australia extended greetings and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening ties with New Delhi.

The celebrations unfolded across Indian missions and diaspora communities around the world, featuring flag-hoisting ceremonies, renditions of the national anthem and "Vande Mataram", cultural performances, community gatherings and a range of activities.

At the centre of the global celebrations was the "Suryapath Tiranga" initiative, under which the Indian Tricolour was hoisted successively at Indian missions as the day moved across time zones, beginning in Fiji and scheduled to culminate in San Francisco. The initiative, part of the broader "Har Ghar Tiranga" campaign,



Artists perform a traditional dance during the 80th Independence Day celebrations, featuring the 'Suryapath Tiranga' global relay at India House in London on Saturday

paigned, sought to create a shared, continuous celebration stretching from one sunrise to the next.

The global observance also saw local governments and communities join the celebrations, with proclamations marking India's Independence Day in parts of the United States and Indian diaspora groups taking part in events from Wellington to Moscow, Berlin, Tokyo, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and Geneva.

In Wellington, more than 500 members of the Indian diaspora and local friends joined the celebrations. High

Commissioner Muanpui Saiawi hoisted the Tricolour and read the President's address to the nation.

Indians also gathered to sing "Vande Mataram" and the national anthem, which the Indian embassy in New Zealand posted on X.

Members of the diaspora also participated in cultural programmes, while winners of painting, photography and other competitions were felicitated in several countries. Students and community members joined the "Har Ghar Tiranga" selfie campaign. In Tokyo, school students

and members of the Indian community added to the celebrations with patriotic songs remembering and honouring those who fought for India's independence.

Japanese media also carried special coverage of India's Independence Day, the Indian mission in Tokyo posted on X.

In Beijing, Ambassador Vikram Doraiswami hoisted the Tricolour in the presence of members of the Indian community and "friends of India", who braved the rain to attend the celebrations, the Indian embassy in China posted on X.

The embassy had also invited members of the Indian diaspora to participate in the "Har Ghar Tiranga" campaign by hoisting the national flag, taking selfies and sharing their celebrations.

In Moscow, the celebrations began with floral tributes at the Mahatma Gandhi statue, followed by collective singing of the national song "Vande Mataram". The celebrations were attended by members of the Indian diaspora, "friends of India" in Russia, embassy officials and their families.

Magnitude 7.7 earthquake strikes off Indonesia's coast, killing at least 47 and toppling buildings

YACOB HERIN
■ Maumere (Indonesia)

A powerful magnitude 7.7 earthquake struck off the coast of Indonesia early Saturday, killing at least 47 people, collapsing buildings and causing panic in a region prone to deadly quakes. Authorities said dozens more residents were injured and warned that the death toll would almost certainly rise.

Authorities issued a tsunami warning and urged coastal residents to move to higher ground, but later lifted the warning when Indonesia's meteorological

agency said monitoring showed no significant sea-level changes that posed a threat to coastal communities. Some smaller tsunamis were reported.

The US Geological Survey said the quake hit eastern Indonesia's Flores region at a depth of 10 kilometres (6 miles) at 5:58 am local time. Its epicentre was 68 km (42 miles) north-northwest of the city of Ende in East Nusa Tenggara province.

The quake triggers landslides and generates small tsunamis

The meteorological agency said the quake was followed



Patients receive treatment inside a makeshift tent outside a hospital following an earthquake in Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia on Saturday

by at least 235 aftershocks, with the largest recorded at magnitude 6.2. The agency's sea-level monitoring stations acknowledged some small

tsunamis reached coastal villages in Manggarai and East Manggarai regencies. Videos obtained by The Associated Press showed the

Nepal PM greets Modi, Indian people on 80th I-Day



Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah on Saturday extended greetings and best wishes to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi and the people of India on the occasion of the country's 80th Independence Day.

Shah's message comes amid Nepal's efforts to strengthen ties with India, with the Himalayan nation seeking greater economic cooperation and connectivity with its immediate neighbour.

"On the occasion of India's 80th Independence Day, I extend my heartfelt greetings and best wishes to PM @narendramodi and the friendly people and Government of India," Shah's office said in a post on X.

Shah's message also comes days after he held his first one-on-one meeting with Indian Ambassador to Nepal

Naveen Srivastava on August 10, after having largely avoided such engagements with foreign diplomats since taking office.

"May the deep historical ties, close people-to-people relations and cooperation between Nepal and India continue to strengthen in the years ahead," Shah said on Saturday.

Nepal Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal also extended his greetings to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, the people and the Government of India on the occasion. "Nepal and India share deep historical and civilisational ties, close people-to-people relations and a multifaceted partnership. May these bonds continue to grow even stronger in the days ahead," Khanal said in a post on X.

Wall Street slips from record on weak US economic data



The US stock market edged back from its all-time high Friday following the latest report on the economy to come in surprisingly weak, this time about how much shoppers are spending at retailers. Such data could keep interest rates low, which is something Wall Street loves, but it also raises the risk of a slowing economy when inflation is still high.

The S&P 500 slipped 0.2 per cent from its record set the day before. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 107 points, or 0.2 per cent, and the Nasdaq

composite sank 0.3 per cent.

Stocks gave up modest gains from early in the morning after oil prices swung higher. The price for a barrel of Brent crude rose 1.7 per cent to \$88.52 as uncertainty continues about when the war with Iran will allow oil tankers to freely exit the Persian Gulf again.

Also raising uncertainty was a report showing shoppers spent less at US retailers last month than the month before. That surprised economists, who were forecasting another month of growth.

While Taliban leaders mark 5 years in power in Afghanistan, UN official warns of rights crisis



Taliban Government supporters attend celebrations marking the fifth anniversary of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's return to power in Kabul, Afghanistan on Saturday

ABDUL QAHAH AFGHAN/ SUZAN FRASER
■ Kabul

Taliban rulers and other officials gathered at Afghanistan's traditional Loya Jirga assembly hall on Saturday to celebrate the fifth anniversary of their return to power, touting having brought stability after decades of upheaval.

A top United Nations official, however, warned of a grave human rights crisis in the country where girls above the age of 12 are denied an education.

The Taliban seized power on August 15, 2021, as the US and other NATO troops withdrew following a costly two-decade war. The US withdrawal led to chaos at Kabul airport as crowds of people tried to flee the country in desperation.

Soon after taking power, the Taliban administration imposed a ban on girls' education beyond the sixth grade and later also banned higher education for women, despite having pledged before the takeover that women would be allowed access to education, employment and public participation.

Women have also been banned from public spaces such as gyms and parks, from taking part in sports and travelling to distant locations

without a male guardian.

At the Loya Jirga, high-ranking officials were joined by some foreign representatives and thousands of ordinary citizens for speeches marking what they said was Afghanistan's liberation from American forces.

The Taliban Government remains isolated internationally, with Russia being the only country to have recognised it formally.

"We pray to Almighty God to forever protect our homeland from occupation, aggression, wars, and insecurity, and to enable our people to enjoy peace, tranquillity, and prosperity under the auspices of the Sharia-based government," the Taliban government's deputy spokesman, Hamdullah Fitrat, said during the ceremony.

There were no women present. Celebrations were also held in provinces across Afghanistan, where Taliban flags and posters emblazoned with slogans in praise of the Taliban's return to power were displayed along major roads and marketplaces.

In a video message, Richard Bennett, the UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, said the country was undergoing a deep human rights crisis.

PM Takaichi skips controversial shrine visit on 81st anniversary of Japan's WW-II surrender

MARI YAMAGUCHI/MAYUKO ONO
■ Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi avoided Tokyo's controversial Yasukuni Shrine, apparently to prioritise diplomatic relations with China and South Korea, as Japan on Saturday marked the 81st anniversary of its surrender in World War II.

However, she did not mention her country's wartime past in Asia or show remorse over it in her address. The Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates over 2.4 million people who died in wars, became controversial after including 14 convicted Japanese war criminals from World War II. China and South Korea say visits by Japanese officials to the shrine show a lack of remorse over Japan's wartime atrocities.

Takaichi mourned the



Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi visits Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo on Saturday

victims of major devastation in Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Okinawa, as well as those who perished in overseas battlefronts, and thanked them for their sacrifice as the "foundation of Japan's peace and prosperity today."

"Japan, since the end of the war, has consistently contributed to global peace and prosperity. We will never let the

tragedy of the war be repeated," she said in her address at Budokan Hall, a walking distance from Yasukuni. Takaichi also said Japan can play a key role in addressing global challenges as "a dependable nation" in the region.

China and South Korea protest shrine visits

Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, three other

Cabinet ministers and three executives from Takaichi's governing party showed up at the shrine earlier Saturday. A non-partisan group of dozens of lawmakers also prayed there.

China's Foreign Ministry protested to Japan over the visits, saying that Japanese politicians' true intentions were to "change the verdict on the war criminals, cover up Japan's war crimes, distort the historical facts and pave the way for accelerating militarisation." It urged Japan to do "serious soul searching" on history and make a clean break with militarism.

Tensions between Japan and China escalated in November when Takaichi said a Chinese attack on Taiwan could constitute "a survival-threatening situation" for Japan requiring the use of force. The comments enraged Beijing.

US pulls last aircraft carrier in Asia as Trump focuses on Iran and Western Hemisphere

BEN FINLEY/DIDI TANG
■ Washington

President Donald Trump's war against Iran is stretching the limits of US aircraft carriers and leaving the western Pacific without one of the key American warships as China shows more signs of aggression.

The USS George Washington is departing the Pacific and expected to replace the USS Abraham Lincoln in the Middle East amid growing concerns about mental health and supply issues aboard the long-deployed carrier.

The Lincoln has had its time at sea extended from its original May return date to support operations against Iran. The lack of a US carrier in the Pacific may be short-lived if the Navy deploys another in the next couple of months. But it shows how



the open-ended operations with Iran are running some American sailors ragged, analysts say, while the Trump administration further retreats from the Asia-Pacific region and focuses on the Western Hemisphere.

"The administration says that the Pacific is supposed to be the most important behind the Western Hemisphere," said Greg Poling, director of the Southeast Asia Program at the

Centre for Strategic and International Studies. Instead, the US is "doing the exact opposite" of its previously expressed goal of pulling out of the Middle East.

American allies in the Pacific are unsettled over the unpredictability of the Republican administration, Poling said, while Beijing "is quite happy with US distraction, with the frustration of US allies and partners."

China may take advantage of the US carrier's absence

Beijing sees the US military presence in the region as a threat to China's rise and an obstacle to its ambition to seize Taiwan, the self-governing island it claims as its own. But the United States has argued that the Pacific region is too important economically to lose. No one expects China to invade Taiwan because an American aircraft carrier has left the region. But the carrier's absence gives the Chinese another opportunity to show its strength, said Bryan Clark, a former Navy submariner who is a defence analyst at the Hudson Institute.

"They're using this as part of the narrative to demonstrate to the Philippines, to Japan, to Indonesia and others that the US is not the big dog in the western Pacific anymore," Clark said.



BRIEFLY

Atletico Madrid signs Cristian Romero from Tottenham



Atletico Madrid confirmed the signing of Argentina defender Cristian “Cuti” Romero from Tottenham for a fee reported to be 34 million pounds (\$46 million) on Saturday. The 28-year-old center-back signed a five-year deal through June 2031, the Spanish club said.

Romero played for the Argentina team that lost the World Cup final to Spain, and he was a member of the side that won the tournament in 2022. He has played 58 games for Argentina. Romero captained Spurs last season, making 32 appearances to take his tally to 156 since he joined the club from Atalanta in 2021, Tottenham said. He arrived on loan initially, then in a permanent deal a year later. Atletico described Romero as “an experienced defender who is highly physical, quick to anticipate danger and decisive in the tackle, with considerable authority and leadership on the pitch.” He also previously had spells at Genoa and Juventus after leaving hometown club Belgrano in 2018. (AP)

Pallister beats Ledecy, US sweeps relays at Pan Pacific



Lani Pallister of Australia defeated Katie Ledecy to win the 400-meter freestyle at the Pan Pacific Championships on Friday night in a final that lacked some luster without world record holder Summer McIntosh.

Pallister was under world-record pace through 150 meters before touching in 3 minutes, 58.42 seconds. Ledecy had over a second to make up on the final lap and took silver in 4:00.15. “I could see Katie catching me on the last 150 and that’s a very nerve-wracking feeling,” Pallister said.

Erika Fairweather of New Zealand was third. “It was OK, not super happy with it,” Ledecy said. “I never like being over 4 minutes in an international final, but I put together the best race I could. I thought I had a good back half, just wasn’t out quick enough.” The United States swept the 4 x 100 freestyle relays, beating Australia in both the men’s and women’s races. The women hadn’t defeated the Aussies in the event since 2017. The team of Chris Guiliano, Patrick Sammon, Destin Lasco and Jack Alexy held off the hard-charging Aussies with a championship-record time of 3:09.01. They finished eight-tenths off the world record of 3:08.24 set by the Americans at the 2008 Beijing Olympics in one of the most thrilling relay races in history. (AP)

Jeev advises golfers to sharpen short game for Asian Games



Indian golfing great Jeev Milkha Singh believes the country’s golfers have a good chance of finishing on the podium at next month’s Asian Games but stressed the need to sharpen their short game to tackle Japan’s lightening fast greens. Jeev, who has been playing regularly in Japan for more than a decade, said chipping, putting and wedge play would be crucial to India’s medal hopes at the continental showpiece to be held from September 19 until October 4 in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan

“My advice to both the men’s and ladies teams for the Asian Games is to make sure you practice your short game a lot.” Jeev told PTI from Tokyo, where he is competing in the Senior Japan Open.

“Because in Japan, the way the greens play and around the greens, the slopes do a lot of short game homework that will help you succeed. A lot of chipping, putting, and wedge play so that even if you miss the green, you have a good chance of making up and down.” (PTI)

India begin World Cup campaign with win over Wales

MONA PARTHSARATHI ■ Amstelveen (The Netherlands)

India made a winning start to their men’s Hockey World Cup campaign, defeating Wales 3-1 in a Pool D match here on Saturday, with captain Harmanpreet Singh scoring twice from penalty corners. Playing in front of a large crowd at the nearly 10,000-capacity Wagener Stadium on country’s Independence Day, India dominated for long periods and were 3-0 ahead before Wales scored late in the fourth quarter.

Harmanpreet, who was named Player of the Match, converted penalty corners in the 11th and 43rd minutes, while Sanjay scored from a direct drag-flick in the eighth minute. Sam Welsh pulled one back for Wales with a field goal in the 56th minute.

India, seeking their first World Cup medal since their gold-winning campaign in

1975, started slowly as Wales enjoyed possession in the opening minutes.

Wales entered the Indian circle in the second minute, with goalkeeper Suraj Karkera denying Jack Pritchard after a pass from Fred Newbold. Newbold’s effort on the rebound then sailed over the bar. Newbold continued to trouble the Indian defence and tested Karkera again in the fifth minute, but the goalkeeper was equal to the task.

India responded with a swift counter-attack and earned their first penalty corner in the seventh minute through Hardik Singh. With Harmanpreet off the field, Sanjay’s first attempt was unsuccessful, but India earned another penalty corner after the ball struck the foot of the first rusher.

Sanjay made no mistake with his next attempt, beating the Welsh goalkeeper with a powerful direct flick to put



India ahead in the eighth minute. Jarmanpreet then came close to scoring three minutes later after making a brilliant run down the right flank, but his reverse hit missed the target.

India earned another penalty corner in the 11th minute and Harmanpreet duly converted it with a powerful drag-flick to double the lead.

Wales immediately pushed forward in search of a

response, but India’s defence, marshalled by Harmanpreet, stood firm. India earned another penalty corner just before the end of the opening quarter, but Harmanpreet’s flick went wide.

The experienced Manpreet Singh, who has 417 international appearances, won another penalty corner for India in the opening minute of the second quarter. However, Manpreet could not trap the ball on Harmanpreet’s initial

PSG bolsters attack by signing Ferran Torres

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Paris



Champions League title-holder Paris Saint-Germain bolstered its star-studded attack by signing World Cup hero Ferran Torres from Barcelona on a five-year contract Saturday.

PSG announced the signing in a statement without giving financial details. Sports Daily L’Equipe said the club was paying the Spanish champion 50 million euros (\$58 million) for Torres. The French team said he will wear the No. 9 jersey.

The 26-year-old Torres scored Spain’s winning goal during extra time of the World Cup final against a robust and physical Argentina side. Brought on as a second-half substitute, he pounced on a bouncing ball and drove a left-foot shot under the crossbar.

It was his only goal of the competition and he said it was “scored by 47 million people,” referring to Spain’s population. The transfer to

PSG is his second big move. Barcelona signed Torres from Manchester City during the January 2022 transfer window for a reported fee of 55 million euros. Before joining City in 2020, he played for Valencia.

More of a roaming forward than a prolific scorer he netted 65 goals in 207 games for Barcelona, including a career-high 21 in all competitions last season.

But his contract was set to expire next year and Barcelona reportedly had to pay a fee to City if he was to extend it. Torres had played briefly alongside PSG forward Ousmane Dembele when the France star was at Barca. The move reunites Torres with Spanish coach Luis Enrique, who gave the player his international debut in 2020 when he was in charge of Spain. Luis

Enrique took over at PSG in 2023 and has led the team to back-to-back Champions League titles as well as the French league title in each of his three seasons in charge. PSG boasts attacking options Luis Enrique has multiple options in attack, with Ballon d’Or winner Dembele, Desire Doue, Bradley Barcola - who has been linked with a summer move to Liverpool - Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and new signing Maghnes Akliouche.

Dembele set up Doue for PSG’s winner against Aston Villa in the UEFA Super Cup on Wednesday after Kvaratskhelia had given PSG the lead in a 2-1 victory.

It’s the first of a possible six trophies this season for PSG, which became the first team to win back-to-back Super Cup titles since Real Madrid (2016 and ’17).

PSG faces French Cup winner Lens on Sunday in the Trophée des Champions, which is a match between last season’s league and cup winners.

Mahindra’s Gen3 rise no fluke; best is yet to come in Formula E: Mortara

AMANPREET SINGH ■ London

Mahindra Racing’s transformation from Formula E mid-fielders to genuine front-runners has been a three-year journey rather than a sudden breakthrough, according to driver Edoardo Mortara, who believes the Indian manufacturer can aim even higher when the championship enters the Gen4 era. Mahindra heads into the London season finale with two wins and four pole positions, just one point adrift of third place in the Teams’ Championship.

For Mortara, however, the significance of the campaign goes beyond the numbers. The Swiss-Italian driver, who joined Mahindra three years ago alongside Nick de Vries, sees the team’s rise as the result of sustained development that has gradually changed its standing on the grid.

“You have to analyse a little bit deeper than only this season. It’s kind of like a journey that I started three years ago when we first

joined with Nick,” Mortara told PTI.

“If you look at the trajectory, the trajectory is very positive. We’ve been improving year after year, making more and more results. I think that this year has been the most successful one for Mahindra so far.” Mortara believes the team has crossed a psychological barrier by arriving at the final weekend with a mathematical chance of fighting for the Teams’ title.

“We are seeing contention actually for the team’s championship. Mathematically, yes, but realistically maybe third or fourth. But that means that we are still in the fight. This is something that has never been achieved,” he said. “We have never come to the last race weekend being able to mathematically have a chance to fight for the title, so that means that a good job has been done and good progress has been done.”

Mahindra’s consistency at the sharp end of the grid has perhaps been the



biggest change for Mortara. The team is no longer merely capable of producing an occasional qualifying surprise; its drivers have increasingly found themselves battling the established front-runners. “I think there were almost no races where I was not a top driver in the top five or in the top three. I consistently started at the front, with the top contenders. And actually, as a driver, it makes a lot of fun. This is where you enjoy yourself because the most you are battling with the best,” Mortara said. The 38-year-old has himself been

one of the standout performers, with four pole positions this season. He admitted, however, that Mahindra could have collected more points had circumstances gone its way.

“There is always the possibility to do better. As a group, I think that there were definitely some missed opportunities,” he said.

A fire extinguisher issue in Sanya cost the team, while rain in Shanghai and Tokyo forced Mahindra to make conservative tyre-pressure decisions when it was running at the front. (PTI)

shot while Mandeep Singh could not capitalise on the deflection.

Wales came close to reducing the deficit in the 19th minute when Pritchard received a long pass and found himself through on goal with only goalkeeper Mohit HS and defender Sanjay ahead of him. Mohit rushed out, but Pritchard’s shot struck the post.

India continued to threaten but could not add to their tally before the interval, taking a 2-0 lead at the half time.

The third quarter saw India maintain the tempo and put Wales under sustained pressure. Their efforts led to another penalty corner in the 42nd minute, and Harmanpreet made it count a minute later, unleashing a powerful low flick from the left to make it 3-0.

Wales refused to give up and earned their first penalty corner of the match in the

54th minute. But Gareth Furlong’s powerful effort was brilliantly kept out by Mohit.

Wales, however, pulled one back in the 56th minute, amid a scramble in front of the Indian goal.

After the ball entered the net, the umpire initiated a video referral to check for a possible backstick offence on the goal-line and a penalty stroke. The video review confirmed that the ball had crossed the goal-line before the offence. Wales were awarded the goal.

With the new tournament format placing added importance on goal difference, India would have preferred to finish with a clean sheet and a bigger margin of victory.

India head coach Craig Fulton will therefore have to address the team’s defensive mistakes and the late concession of a goal before India’s match against third ranked England. (PTI)

‘India will have to be in top of medals tally to be called sporting nation’



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Former world Number 1 shuttler and Olympics medallist Saina Nehwal on Saturday said featuring among top nations in medals tally would be the real metric of calling India a “sporting nation,” amid the push to host global competitions here.

Saina said while the scenario has changed in sports, especially for women in the country, there still is a lot to be done.

“We are trying (to host) Olympics or big tournaments, but I think one thing we have to make sure is that we are in top of the medal tally as well and that is when we can call ourselves a sporting nation,” Nehwal said during an inter-collegiate festival ‘Malhar’, hosted by the St Xavier’s College. Saina said female sports persons in the country have realised their potential and there has been a huge change in the last decade or so. “Somewhere women are realizing that we are capable, we can do well,” Nehwal said.

“Last 15-20 years, I can see huge change in sports especially because I keep looking at matches and I keep seeing that, especially lot of girls from Haryana, they are doing extremely well in sports and wrestling, boxing, badminton is coming up.”

“I just want it to happen throughout the country so that we can be called as sporting nation in the future,” she said. Nehwal exhorted for a system where young athletes across sports get adequate financial backing right from the beginning.

“It’s not about men or women, it’s about giving your best because in sports it’s not very easy to earn money. You feel, what’s going to happen in sports? Unless you reach in

top 15 or top 20, you won’t even get good sponsorships (or) good funding,” Saina said.

“It’s not like cricket... still you have to improve a lot more but if you are consistent, if you are performing well, of course you will get all kind of sponsorships but not many players are like so talented.”

“Sometimes the results come a little late, sometimes the results are a little early but everyone is looking forward to the performances, and that becomes very challenging. So, unless we improve the promotions, marketing, sponsorships from really early age, that is when I think we can get many more players,” Nehwal said. Nehwal said it is important for India to have not just efficient sporting infrastructure but also right coaching.

“... that is the problem in most of the sports that you don’t have psychologists, you don’t have proper trainers and proper physios,” Nehwal said. “Now, from last 5-6 years, they have improved it but we need lot of psychologists, lot of mental trainers in our sports so that out of 10, at least six of them can perform. Otherwise, from your own will, from your own fighting attitude, there are only 2-3 people who can do well.”

Nehwal said having financial security in other sports like cricket have would be a lot easier for sports persons.

“... being in top 10 of the world and consistently being there, coming out of injuries, coming out of that same stress, there will be lot of people who will be trolling you,” Nehwal said.

“Very few will appreciate you but everyday taking that stress and being the best is not easy in sports. I think it can only change when you have lot more security like how it is in cricket.”

India’s domestic hockey reforms drove Olympic success, Pakistan missed out: Salman Akbar

MONA PARTHSARATHI ■ Amstelveen

Former Pakistan captain Salman Akbar has blamed the absence of a robust domestic hockey structure for the country’s decline, saying India responded to its failure to qualify for the 2008 Olympics by investing in its grassroots and domestic ecosystem and has since reaped the rewards.

Pakistan, a four-time World Cup champion and one of hockey’s most successful teams historically, has returned to the men’s World Cup after an eight-year absence. The team also finished last in the Pro League last season. In an exclusive interview with PTI, Akbar, who represented Pakistan in 230 international matches and featured in the 2004 and 2008 Olympics, identified

the lack of regular domestic competition as the biggest reason behind the slide.

“There are many reasons, but the biggest reason is that Pakistan never tried to strengthen its domestic hockey structure. There’s no platform for the players at home,” said the 44-year-old, who is now settled in the Netherlands.

“Players get opportunities in international tournaments, so they remain busy there or in domestic camps. The domestic structure, which should produce talented players, is non-existent.”

The two-time Olympian, who has also been working as a goal-keeping coach with Japan since 2018, said India’s turnaround following its failure to qualify for the 2008 Olympics was the result of



sustained investment rather than a quick fix. India has since won

Olympic bronze medals at Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024, a gold at the

2023 Asian Games and multiple podium finishes at the Commonwealth Games and Asian Champions Trophy.

“This generation is fortunate to have come of age at a time when Indian hockey had just recovered from the shock of failing to qualify for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

“India then worked on its domestic structure. Today, they have the Hockey India League and a busy year-round schedule. The results were achieved, not in a year or two, but only until the Tokyo Olympics,” he added.

The former goalkeeper said India also invested in its coaching system and created a wider pool of players, helping it emerge as a consistent medal contender at major tournaments. “There were

ups and downs, but India even trained its coaches and built a pool of talented players. Now, they enter every major tournament as strong medal contenders.” Akbar expects the India-Pakistan rivalry to remain as intense as ever despite the contrasting fortunes of the two sides.

Pakistan have not defeated India since 2016, and Akbar believes the upcoming clash offers his former team an opportunity to end that wait

“Recently, India defeated Pakistan easily in the Pro League, but I believe Pakistan will try to avenge that. People enjoy watching India-Pakistan hockey.

“This match is crucial for hockey. Pakistan hasn’t won against India since 2016, and this is a golden opportunity. I wish

both teams the best of luck and hope to see good hockey, and warm handshakes,” he said.

Akbar also backed India’s young goalkeepers Mohit HS and Suraj Karkera to benefit from the experience of having worked alongside legendary goalkeeper PR Sreejesh.

Asked whether India would miss Sreejesh following his retirement, Akbar said his former experience and influence would continue to benefit the current crop.

“I can’t say for sure, but he retired with dignity after a stellar career. His performance in the final days of his career was outstanding. “Current Indian goalkeepers have played in the Pro League and against big teams, and they would have learned a lot from working with a legend like Sreejesh.” (PTI)

Padikkal's maiden ton takes India to 288/2 against SL on Day 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Galle

Devdutt Padikkal made a memorable return to Test cricket with a marvellous unbeaten 131, helping India construct a commanding 288 for two against Sri Lanka at stumps on the opening day of the first match here on Saturday. Padikkal, whose last appearance in whites was against Australia in Perth in 2024, underlined the progress and maturity as a batter in the interim, bringing up his maiden international hundred

in 134 balls. Rishabh Pant was giving him company on 27 at close with whom Padikkal has added 52 runs for the unbroken third wicket stand. Before KL Rahul retired hurt on 77 (162b), the Karnataka pair added 150 runs for the second wicket to keep the Lankans pinned to the wall. Even during that alliance, the lead cast was Padikkal, who scored fluently around the wicket. In fact, his first 20 runs came at a strike-rate close to 100 before settling into a more steady rhythm.

Padikkal had an engaging battle with debutant Keshara Nuwantha as the off-spinner was brought back to attack immediately after the left-hander walked in. The intention to employ an off-spinner against a southpaw was legit, but just that it did not bring the desired result for the hosts. Nuwantha did manage to elicit an outside edge from Padikkal which died in front of the lone slip, but the 26-year-old displayed strong resolve to put behind such oddities. He pulled Nuwantha for a four to establish an early hold over the



bowler, and then did not allow Sri Lanka's premier left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya to settle down. Padikkal, who went past fifty in 81 balls, smacked him for a six, a little shimmy and a clean hit sending the ball soaring over long-on and then essayed a crunchy punch through the covers for a boundary. But at the other end, Rahul was in his now customary Zen mode, blunting the Lankan bowlers with a flat bat. Rahul, who reached his fifty in 127 balls, gave occasional glimpses of his wonderful

striking ability- a straight six off Jayasuriya stood out for its timing and perfect execution. However, he had a couple of nervy moments against Lahiru Kumar, who jostled him with pace in the early part of his innings. But the biggest challenge the two batters faced on the day might have been sustaining the concentration through a and hour and 20 minutes rain break ahead of the second session. The Lankan bowlers seemed bereft of any ideas against these two Indian batters, and it required Rahul to walk out

in the final session with what appeared to be cramps. Padikkal, who also battled dehydration towards the end of a humid day, was undeterred. He had shown tremendous touch in recent times across formats, and his 142 against SLC XI in a warm-up match in Colombo last week was proclamation of his form. The knock fasttracked his selection to the Indian team once Sai Sudharsan failed to recover from a toe injury, and here Padikkal fully exploited the opportunity with a knock of authority.

India is strong candidate for 2036 Olympics, talent hunt for 5 to 15: PM Modi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India is a strong candidate to host the 2036 Olympics. To boost the country's chances, a nationwide search will look for talented children between 5 and 15 years old. Speaking from the Red Fort on the 80th Independence Day, PM Modi said the Target Olympic Podium Scheme, launched in 2014, has been highly successful in supporting athletes. "India is making its mark in sports. Our national anthem is played often, and our flag is raised frequently. TOPS has been very successful. With programs like Khelo India Games, University Games, Beach Games, Winter Games, and improvements in sports training, medicine, and nutri-

tion, India is moving forward quickly," he said. "India's performance is getting better, and we are strong candidates to host the 2036 Olympics. We will also host the Commonwealth Games in 2030. The Olympics have about 40 sports and nearly 350 events. Sadly, we cannot compete in at least two-thirds of these events because we do not qualify." "We want to take part in at least three-fourths of the events at the 2036 Olympics. To do this, we are launching a nationwide search for talented children aged 5 to 15. Those chosen will get special training to become world-class athletes," he added. India will host the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad, which is also bidding for the 2036 Olympics.

Wall of China awaits India in women's hockey World Cup opener

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Amstelveen (The Netherlands)

A confident India face a stern opening test in the Women's FIH Hockey World Cup here on Sunday as Dutch coach Sjoerd Marijne's side takes on the Olympic silver medalists China, with a little room for error in a demanding Pool D contest. Ranked ninth in the world, India will take on the second-ranked China, the Paris Olympic silver medalists, in a match that could set the tone for their campaign. With England and South Africa also in the pool and the tournament being played in a new format, India cannot afford a slow start. India have spent a considerable time acclimatising to European conditions, training at the Wagener Stadium in the heat and playing a practice match against hosts and defending champions

the Netherlands. The game against China assumes added significance as the two teams will meet again at next month's Asian Games. India's best World Cup finish came at the inaugural edition in 1974, when the team led by Ajinder Kaur finished fourth. Having featured in only eight of the previous 15 editions, India will be looking to improve on their ninth-place finish from 2022. It will also be a first appearance in the World Cup for as many as 11 members of the squad, but they have had plenty of big-match experience. Goalkeeper Savita, with 313 international appearances, is the most experienced player in the tournament. Playing in her third World Cup, she has already participated in two Olympics and three Asian Games. Defender Sushila Chanu has 262 caps, while Navneet



Kaur, Nikki Pradhan, and Neha Goyal have also crossed the 200-match mark each. Savita believes India's fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympics can provide extra motivation. "The pain of missing out on a medal at the Tokyo Olympics after coming so close still lingers. This time, we will not hesitate," she said. "We have high expectations from ourselves and want to finish on the podium." India's confidence

has also been strengthened by a series of encouraging performances over the past year. India won the FIH Nations Cup in New Zealand to return to the Pro League, in which drag-flicker Deepika rediscovered her scoring touch after recovering from injury, finishing the tournament with six goals. Navneet has emerged as another key attacking weapon. She scored six goals during India's Asia Cup campaign and four at the World Cup

qualifiers, where she was named the Player of the Tournament. India, however, will be wary of China's recent dominance. China defeated India 4-1 in the 2025 Asia Cup in Hangzhou and went on to win the continental title. The Chinese side also claimed silver at the Paris Olympics and finished fourth in the last two Pro League seasons. China's resurgence has coincided with the arrival of Australian coach Alison Annan, a six-time FIH Coach of the Year, who previously guided the Netherlands to World Cup and Olympic gold. India coach Marijne, who guided the team to fourth place at the Tokyo Olympics, is confident his players are ready for the challenge. "We see the World Cup as the next step after the FIH Nations Cup. This team is full of confidence and ready to face the challenges ahead," the Dutchman said. Marijne

has also strengthened his backroom team, with Wayne Lombard coming on board as the head scientific advisor and athletic performance, Matias Yila handling analysis and Taeke Taekema providing specialist drag-flick expertise. Rodet Yila and Ciara Yila add sports-science expertise to a support structure that has placed strong emphasis on physical preparation and performance. China's quality and ranking make them favourites on paper, but India have shown enough progress over the past year to believe they can challenge the Olympic silver medalists. A positive result against China would not only provide India with valuable points but also strengthen their belief ahead of the remaining pool matches while giving them a psychological edge before their Asian Games reunion next month.

Praggnanandhaa draws with Wesley So

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ St Louis (USA)

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa remained on course for a podium finish following a draw with tournament leader Wesley So of United States in fifth round of the Sinquefeld Cup, which is a part of the Grand Chess tour. The draw as black meant that Praggnanandhaa remained in the joint second spot in the 10-players-9-rounds event with 3 points out of a possible five in his bag now from five games. This also resulted in his resurrection as one of the best player in the GCT tour as now only a massive tragedy can keep him away from attending the grand



finale scheduled for later this year for the chosen four from the GCT. With Wesley in command on 3.5 points the two big comebacks were recorded by pre-event favourite Fabiano Caruana of United States and Vincent Keymer of Germany who both won

when it mattered the most with their white pieces. Caruana won the tag in the fifth round with his fine victory over Armenian-turned American Levon Aronian while Vincent defeated the out-of-form Anish Giri in a game that the Dutchman would rather

forget. As things stand, So on 31.5 points is half point ahead of Praggnanandhaa, Keymer, Caruana and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France. This half point could mean nothing or everything as the tournament progresses in the second half wherein one can expect Caruana and Praggnanandhaa to make rapid progress. Caruana is still the best guy to hold his forte one more time and emerge as the best on the grand chess tour. For Praggnanandhaa the fifth round did not force any major issue. The Indian ace was at his best in handling the black side of a king pawn opening and in just 26 moves the game was agreed as drawn.

Better to keep them separate: Arjun Erigaisi on online, FIDE chess ratings

AMIT KUMAR DAS ■ Paris

Ace Indian Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi has reservations about plans to convert online chess ratings into a player's first official FIDE rating, arguing that the nature of virtual play makes it difficult to guarantee the same level of integrity as over-the-board competition. World Chess and FIDE has published a White Paper detailing a proposed two-year experiment to convert online rapid and blitz ratings into a player's first official FIDE rating via World Chess. The proposal outlines fair-play checks, identity verification, and a proposed rating ceiling of 1,800. Arjun said he had not followed the proposal closely but immediately pointed to the fundamental differences between online and over-the-board chess. "I was not aware of this. I didn't think much. The first thing that comes to my mind is that online chess contains a lot of mouse slips, flagging and all this. While FIDE chess is quite different," the 22-year-old told PTI during an interview. "Even in world blitz, which is the fastest time control, there is still no dirty flagging, no mouse slips. It's better to keep both of them separate. But it's not that I gave a lot of thought into it," added Arjun, who finished in the quarterfinals in the chess tournament of the ongoing Esports World Cup. The distinction, according to Arjun, becomes particularly important when players



are competing from their homes, where there is no physical supervision. "In an event like EWC, there is no way that anybody can cheat. But yeah, as for pure online events where people are playing from home, I know that chess.com and other organisations are trying their best. But I don't think it's so easy," he said. "Essentially, people are at home playing and there is no one at the location to monitor them. So if they really want to cheat, there must be some way." Arjun also offered a measured assessment of World Champion D Gukesh's recent struggles, saying the Indian GM's results have not always reflected the quality of his play. Gukesh became the youngest world champion in December 2024. Since then, his results have been inconsistent. "To be honest, in Chennai, his quality didn't seem so bad. The results feel otherwise, but his quality was fine, in my opinion. Like with me, he was actually playing a quite good game. But, in some situations, he was just taking one bad decision," he said. (PTI)

Bangladesh closes in on historic win as Australia's batting woes return on Day 3

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Darwin

Bangladesh moved to within sight of one of the biggest wins in its test cricket history after Australia stumbled to 161-4 and remained 67 runs behind at stumps on Day 3 of the first test on Saturday. Cameron Green (43 not out) and Alex Carey (19 not out) dug in to keep Australia afloat, but the hosts face a huge task to first erase the deficit and then build a competitive total to defend in the final innings. Bangladesh needs six wickets to secure its first test victory in Australia and arguably the biggest win in its history in the format. Resuming at 351-6, Mehidy Hasan Miraz calmly shep-

herded Bangladesh's tail to another 75 runs, taking the visitors to 426 and extending their first-innings lead beyond 200 before returning to make the crucial breakthrough with the ball, removing Steve Smith late in the day. Mehidy shared partnerships of 46 with Hasan Mahmud, 18 with Taijul Islam and then a handy 46-run partnership with Taskin Ahmed before eventually falling for 65 from 154 balls. Australia was at times its own enemy with another three dropped catches Saturday, including an inexplicable drop by Smith in the deep, making it five for the battered hosts across the match. Josh Hazlewood claimed all four wickets to



fall on Saturday and returned 6-89 off 28 overs for the innings. His fifth wicket of Mehidy was also his 300th test wicket, making him the fourth of Australia's Big Four bowling attack to reach the milestone, and the ninth

Australian to do so. Hazlewood then removed Ebadot Hossein caught behind for 7 to end the innings at 426 to mark a strong return after 12 months out of the test team through injuries. "From my point of

view I think I bowled four out of six good balls a lot of the time and let things off in those other two," Hazlewood said. "I am still standing. That's good. It was a pretty tough slog straight-up. Obviously the more matches you play the better you get through those longer spells." Top order woes repeat Australia lost both openers cheaply before tea as Bangladesh strengthened its grip at Marrara Stadium. Jake Weatherald (0) and Travis Head (17) both chopped on to paceman Hasan Mahmud attempting cut shots too close to their stumps as Australia slid to 37-2. It took Mahmud's (2-33) match wicket tally to eight after his return of 6-55 in the

first innings limited the hosts to 198 and set the tone for the tourists' upper hand for the following two days. Marnus Labuschagne, also in search of runs after a lean spell, looked busy at the crease until he missed a straight ball from spinner Taijul Islam (1-28) and was bowled for 31 from 59 balls. Australia's hopes of salvaging the match rested on Smith's shoulders and the veteran looked composed as he characteristically accumulated his runs with low risk. The match spun firmly toward Bangladesh though, when Mehidy (1-20) took a sharp caught and bowled chance from Smith (44) as Australia sunk to 122-4, still 106 in arrears.

Werro holds off Hodgkinson to win 800m gold at European championships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Colombo

Audrey Werro stormed to the 800-meter title by holding off Olympic champion Keely Hodgkinson down the home straight at the European championships. The Swiss star, who was given a spot in the final after falling in the semifinal a day earlier, finished in 1 minute, 54.81 seconds at Alexander Stadium. Hodgkinson closed the gap down the stretch but Werro willed herself across the line for gold ahead of her British rival. Dutch star Femke Broeders-Bol took bronze. "I was coming for the gold medal. It truly means a lot. I'm so happy with the finish of the race," said Werro,

who did her trademark lion's roar after winning. Werro, sporting a small bandage on her right hip, took the lead in the first lap and never let up. Werro in late June ran the third-fastest women's time ever: 1:53.80. In one of Thursday's semifinal heats, Anaïs Bourgoïn's left hand made contact with Werro's right foot and Werro tumbled on the last bend. "It was not the best scenario to qualify like that," Werro said. "It was just a little bit hard for me at this point as that fall was very dramatic in the semis. But I tried to convince myself that I have the second chance and I have to take it and do something great. I'm glad I had a second chance and I just took it."

Hodgkinson had won the past two 800 titles at the European championships. "Going into that last 100m I really thought I could catch her but sometimes you just don't have enough and that was the case today," Hodgkinson said. "Of course, I am very disappointed but it was a fantastic race." Werro broke the European championships record of 1:55.41 set in 1982 by Olga Mineyeva, European Athletics said. It's back-to-back doubles for Italy's Nadia D'Amico, who defended her 10,000-meter title three nights after retaining her 5,000-meter crown. Battocletti, the silver medalist in the 10,000 at the Paris Olympics, made her move with 200 meters



remaining and Maureen Koster of the Netherlands and Belgium's Jana van Lent couldn't keep up. Battocletti crossed the line in 31 minutes, 41.17 seconds. Koster took silver, and Van Lent won bronze. In the high jump, Gianmarco Tamberi won his fourth European

championships title - and third in a row - after clearing 2.32 meters. The charismatic Tamberi, who famously shared gold with his good friend Mutaz Barshim at the 2020 Tokyo Games, pulled off his jersey and thumped his bare chest in celebration Friday. Ukraine's Oleh

Doroshchuk (2.30) took silver, and Tamberi teammate Matteo Siofi (2.27) won bronze. Norway star Karsten Warholm lowered his own European championships record in the 400-meter hurdles by winning in 46.63 seconds for his fourth consecutive title in the discipline. "It's not as easy as it looks out there, I don't take any medal for granted but today was extra special for me as nobody has ever won four in a row," the 30-year-old Warholm said. "I was so locked in today." Germany's Emil Agyekum took bronze, and Ismail Nezir of Turkey was third. Married man Mondo Duplantis into pole vault final Swedish pole vaulter

Armand "Mondo" Duplantis is hoping to break the world record - as a married man. Duplantis, who tied the knot with Desire Inglander in June, needed just one successful attempt at 5.60 meters to qualify for Sunday night's final. The world record is 6.31, which the Louisiana-born Duplantis vaulted in March. That was his 15th world record. He first broke it in 2020 and has eclipsed his mark by 1 centimeter every time since. The two-time reigning Olympic champion looked fully recovered from a thigh issue that forced him to stop competing at the London Diamond League meet one month ago. "I've worked really hard the past

few weeks to try and make sure I am ready for this competition, so I feel good out there. I feel hopeful and confident for Sunday," he said. "The jump was clean, good. Nothing too out of the ordinary. Now it's just about going up there and doing what I normally do in the final on Sunday." The world record holder signed autographs and shook hands with fans. Organizers sold special Mondo children's tickets priced at 6.31 pounds - the figure representing his latest world record height - for Friday morning's session. Duplantis also revealed on Friday he usually keeps his wedding band "in between my laces (of) my spikes" while he competes. (AP)

Living through Colours

Did you know colours silently control your body and mind? Every shade we see instantly alters our daily moods, spending habits, and deep emotional comfort

SAKSHI PRIYA

Have you ever noticed how a bright yellow room wakes you up in seconds? Or why a blue dinner plate may influence your appetite before you even take a bite? We experience these sudden physical reactions because colour affects how we perceive and feel, but not the same way for everyone. **Context, culture, lighting, even your own personal history, all of it plays a part.** Some studies suggest that red light can heighten alertness and influence the body's stress response, but scientists have not proved that simply looking at red immediately speeds up the heart or metabolism. This perfectly explains why the food industry relies on it so heavily while on the flip side, cool blue shades gently calm your body and create a deep sense of peace. We take in these colours constantly throughout our day as they quietly guide how we feel and what we buy along with how relaxed we are at our core.

The garments resting on our shoulders and the dishes on our dining tables alongside the bedrooms we sleep in all send clear messages. In fashion, we found something fascinating here. Donning a structured black blazer instantly grants the individual a profound sense of personal authority, while wearing pink naturally soothes those in their immediate presence. Colour acts as an unrelenting mental influence, continuously moulding your emotional state the very moment you awake every single day.

Spiritual life coach Priya Kaul observes that **our instinctive shade preferences actually expose our unmet emotional needs.** You might seek blue for quiet peace, green for fresh beginnings, yellow to feel hopeful, or dark brown for solid stability. Watching these changing preferences gives us a vital chance to stop and realise what our inner self genuinely needs and physically demands. We must closely observe our common environments to grasp the true impact of these visual choices. I spoke with three designers and psychologists who shared exactly how

Light striking the these everyday shades manage to alter our perception starts. Signals are transmitted to our internal connections. brain regions involved in vision, attention and emotion. The brain can judge colour based on context and learned associations before conscious judgment. Different colour responses are due to personal memories, culture, environment and past experiences. Biology and context count too. These responses influence emotional state.

On Colour Psychology
Light striking the these everyday shades manage to alter our perception starts. Signals are transmitted to our internal connections. brain regions involved in vision, attention and emotion. The brain can judge colour based on context and learned associations before conscious judgment. Different colour responses are due to personal memories, culture, environment and past experiences. Biology and context count too. These responses influence emotional state.

- RAHUL CHANDHOK, HEAD CONSULTANT, MENTAL HEALTH AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE, ARTEMIS HOSPITALS

On Colour & Inner Wellbeing

Colour can help cultivate mindfulness by providing an individual with grounding in reflection or transition periods. We can choose a colour on purpose and pay attention to our own reactions to the colour without believing in its healing properties. Noticing changing colour preferences can offer gentle clues to our inner world and emotional needs. The value of the colour is in generating presence, intention and self-observation.

- PRIYA KAUL, SPIRITUAL LIFE COACH

On Colour & Space

For us at House of J, colour is another material. Its intensity, saturation and relationship with daylight can completely transform how a space feels. Deeper, warmer tones can encourage families to linger and gather more often. There is no universal formula for how colour makes us feel. Personal memories, cultural associations, daylight and room function all influence that response. A colour can photograph beautifully and still feel completely wrong when you live with it.

- NISHI JAIN, FOUNDER & PRINCIPAL DESIGNER, HOUSE OF J

ART CORNER

Sculpting earth into monumental art

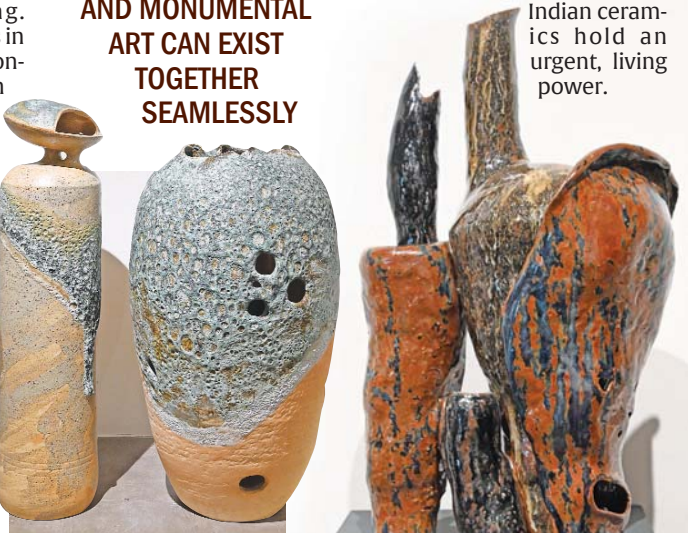


TEAM VIVA



Artist Keshari brilliantly transforms raw earth into profound contemporary art through the unpredictable alchemy of fire

DRAWING FROM RAJASTHAN'S RICH TEXTURES, THE EXHIBITION DISPLAYS VESSELS, PLATTERS, AND A MASSIVE SCULPTURAL FORM. EVERY SINGLE PIECE PERFECTLY CAPTURES THE RAW BEAUTY OF WOOD FIRING, PROVING THAT EVERYDAY POTTERY AND MONUMENTAL ART CAN EXIST TOGETHER SEAMLESSLY



True sculptural mastery requires an absolute surrender to the unpredictable alchemy of fire. Within the quiet walls of Shridharani Gallery, the FIRE & FORM exhibition reveals exactly how raw earth transforms into profound contemporary art. Curated by Uma Nair and presented by 108 Art Projects, this breathtaking showcase completely shatters conventional boundaries of studio ceramics.

For over thirty-five years, Keshari Nandan Prasad has operated as a true master of elemental engineering. Viewers witness this genius in *Manushya aur Prakriti*, a monumental stoneware creation that nestles a human figure within massive, organic contours. Nearby, the *Secrets of the Sea* series emerges. These rough, perforated mounds evoke ancient coastal rocks, their heavily crawled skins holding the deep emotional weight of oceanic tides.

Every handcrafted piece proves that the high-temperature kiln acts as an active, breathing collaborator. The expansive *Mural* breaks down traditional figura-

tion into a complex, fleshy terrain, while the towering *Tree of Life* stands as a marvel of structural resilience. Even the platters goes beyond utility. Inspired by Cubist histories and Goddess Lakshmi's sacred vehicle, the owl-adorned platters balance rugged textures with delicate, spiritual grace.

By rejecting the rigid symmetry of the potter's wheel, Keshari leaves the honest, intimate imprint of human hands on every surface. The resulting exhibition offers a soaring, visceral triumph, proving that handmade Indian ceramics hold an urgent, living power.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

The sidewalk

CANVAS

STEPPING INTO THE QUIRKY SNEAKER REVOLUTION

TEAM VIVA

Real sneakerheads and regular mall shoppers share a huge obsession right now. They are hunting down the absolute weirdest shoes on the market. The numbers completely back up this massive trend. Experts are betting the global footwear industry will top 143 billion dollars by 2031. A massive slice of that pie belongs to deeply weird and highly customized kicks. Art collectives like MSCHF break the internet all the time by releasing goofy cartoon boots made from totally strange materials. We keep seeing massive platform soles, bright neon colors, and fabrics that totally fight each other. People love lacing up these weird creations because your feet are now the absolute best place to show off your personality. Gaurav Tandon is the Managing Director of Limited Edt India and he

explains that buyers want their footwear to speak for them. He notes that intense interest in bold colors and custom designs acts as a natural extension of personal style. You see this happening in the Vandy The Pink and ASICS collaboration where classic shapes get completely reimaged. Tandon also highlights the adidas Originals and Limited Edt Superstar II. He adds that bringing local craftsmanship and storytelling to a famous shoe gives it a completely different personality.

Throwing on a pair of shoes fixes a dull morning. So how do you walk outside in these things without looking silly? The real secret is balance. When your sneakers are yelling, everything else you wear should shut up. Old jeans work beautifully here.



HYDRO-DIPPING YOUR OWN KICKS

Making a wild, marbled pattern on a plain white pair of canvas shoes takes barely any effort. The trick uses ordinary water and oil spray paint to push bright colors straight onto the cloth.



Take out the laces and pack the shoes tight with plastic bags. Wrap painter's tape carefully over the rubber bottoms and any spots you want to stay completely spotless.

Fill a large plastic bin about halfway with regular tap water. Spray two or three oil-based enamel colours lightly across the water it should float, not sink. Grab a stick and stir it through until the pattern looks right to you.

Hold the shoe by the heel, lower it straight through the paint film into the water below. Pull it back out. Leave the shoes outside to dry overnight, peel the tape off in the morning, and that's it. Custom shoes designed by you, worn only by you.

CINEMA



TEAM VIVA

This year's release calendar reveals a clear pattern: nearly half the titles carry a number after them. *Border 2*, *Cocktail 2*, *Dhamaal 4*, *Awarapan 2* opened in theatres this week, and *Khosla Ka Ghosla 2* follows later this month, two films built entirely on nostalgia.

Emraan Hashmi returned as Shivam nearly two decades after the original *Awarapan* became a cult favourite, while Anupam Kher and the returning cast of *Khosla Ka Ghosla* are set to step back into a story that grew into a classic long after its first release. Neither of these movies is really trying to win over a new crowd. Honestly, they are just counting on the original fans showing up at the ticket counters. People were already debating this gamble online long before *Awarapan 2* even hit the theatres. Early reactions to the film were mixed, with some fans welcoming Hashmi back to one of his most-loved roles and others feeling it fell short of the original's emotional pull. *Khosla Ka Ghosla 2*, meanwhile, has drawn a warmer response so far, its cast reunion clip racking up hundreds of thousands of views within hours. Studios keep making this bet because a returning title arrives with a built-in audience, one that needs less convincing. The real question is what happens to original storytelling as nostalgia keeps winning, and whether these sequels honour what fans already loved.

Majestic steps



SAKSHI PRIYA

How do observers measure the beating heart of a nation? Perhaps they must look to the ancient rhythms echoing through a fractured world. In an era where sacred heritage spaces often fade and classical artists fight to keep their traditions breathing, witnessing a true cultural revival feels miraculous. For 21 years, this resilient pulse has lived within *Saare Jahan Se Accha - Vande Mataram: Bharat Ki Virasat, Bharat Ka Gaurav*, a monumental tribute. Now themed *Bharat Ki Virasat, Bharat Ka Gaurav*, it weaves the heavy, golden threads of history into urgent, living expression.

AT 'SAARE JAHAN SE ACCHA,' CLASSICAL MASTERS BREAK THEIR SILENCE TO FIERCELY CELEBRATE INDIA'S HERITAGE

Organised by the Utsav Educational and Cultural Society, the two day festival completely transformed the atmosphere at Stein Auditorium. Day one saw Guru Ranjana Gauhar's choreographic production, *Chitrangada*, breathe on stage like a storm of pure grace. How often can Tagore's vision of the Mahabharata pierce through to the modern soul with such startling urgency? The cast beautifully embodied a royal warrior waking up to her own untamed strength. Every glance challenged the crowd to see real courage instead of simple charm.

The second evening shifted into an incredibly moving display of shared genius. The floorboards trem-



bled under the collective brilliance of classical masters keeping their artistic traditions alive. Spectators watched Kathak, Bharatanatyam, and Odissi collide in a mosaic of profound pride. The disciples of Guru Rajendra Gangani spun with dizzying precision. The dedicated students of Guru Ananda Shankar and Guru Ratikant Mohapatra struck the floor with intricate, heart stopping footwork that echoed long after the movement stopped.

As Guru Ranjana Gauhar perfectly noted, "culture is one of the strongest expressions of our national identity." Nights like these shatter expectations, offering a soaring, visceral salute to the motherland.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

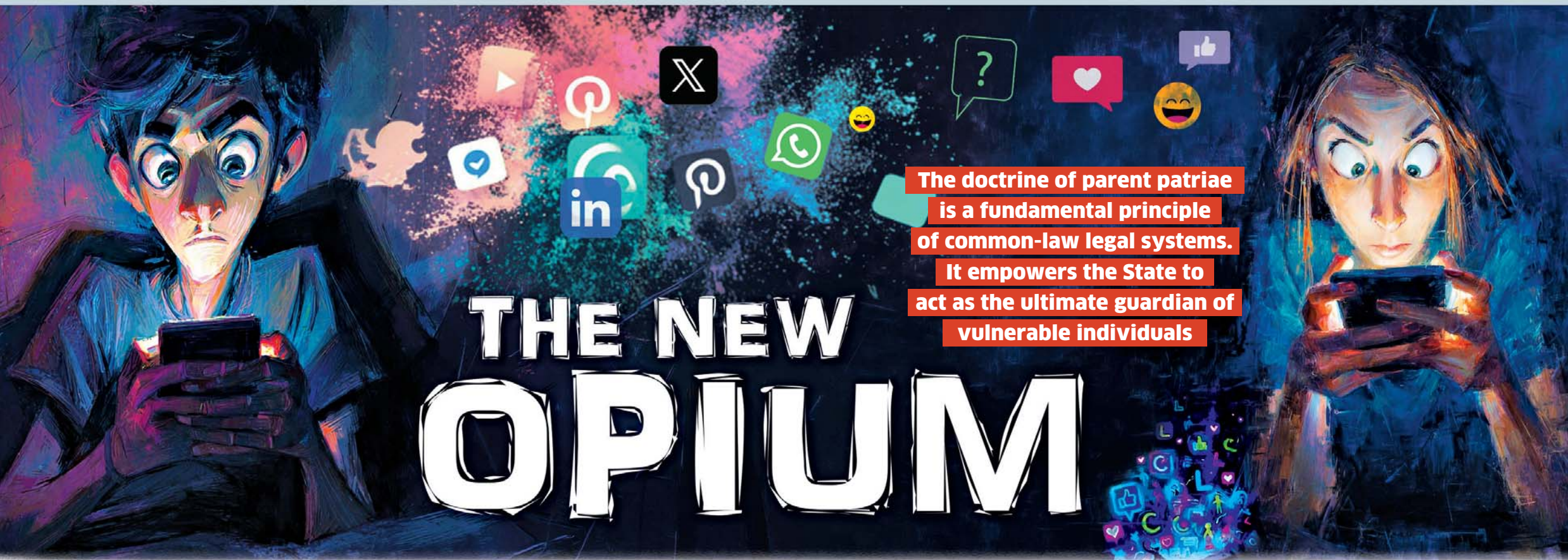
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The Pioneer AGENDA

I think there should be regulations on social media to the degree that it negatively affects the public good.
— Elon Musk



Social media is no longer merely a tool for communication; its algorithms are increasingly shaping how children think, behave and see themselves. From addictive feeds and cyberbullying to shrinking attention spans and exposure to harmful content, the risks are mounting. India must urgently rethink how technology protects, rather than exploits, its youngest users.

The mobile menace: Is social media reshaping the development of young teenagers?



MEENAKSHI LEKHI
Former Minister of State for External Affairs

I speak to you today first as a mother and a citizen concerned for our society's fabric, and only then as a lawyer and lawmaker.

Before we discuss economic metrics, GDP growth, or digital expansion, we must face an uncomfortable truth: algorithms engineered by tech giants are quietly deciding the character, identity, and moral boundaries of our children. When an algorithm incentivises vulgarity, hyper-sexualized content, and outrage over decency, it directly erodes the foundational character of a healthy childhood. As parents, we instill ethics and cultural values at home, but the same are challenged by only for profit-driven algorithms to rewrite those values the moment a child picks up a screen.

We have seen the clear warning signs flare up in real life from cyberbullying to severe mental health crises and yet we hesitate to act. Speedy adoption of technology cannot come at the cost of our children's safety, cognitive development, and character. In India, our legal framework explicitly prioritizes the protection of minors through statutes like the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act. Unfettered, unverified access to addictive social media directly contradicts the protective intent of POCSO by exposing impressionable minds to predatory behaviors and psychological harm without adequate safeguards.

To protect our youth, we must move toward concrete measures: enforcing strict age limits (such as a minimum age of 16) with robust verification, imposing non-negotiable bans or penalties on non-compliant platforms, actively prohibiting vulgar language and addictive feeds, implementing graded digital exposure, and holding tech corporations legally accountable under child protection laws when their code pushes harmful content to minors.

In today's digital age, social media has become an addiction and my oft repeated statement is if data is the new oil then social media is the new opium. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and WhatsApp have transformed the way young people communicate, learn, and entertain themselves. Experts are increasingly questioning whether their use is hindering the healthy character and cognitive development of adolescents.

Teenage years are among the most formative stages of human development. It is during this period that young people build their identity, develop emotional maturity, strengthen social relationships, and prepare for adulthood. However, the rapid growth of social media has introduced new challenges that previous generations never encountered.

One of the most visible concerns is the growing impact on mental health, cognition, character, and reading abilities. Psychologists have observed rising levels of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and stress among teenagers who spend prolonged hours on social media. Constant exposure to carefully edited images and seemingly perfect lifestyles often encourages unhealthy comparisons. Many teenagers begin measuring their self-worth through likes, comments, and followers rather than real-life achievements or meaningful relationships. The issue extends beyond self-esteem. Adolescence is the stage when individuals develop their personal identity and moral character. Social media is exposing teenagers and young children to vulgar language, hyper-sexualized material, and information which is far beyond their years, creating pressure to fit into popular trends rather than embracing their authentic personalities. The pursuit of online approval can overshadow genuine self-discovery and character building.

Education is another area feeling the severe effects of excessive digital engagement on social media. Short-form videos and endless scrolling have contributed to shrinking attention spans and weakened cognition, making sustained concentration on books and classroom learning far more difficult.

Cyberbullying has emerged as one of the darker consequences of digital communication. Unlike traditional bullying, online harassment follows teenagers beyond school hours, often reaching them at any time of the day. Victims frequently experience emotional distress, social withdrawal, reduced academic



IN TODAY'S DIGITAL AGE, SOCIAL MEDIA HAS BECOME AN ADDICTION AND IF DATA IS THE NEW OIL THEN SOCIAL MEDIA IS THE NEW OPIUM

performance, and, in severe cases, mental health crises.

Health experts are equally concerned about sleep deprivation. Many teenagers spend late-night hours browsing social media, exposing themselves to blue light that interferes with the body's natural sleep and growth cycle. Poor sleep not only affects mood but also impairs memory, concentration, and overall cognitive development. Another growing concern is body image. The widespread use of beauty filters and edited photographs promotes unrealistic standards of appearance. As a result, many adolescents struggle with body dissatisfaction, reduced confidence, and unhealthy dieting habits in an

attempt to imitate online influencers. Despite these concerns, social media cannot be viewed solely as a harmful force. Let me clarify here there's a legally defined age which defines a juvenile in every country; in India it is 18 years. Up to the age of 18 years, individuals are considered minors and have the protection under child rights i.e. POCSO etc. There is a clear legal distinction between minor children and young adults.

Parents, educators, governments, and technology companies all share responsibility for creating a healthier digital environment. Parents themselves need to be sensitised about the dangers lurking on social media which in turn can encourage balanced screen habits, and technology companies can improve safeguards for younger users through stronger privacy protections and better content moderation on the internet. I am an advocate for a childhood which is genuine, affectionate, and produces responsible citizenship encouraging teenagers to balance online engagement for educational purposes and not necessarily social media, with physical activity, face-to-face friendships, family interaction, reading, and outdoor experiences.

Social media and information technology has undoubtedly transformed modern adolescence. Information technology has offered extraordinary opportunities for learning but use of social media also presents significant risks if left unchecked. The future well-being of our society and country will depend on creating responsible citizens with strong character and sharp cognitive capabilities. As society continues to embrace an increasingly connected world, one question remains: Is social media becoming a tool that disempowers the next generation and will it quietly erode the very foundations of healthy childhood and adolescence? The answer will depend on the choices made today by families, schools, policymakers and technology companies. Under the doctrine of *parens patriae*, a court may intervene to safeguard the welfare of a child. The child's best interests are

the court's primary concern. Indian courts have repeatedly recognized the doctrine of parent patriae. The Supreme Court has held that in matters concerning children, the court acts as parent patriae, and the child's welfare is the paramount consideration. The doctrine has been applied in cases involving protection of children from abuse. The Doctrine protects children and vulnerable individuals and ensures decisions are guided by welfare and legal rights. The doctrine of parent patriae is a fundamental principle of common-law legal systems. It empowers the State and the courts to act as the ultimate guardian of vulnerable individuals when necessary. In India, it is firmly established in constitutional and family law, with the welfare of the child serving as the overriding consideration in all custody, guardianship, and child-protection matters. Thus, courts can also take a call on this subject.

Several countries have adopted or are introducing strict social media laws for children, although the nature of these laws varies. Some impose minimum age requirements, others require parental consent, while some focus on age verification, privacy protections, or limits on addictive platform features. Australia, which currently has the world's most comprehensive national restrictions, has a minimum age of 16 years for accounts on designated social media platforms and says that companies can face substantial penalties for non-compliance. France has moved toward stricter controls for minors which includes a minimum age of 15 years for opening social media accounts and legislation strengthens age-verification and child-protection requirements. The EU regulates child online

IT'S KNOWN THAT TEENAGERS ARE SPENDING LESS TIME WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND PREFER LONELINESS DESPITE BEING CONSTANTLY CONNECTED

safety primarily through the Digital Services Act which makes large online platforms protect minors from harmful content. In recent times Norway, Spain, Greece and Denmark have announced plans to strengthen age restrictions and stronger digital protections. I headed a Joint Parliamentary Committee in which this aspect was specifically dealt with and social media regulation was proposed much before the EU and Australia took a call on this subject. This report was subsequently presented to the parliament by Shri PP Chaudhary Ji, as I had been appointed as a minister and he was appointed as the chairman of JPC. The world is learning from its past mistakes and making amends, should we not learn from them rather than go through the painful lessons.

CONTINUED ON >> PII

The hijacking of digital identity and the urgent need for cyber accountability

We are all living in transient times. Our dependence on the digital environment has begun to start shaping our perspectives. The digital ecosystem is witnessing an alarming and escalating trend that demands immediate legal and policy attention: the systematic compromise and takeover of high-profile accounts on X (formerly Twitter). From journalists to public figures, the list of victims continues to grow, exposing not merely individual vulnerabilities but a deeper structural crisis in platform security architecture. As someone who has tracked the evolution of cyber law jurisprudence for over three decades, I find this pattern deeply symptomatic of larger fault lines in how social media platforms approach identity verification, account security, and post-incident accountability.

Account takeovers on X typically occur through a combination of tech-



DR PAVAN DUGGAL
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nical exploitation and social engineering. Phishing remains the most prevalent vector as attackers craft deceptively authentic login pages or direct messages that trick users into surrendering credentials. SIM-swapping attacks, where malicious actors hijack a victim's mobile number to intercept two-factor authentication codes, have also surged, particularly targeting individuals whose

phone numbers are linked to their accounts for verification purposes.

Credential stuffing being the automated testing of leaked username-password combinations from unrelated data breaches, continues to be an effective, if unsophisticated, method. More concerning is the emergence of insider-facilitated breaches, where compromised employee access or third-party contractor vulnerabilities within the platform itself have been exploited, as demonstrated in previous high-profile incidents.

The convergence of these methods reveals a troubling reality: account security is only as strong as its weakest link, whether that link resides in user behaviour, platform infrastructure, or third-party integrations.

The targeting of journalists and public figures is neither coincidental nor arbitrary. These accounts carry

HIJACKED ACCOUNTS OF PROMINENT FIGURES WERE USED TO PROMOTE CRYPTOCURRENCY SCAMS

what I term "amplified digital credibility", being the intrinsic ability to disseminate information at scale with inherent public trust. When compromised, such accounts become potent instruments for spreading disinformation, market manipulation, or political propaganda, often within the narrow window before the breach is detected and remedied.

We have witnessed instances where hijacked accounts of prominent figures were used to promote cryptocurrency scams or issue false statements with significant real-world consequences, including market volatility. The asymmetry here is stark: the effort required

to compromise an account is minimal compared to the exponential damage that a single malicious post from a trusted handle can inflict upon public discourse, financial markets, or geopolitical stability.

This is where the legal and policy dimensions of the said phenomenon become critical. Social media platforms have evolved into the primary architecture of contemporary public discourse. When the accounts of those entrusted with shaping public opinion are compromised, the very foundation of trust in digital communication is shaken.

This raises fundamental questions about intermediary liability, the adequacy of existing intermediary due diligence frameworks, and whether current legal regimes including India's Information Technology Act, 2000, and the emerging Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 framework,

sufficiently address the unique harms arising from identity-based cyber intrusions on social media.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, the Indian cyber law does not provide direct clear guidance in this regard. Intermediaries are mandated to implement and maintain reasonable security practices and procedures, while discharging their obligations under the law. However, issues pertaining to security of user accounts is not specifically mentioned under the IT Act, 2000 and rules and regulations made thereunder. Breach of social media accounts would constitute computer related offences under Section 66 of the IT Act, 2000. The absence of robust, mandatory, and time-bound breach notification requirements specific to social media identity theft represents a significant legal lacuna.

CONTINUED ON >> PII

“TO TRAVEL IS TO DISCOVER THAT EVERYONE IS WRONG
ABOUT OTHER COUNTRIES.”
—ALDOUS HUXLEY

Oman tourism: India emerges as a strategic growth market



ASHOKE RAJ

Oman remains confident about the outlook for international tourism in 2026 despite geopolitical uncertainties and the ongoing conflict in West Asia. India has emerged as one of Oman's most important international source markets, with strong visitor growth in the first half of 2026. Oman is also investing in destination promotion, trade partnerships and new attractions to encourage longer stays and repeat visits.

The *Pioneer* spoke with Yousuf Khalaf Al Mujaizi, Assistant Director of Business Development, Tourism Promotion Directorate, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, about Oman's tourism ambitions, the growing importance of the Indian market.

With geopolitical tensions in West Asia continuing, how confident is Oman in international tourism in 2026?

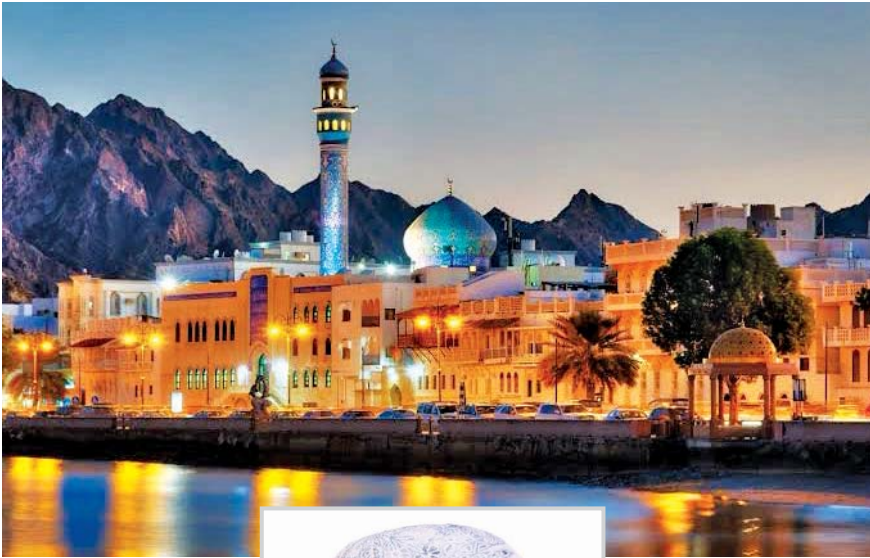
Geopolitical developments can influence travel sentiment, and it is natural for travelers and the tourism industry to monitor developments closely. At the same time, Oman remains cautiously confident in its tourism outlook for 2026, supported by the continued strength of our source markets, connectivity and the growing diversity of experiences we offer international visitors.

Our focus is to remain responsive to developments while maintaining close engagement with our travel trade, airline and international tourism partners.

We therefore remain focused on building long-term confidence in Oman as a destination-not simply by responding to short-term sentiment, but by continuing to strengthen the fundamentals that make the country an attractive choice for international travelers.

India has become an increasingly important market for Oman. What do the latest visitor numbers tell you?

India continues to reinforce its position as one of Oman's most strategically important source markets. Between January and June 2026, Oman welcomed 381,305 Indian visitors,



Yousuf Khalaf Al Mujaizi
Assistant Director of Business Development, Tourism Promotion Directorate, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman.

while May recorded 81,797 visitors, making it the strongest month in recent decades.

Beyond the numbers, the more significant development is the changing perception of Oman among Indian travellers. Oman is increasingly moving beyond being viewed as a niche destination and becoming a considered choice for travellers seeking authentic, experience-led holidays.

It is not simply about more people visiting Oman; it is about growing confidence in Oman as a destination and the increasing maturity of the India-Oman tourism relationship.

Are you looking for volume or higher-value tourism from India?

Our ambition goes beyond increasing visitor numbers. India has evolved into one of Oman's cornerstone source markets, and our focus is on building a resilient, high-value and sustainable tourism relationship.

Indian travellers have increasingly diverse interests, including heritage and culture, luxury, adventure, wellness, marine tourism, MICE and family travel. We want Oman to be seen as a year-round destination offering authentic experiences for different types of

visitors.

Our priority is to build long-term demand through sustained destination awareness, deeper engagement with travel trade and airline partners, and stronger efforts to encourage repeat visitation.

What is driving the current growth in business between Oman and the Indian tourism industry?

The growth is the result of sustained market development over several years. We have consistently engaged

with travel trade, airline partners, media and content creators to keep Oman visible and relevant to Indian travellers.

Over the past year, we have strengthened trade relationships through destination training programmes, joint marketing initiatives, familiarisation visits and strategic media engagement.

A significant milestone was Focus Oman 2025, which brought together more than 150 travel industry stakeholders from across India.

Our objective is to build meaningful, long-term partnerships with the Indian travel industry and inspire more travellers to discover that every visit to Oman can offer a different story.

How important are new attractions such as Snow Oman in attracting international tourists?

Snow Oman is an excellent example of how Oman's tourism offering is evolving while complementing its established natural and cultural attractions. Oman is known for its mountains, coastline, deserts and heritage, but alongside these timeless experiences, newer leisure and entertainment offerings are adding a different dimension to the visitor experience, particularly for families and younger travellers.

What makes the destination particularly appealing is this contrast. Visitors can explore centuries-old forts, experience the coastline and later enjoy an indoor snow park during the same holiday. One distinctive feature is its resident colony of Gentoo and King penguins, offering an experience many visitors do not expect to find in Oman.

Snow Oman welcomes an average of around 350,000 guests annually, demonstrating strong demand for contemporary leisure and entertainment. Attractions such as the Roller Glider and Frozen Shipwreck appeal to different age groups, while the facility has also received international recognition, including the MENALAC Award for Best Design for a Leisure & Entertainment Facility.

Beyond leisure, Snow Oman has developed into a venue for sporting events, community initiatives and international collaborations, strengthening its role within Oman's tourism and entertainment ecosystem.

What is your message to Indian travellers unfamiliar with Oman?

For Indian travelers, there is already a strong foundation of familiarity between our two countries. Oman and India share centuries of trade and cultural exchange, and those connections remain visible today, including in Oman's culinary landscape, where Indian cuisine and restaurants have become a familiar part of everyday life. This creates a sense of connection for Indian visitors, while still offering them the opportunity to discover the distinct culture, landscapes and experiences of Oman. Oman offers a distinctive combination of heritage, culture, mountains, deserts, coastline, adventure, hospitality and increasingly diverse leisure experiences. For Indian travelers, there are many ways to experience Oman, whether through a family holiday, luxury escape, adventure trip, cultural journey, wellness experience or business event.

The writer is an Associate Editor (Foreign Affairs) at *The Pioneer*.

FROM AGENDA COVER

Is social media...

Social isolation and its impact on mental health and cognitive development must be taken into account. It's known that teenagers are spending less time with family and friends and prefer loneliness despite being constantly connected. Social media platforms are often perceived as free services that enable people to connect and share information. However, behind these platforms are some of the world's largest and most profitable businesses. Companies such as Meta Platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Threads), TikTok, Snap Inc., X Corp., and YouTube generate billions of dollars annually through advertising, subscriptions, data-driven marketing, and digital commerce.

Social media is therefore considered a business because its primary objective is to generate revenue and create value for shareholders while providing digital services to users; so for most companies in this business user data becomes an economic asset through which they can collect information such as pages followed, videos watched, search history and engagement with different types of content. These jar-gonised Attention Economies are deployed through Artificial Intelligence to attract and push personalised recommendations, notifications, and continuous content feeds designed to encourage addictive engagement.

There is growing evidence that social media can influence vulnerable individuals' attitudes toward suicide and self-harm, potentially contributing to suicidal behavior in some cases. Cyberbullying, Suicide Contagion and Algorithmic Amplification are a few new terminologies linked to this dangerous phenomenon. One of the most widely discussed cases in recent times is of a 14-year-old Molly Russell, of the UK, who viewed large amounts of self-harm and suicide-related content online before her death. In 2022, the coroner concluded that exposure to online content relating to suicide and self-harm contributed to her death, while noting other factors were also relevant.

The Blue Whale Challenge was yet another alleged online "challenge" encouraging participants to complete increasingly harmful

tasks. Closer home we witnessed the tragic death of teenage sisters from Noida.

It is time that India through its government amends the laws and applies the regulations firmly and looks at creating indigenous social media platforms with graded exposure to young people. An Indian platform could store and process user data in India, making it easier to comply with Indian laws and data protection requirements. This will result in better control over citizens' data, greater transparency, self-reliance and easier regulatory oversight.

Monitoring will also become easier as Indian agencies may be able to respond more quickly to lawful requests, investigate cyber-crime efficiently, and protect our national interests while upholding our cultural standards. China has developed platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin, alongside strict regulation of foreign services. South Korea has strong domestic internet services such as Kakao and Naver, and Russia has domestic platforms including VK.

An Indian social media ecosystem could strengthen data sovereignty, economic growth, and digital innovation while safeguarding the character, cognitive development, and future of our young citizens.

The Hijacking of...

Unlike financial data breaches, which often trigger statutory disclosure obligations in various jurisdictions, account takeovers on social media platforms largely remain governed by platform discretion rather than binding legal mandate. This is one area that the Indian cyberlaw must immediately focus on. This assumes all the more significance as India still does not have any dedicated law on artificial intelligence or governing its misuse.

Given the existing ground reality, users, particularly those with public-facing profiles, must adopt a layered security approach. Enabling two-factor authentication rather than SMS-based verification significantly reduces vulnerability to SIM-swapping. Regular password rotation, combined with the use of unique, complex passwords, remains foundational. Equally important is vigilance

against phishing attempts. Users must verify the authenticity of login prompts and refraining from clicking on unsolicited links purporting to be from X or related services. Public figures would also benefit from limiting the linkage of personal mobile numbers to their accounts, opting instead for dedicated, less publicly known contact methods for verification purposes.

The response mechanism post-compromise remains an area requiring substantial improvement. Users have reported delays in account recovery, particularly when attackers alter linked email addresses or phone numbers immediately upon gaining access. The efficacy of X's support infrastructure in swiftly restoring compromised accounts, especially for non-monetized or non-premium users, continues to lag behind the urgency the situation demands.

The recurring nature of these incidents necessitates the need for adopting a multi-pronged response. Platforms must be held to higher standards of proactive security architecture, including mandatory security audits and transparent incident reporting. Regulatory frameworks worldwide, including India's evolving digital regulatory landscape, must evolve to specifically address warranting expedited grievance redressal mechanisms. The existing grievance redressal mechanisms are not as effective as were expected and leave much to be desired.

As digital identity increasingly becomes synonymous with real-world credibility and influence, safeguarding it must transcend individual responsibility and become a shared obligation between users, platforms, and regulators. The sanctity of public discourse in the digital age depends on nothing less. The Indian cyberlaw needs to play a decisive role in this regard by coming up with new distinct provisions regarding the above phenomenon and the accountability aspects connected therewith. Till such time as it happens, it is time for users to be extra careful, duly diligent and cautious in respect of their social media accounts and issues concerning the same.

Dr Pavan Duggal is Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India. He is a global leading authority and expert on cyber law, artificial intelligence, and emerging technology law.

A beautiful journey into the inner world

DR DEVENDER KAKAR

Rahul Ranchor's book of verse, "Diamond Red and Other Poems" calls for a deep understanding of its rich content and for an appreciation of the poet's unique style. The collection is not merely a compilation of poems; it is an inward journey into the poet's psyche, reflecting the emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of his life. Many of the poems may be regarded as a search for a lost identity, arising from the absence of connectivity, experienced while living between two worlds — the West and the East, namely America and India. As the years rolled by, Ranchor's experience of alienation and of the absence of relational

first fight, and the dust a girl threw in his eyes, return with remarkable vividness. Such recollections appear almost as living experiences unfolding in the present.

He laments narrow-mindedness, the distortion of truth, and the refusal to acknowledge it, while repeatedly affirming the enduring significance of compassion and human feeling.

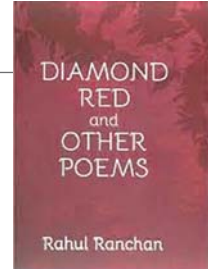
As expressed in several poems, intrigue, planning and deception by certain trusted friends, during a particularly difficult period in the poet's life, left deep emotional scars. These experiences recur in poems such as "Mindscape".

Nature occupies a significant place throughout the collection. Trees, leaves, wind, breeze, storms, fog, firs, pines and bushes become more than natural imagery; they serve as extensions of the poet's emotional and spiritual landscape.

The intimate relationship between the creator and the creative act receives memorable treatment in "Pottering". Here, handcrafted pottery stands in contrast to the mass production of plastic, suggesting the loss of authenticity in modern life. Ranchor's admiration for the potters remains unwavering. They representing joy, hope and renewal, inspires him to become, in spirit, a potter himself, continually shaping life through creative endeavour.

Stylistically, the poems move beyond conventional metrical patterns. Their freshness of imagery, originality of expression and symbolic richness make this collection worthy of a careful literary study. "Diamond Red and Other Poems" therefore, is a collection that requires slow and reflective reading. Beneath its quiet voice lies a profound exploration of identity, memory, suffering, hope and renewal.

The reviewer is Associate Professor (Retired), School of Open Learning, University of Delhi



Author: Rahul Ranchor
Publisher: Har-Anand
Pages: 84
Price: ₹399

the poet continues to look ahead with hope, determined to regain lost ground.

Even in his loneliness, Ranchor writes with restraint and dignity. In "A Bowl of Porridge", the unusual image of the poet's artificial eye, unseen by the visitor, becomes a subtle symbol of an inner reality concealed beneath an ordinary exterior. Hope, however, remains a persistent current throughout the collection. In "Planting", the poet looks forward to the birth of his child with the wish that the newcomer must not inherit the fractured experiences of the poet. The image of the son eating the fruit of the father's planting, becomes a powerful affirmation of renewal, continuity and faith.

Ranchor also revisits the memories of youth, where images of the soccer field, his

WEEKLY MOON SIGN FORECAST | 16 - 22 AUGUST

Putting Things in Order, Finding Balance, Seeing More Clearly

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

The Moon's quiet message for the week ahead. This week begins with the need to sort out what is pending and gradually moves towards balance, honesty and clearer judgement. What looks routine at first may reveal a deeper concern once expectations are examined properly.

Weekly Overview

The week opens with the Moon in Virgo, favouring organisation, practical thinking and unfinished work. Libra then brings relationships, cooperation and fair decisions into focus. Scorpio deepens emotional awareness and makes trust or commitment harder to ignore. Late in the week, Sagittarius begins to lift the mood and restore a wider perspective.



Aries (Mesh): Work, health or routine responsibilities may need better organisation at the start. A practical approach will help more than rushing. Relationships become more important as the week progresses, especially where expectations differ. Later, shared finances or a matter of trust may need honest discussion. Give the situation enough time before deciding what it really means.



Taurus (Vrishabh): Creative interests, family activities or personal plans can bring some satisfaction early in the week. Practical details still matter, so avoid leaving everything to mood. The middle phase asks for better balance in work and routine. Relationships then become more emotionally charged. Listening carefully may prevent a small issue from becoming much larger than it needs to be.



Gemini (Mithun): Home, family or a private concern may occupy your mind during the opening days. Small changes around you can improve the atmosphere. Social interaction and creativity become easier as the week moves on. Later, work, health or pending duties demand greater discipline. Progress will come through regular effort rather than one sudden burst of enthusiasm.



Cancer (Karka): Communication, paperwork or short journeys may keep you occupied early in the week. An ordinary conversation could offer useful clarity. Home and family then require a more balanced approach, particularly if someone has been avoiding a sensitive subject. The later phase supports creativity and personal expression. What felt complicated may become easier once emotions are spoken about plainly.



Leo (Simha): Money matters and family responsibilities deserve sensible handling at the beginning of the week. Avoid spending merely for comfort or appearance. Communication improves later and may help clear an old misunderstanding. Home matters then become more personal and emotionally important. Someone close may need your presence more than your advice. Keep the tone warm rather than authoritative.



Virgo (Kanya): With the Moon beginning the week in Virgo, personal priorities become easier to sort out. This is useful for completing unfinished work and making practical decisions. Attention later shifts towards money, values and day-to-day arrangements. Communication becomes deeper towards the weekend, and one conversation may carry more weight than expected. Say what matters without over-explaining it.



Libra (Tula): The opening days may feel quieter, giving you time to step away from unnecessary noise. Once the Moon moves into Libra, confidence improves and personal matters begin flowing more smoothly. Relationships and choices need balance, not perfection. Later, finances or emotional security come into focus. Avoid comparing your progress with others; your own pace is the better measure this week.



Scorpio (Vrishchik): Friends, group matters or future plans may keep you engaged early on, though not every suggestion deserves attention. A quieter middle phase helps you observe before acting. Once the Moon moves into Scorpio, confidence and emotional clarity increase together. Personal priorities become easier to recognise. By the close, perspective begins widening again and some pressure may finally start to ease.



Sagittarius (Dhanu): Professional responsibilities may require patience and careful follow-up during the first half of the week. Support from colleagues or useful contacts can make things easier. Later, you may feel the need to withdraw from noise and think privately about recent choices. By Saturday, the mood begins to lift. A clearer sense of direction may return without needing any dramatic decision.



Capricorn (Makar): Learning, travel or long-term planning may hold your attention early in the week. Practical thinking helps separate useful ideas from distractions. Career matters then become more visible and diplomacy may be necessary in important discussions. Friends or networks can offer support later. A dependable connection is likely to prove more valuable than a sudden opportunity that looks impressive at first.



Aquarius (Kumbh): Shared finances, responsibilities or a sensitive personal matter may need practical handling during the opening phase. Broader thinking and useful advice become available as the week develops. Career matters later gain importance and your work may attract more attention.

Stay prepared rather than trying to impress. Recognition usually comes more comfortably when the groundwork has already been done.



Pisces (Meen): Relationships and close interactions need clearer understanding at the beginning of the week, especially where duties are uneven. Shared values, trust or financial expectations may require a more direct conversation later. The closing phase broadens perspective and can bring relief through learning, travel or spiritual reflection. Some problems feel smaller once you stop looking at them from only one angle.

“PROPER NUTRITION IS THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN FEELING EXHAUSTED AND
GETTING THE MOST OUT OF A WORKOUT”
— SAHARA SANDERS

JAMAI SASHTI

A feast of affection, abundance and tradition



ANIL
RAJPUT

There are festivals in which a single sacred preparation defines the table, and there are others in which abundance itself becomes ritual. Jamai Sashti belongs unmistakably to the latter. In a Bengali household preparing for the day, celebration begins long before the son-in-law sits down to eat. The best fish is chosen at the market, vegetables are prepared, milk is reduced for sweets, seasonal fruit is arranged, and the kitchen becomes the centre of family anticipation. The meal is not merely meant to satisfy hunger. It is an act of welcome, affection and honour. For the married daughter, the day is also a return to her parental home, making the feast a reunion as much as a ritual. Jamai Sashti was observed earlier this year on Saturday, 20 June, with the Shashti tithi beginning on the afternoon of 19 June and ending on 20 June.

Jamai Sashti is observed by Bengali Hindu families on the Shukla Paksha Shashti associated with the Bengali month of Jyeshtha and is linked to the worship of Goddess Shashti, traditionally revered as a guardian of children, fertility and family welfare. The observance is also known in older contexts as Aranya Shashti, reflecting an association between the goddess, fertility and nature. Over time, the day acquired its distinctive social character as married daughters returned to their parental homes with their husbands, allowing families separated by marriage to gather again. The son-in-law, or jamai, became an honoured guest, but the deeper emotional centre remained the relationship between the daughter, her parents and the household she had left after marriage.

A popular Bengali vrata-katha gives the festival another layer of meaning. According to the traditional story, a young wife secretly ate food and blamed the theft on a cat, the animal associated with Goddess Shashti. Angered by the false accusation, the goddess caused the woman to lose her children. After remorse, prayer and reconciliation with the goddess, her children were restored. In later retellings, social restrictions kept the woman from visiting her parental home, so her parents invited her and her husband on the day of Shashti worship. The story connects the observance with honesty, motherhood, protection and the enduring desire of parents to remain connected with a married daughter.

The rituals of the day retain this language of protection and blessing. Mothers-in-law traditionally worship Goddess Shashti before welcoming the jamai, and some customs include blessing him with durba grass and grain,

offering seasonal fruits, tying a sacred thread, applying a ceremonial mark and fanning him with a palm-leaf fan. The gestures vary between families but share a wish for the well-being of the daughter and her husband. Only after these formalities does the most visible expression of jamai-adar begin: the feast. Jamai Sashti has no single compulsory menu, and family, region, season and means all shape what is served. Yet the recurring pattern is unmistakable. The table is generous, fish is given pride of place, meat often follows, sweets arrive in abundance, and Jyeshtha's summer produce gives the meal its seasonal character.

That seasonality begins even before the cooked food. Mango, litchi, jackfruit, jamun and other summer fruits often appear in the welcome or at the end of the meal, reflecting what Bengal's orchards and markets offer at this time of year. The cooked feast often follows the logic of a traditional Bengali meal, moving through contrasting tastes rather than placing everything on the plate at once. A fitting opening is Shukto, the gently bitter vegetable medley in which bitter gourd may be combined with raw banana, drumstick, potato and other vegetables in a lightly spiced gravy. Its restrained bitterness provides a deliberate counterpoint to the richer courses that follow. Mochar Ghonto, made from finely prepared banana blossom cooked with spices, coconut and often potatoes, brings another deeply Bengali vegetable tradition to the table, turning an ingredient that demands patience into something fragrant, textured and celebratory.

The progression may continue with Potoler Dolma, pointed gourds carefully hollowed and stuffed, often with chhena, coconut or a spiced filling before being cooked in gravy. Its time-consuming preparation itself signals a special meal. Lentils, too, can become festive through fish. Macher Matha Diye Moong Dal combines roasted moong dal with pieces of fried fish head, commonly from a large rohu or katla, creating a dish in which the nuttiness of the lentil absorbs the richness of the fish. It shows how Bengali cooking can turn the head of a large fish into a prized course. Contemporary Jamai Sashti menus continue to feature fish-head dal alongside elaborate fish preparations.

Rice then becomes the stage upon which the richer dishes arrive. Plain steamed rice remains essential with mustard-based fish, but a celebratory spread may also include Basanti Pulao, fragrant yellow rice enriched with ghee, whole spices, cashews and raisins, with a faint sweetness that



distinguishes it from an everyday pot of rice. It prepares the palate for what is often the most anticipated part of Jamai Sashti: fish. In Bengal, the quality, size and variety of fish offered to the jamai can itself communicate generosity, and recent Jamai Sashti coverage continues to place hilsa, prawns and katla at the heart of the feast.

Among these, Shorshe Ilish carries particular prestige. Pieces of hilsa are cooked in a sharp mustard paste with turmeric, green chillies and mustard oil, allowing the fish's natural richness to meet one of Bengal's most characteristic flavours. The technique remains restrained so the hilsa stays central. Ilish Paturi uses the same affinity between hilsa and mustard in another form. The fish is coated with mustard and green chilli, wrapped traditionally in banana leaf or another suitable leaf, and cooked gently so that the parcel traps moisture and aroma. Opening the leaf at the table releases its fragrance at once. Indian Express Bengali highlighted ilish paturi specifically as a Jamai Sashti preparation in 2026, illustrating how closely hilsa remains tied to contemporary jamai-adar.

Prawns add a different kind of luxury. Chingri Malai Curry pairs large prawns with a silky coconut-milk gravy scented with ginger, green chilli and warm spices. The sweetness of coconut softens the marine flavour of the prawns, producing a richer and more rounded dish than the mustard heat of hilsa. Katla Kalia, meanwhile, represents another classic mode of festive Bengali fish cookery. Thick steaks of katla are fried lightly and finished in an aromatic, fuller-bodied gravy, often built from ginger, spices and a carefully cooked masala. The contrast between mustard-sharp hilsa, coconut-rich prawns and gravied katla

gives the table abundance without repetition. Current festival menus regularly feature hilsa, chingri and katla in multiple forms.

For many families, fish is still not the final savoury statement. Kosha Mangsho brings slow-cooked mutton to the meal, its colour deepened by patient bhuna-style cooking as onions, ginger, garlic and spices are worked down until they cling to the meat. The dish is rich, concentrated and celebratory. Jamai Sashti food coverage repeatedly includes mutton as part of the lavish meal, showing how the festival embraces both the aquatic identity of Bengali cuisine and the indulgence of a meat course.

After so much richness, the meal traditionally needs a change of direction. Aamer Chutney, made from green or semi-ripe mango cooked with sugar or jaggery and tempered with spices, brings together sweetness, acidity and the unmistakable flavour of the season. It acts almost as a bridge between the savoury courses and dessert. Papad may accompany it, but the mango is more culturally revealing because Jamai Sashti falls when Bengal is immersed in summer fruit. The feast therefore does not merely display wealth through quantity. At its best, it displays attentiveness to season and household knowledge.

Then come the sweets, and on Jamai Sashti they are not an afterthought. Payesh, made by slowly simmering rice in milk until the grains soften and the liquid thickens, is one of the most intimate forms of Bengali celebration food. Sugar, cardamom, nuts or raisins may be added, while other occasions and seasons allow jaggery to change its character. Beside it may appear Sandesh, created from fresh chhena kneaded smooth with sugar and shaped into delicate portions. Its simplicity depends on keeping the chhena tender without making it loose. Jamai

Sashti recipe collections continue to treat sandesh as a natural part of the festive sweet table.

Roshogolla offers the opposite texture. Soft chhena balls are cooked in sugar syrup until they expand into light, spongy sweets that release syrup with every bite. Rajbhog follows a related tradition but is larger and more opulent, often flavoured or filled, making it particularly suited to a feast built around honouring a guest. Pantua changes the technique again. Instead of being poached directly in syrup, the milk-based balls are fried until deeply coloured before soaking, producing a denser texture and caramelised exterior. Chomchom, another celebrated Bengali chhena sweet, adds still another form, typically elongated and syrup-soaked, sometimes finished with grated coconut or khoa.

No Bengali festive sweet course would feel complete without Mishti Doi, in which sweetened milk is cultured into yoghurt and traditionally set in earthen pots. The caramelised sweetness of the milk offers a cool finish after mustard, chilli, fish and mutton. Together, payesh, sandesh, roshogolla, rajbhog, pantua, chomchom and mishti doi demonstrate that Jamai Sashti abundance is not simply about serving many sweets. It is also a display of Bengal's extraordinary command over milk, chhena, syrup, fermentation and texture. Festival menus and recipe coverage repeatedly identify sandesh, roshogolla and mishti doi among the familiar closing pleasures of the day.

The beverages surrounding the feast also respond naturally to the heat of Jyeshtha. Aam Pora Shorbot, prepared from roasted raw mango blended with water, salt, sugar or jaggery and spices such as roasted cumin, offers tartness and a deep roasted character suited to summer. Gondhoraj Ghol turns diluted yoghurt into a refreshing drink scented with the intensely aromatic Gondhoraj lime, while Daaber Jol, the water of tender coconut, provides a simple seasonal welcome. Other cooling sherbets may appear, while tea can return as conversation continues. They show that Jamai Sashti hospitality extends beyond the main table.

Jamai Sashti has inevitably changed with Bengali life. Smaller households, working families and restaurant celebrations have altered where and how the feast is prepared. Yet the essential idea remains recognisable: food turns kinship into something visible. The future of Jamai Sashti therefore depends on preserving more than the custom of feeding a son-in-law generously. It depends on carrying forward the culinary knowledge that gives the day meaning: how banana blossom is cleaned for mochar ghonto, how bitterness is balanced in shukto, how mustard is ground for hilsa, how a leaf parcel protects the fragrance of paturi, how milk becomes chhena, sandesh or mishti doi, and how summer mango can move from a fruit platter to chutney and shorbot. If younger generations inherit these techniques along with the stories behind them, Jamai Sashti will remain more than a festive lunch. It will continue to be a living expression of Bengali family memory, seasonal wisdom and hospitality, served from one generation to the next.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)



A joyful blast of
flavours

TEAM AGENDA

Do you know why bubble tea has captured the hearts of young food lovers across India? The obsession stems from a wonderfully fun physical sensation. Sipping a cold refreshing fruit cooler or a rich milk based tea brings a joyful, chewy surprise that pops up through the straw, creating a brilliant blast of flavours in every gulp.

Upon asking about this widespread love, the findings reveal a delicious story. The appeal lies in lovely customisation and a visually engaging experience that gives a youthful generation the perfect playground to experiment. With growing familiarity, this is no passing fad. A remarkable 60 per cent of guests return to enjoy a drink every other day. Taro Lava remains a reigning favourite alongside Indianised creations like Jamun Kala Khatta. This shows young India eagerly sought a delicious change and warmly embraced these vibrant adaptations. While stunning visuals drove initial curiosity, the lasting craving now comes entirely from

exceptional taste and immense variety, proving consumers have moved well beyond novelty.

Creating these drinks requires loving dedication. Following a celebrated showcase on Shark Tank, Boba Bhai, founded by Dhruv Kohli in 2023, continues to share this fantastic feast. The kitchen begins with premium black or green tea leaves, brewed fresh for a deeply flavourful base. Tapioca pearls are cooked slowly, remaining wonderfully soft outside and perfectly chewy inside. Sweetened just right, every beverage is thoroughly shaken with ice for a cool, satisfying sip.

The tropical Tender Coconut and fizzy Berry Bomb Mojito offer brilliant refreshment. Coffee lovers enjoy the Classic Cold Coffee with bubbles, while the rich Royal Thai Milk tea, layered Strawberry Matcha, and Mango Coconut provide indulgent comfort. The taro and blueberry cheese clouds pair magically with hot spicy Korean loaded fries and comforting aloo tikki burgers. Getting to chew your tea while eating a wonderfully messy burger is, quite frankly, remarkably interesting.

CHEWY, JUICY, FUN!

Matcha Bloom offers a magnificent blend of rich Japanese matcha and creamy milk, bringing beautiful earthy comfort alongside a joyful, chewy bounce of sweet tapioca pearls.

Craving something sweet? The Mango Coconut Bubble Tea mixes real Alphonso mango with thick coconut milk. Toss in some chewy boba, adding texture to every sip, a refreshing drink perfect for afternoons anytime.

Jamun Kala Khatta with Popping Bubbles brings nostalgia in a cup. That sharp, tangy jamun flavour wakes you right up and having those popping bubbles burst in your mouth is just so much fun.

Beyond the usual Indian plate



GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Ask most restaurants what an Independence Day menu looks like, and the answer is fairly predictable: a tricolour canapé, a biryani doing the work of national unity, kulfi to close. This year, two addresses on Mussoorie's Mall Road made a different argument — that a food culture as regionally varied as India's deserves a menu built from names most Indians outside the hills have never had to pronounce.

The Tavern has anchored Mussoorie's Mall Road for more than four decades. A few doors along, Café de Tavern has a different appeal. This Independence Day, both stepped outside their usual menus to build a spread entirely around Uttarakhand's indigenous ingredients — Bhatt, Jhangora, Gahat, Mandua, Pahadi Rai and Bharg, alongside herbs sourced locally from the hills - reinterpreted, the restaurants

say, through a contemporary culinary lens, without losing what makes them specifically Pahadi.

What makes the idea worth paying attention is the origin of these ingredients. Bhatt, Jhangora, Gahat and Mandua have fed Uttarakhand's hill households for generations, grown on terrain too steep and too cold for wheat and rice to reliably take. Mandua — finger millet, known elsewhere in India as ragi — gets ground into the dense, faintly nutty, iron-dark rotis that anchor a Pahadi thali.

Jhangora, a barnyard millet, goes the sweeter route, simmered slowly in milk and sugar into jhangore ki kheer, a dessert that turns up at almost every Kumaoni festival table. The legumes carry similar weight. Bhatt, a black soybean

grown almost nowhere outside these hills, is roasted, ground and slow-cooked with mustard oil and garlic into bhatt ki churkani — a thick, nutty curry that's arguably Garhwal's most recognisable dish.

The bigger point The Tavern and Café de Tavern seem to be making has less to do with any single dish than with what an Independence Day menu was for.

Building a menu around Bhatt and Jhangora instead is a small, specific argument: that celebrating a nation whole means giving its lesser-known regional kitchens equal claim to the table, not just the ones that already travelled well.

It's a modest gesture, contained to one high street in one hill station. But it's also a fair question for any Independence Day menu to answer: independence from what, exactly, if not from a single idea of what Indian food is supposed to taste like?

What makes us ill can make us well

AMMA (SRI MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI DEVI)

Most people in the world are immersed in action, and they act in the hope of its result. Sometimes what they longed for arrives, and there is joy; sometimes it does not, and there is sorrow. A good deed brings merit, a wrong one brings sin, and the fruit of each must be borne in time.

When attachment to the fruit grows too strong, peace of mind is lost. Both while we act and long after, the recurring thought of how things will turn out causes constant anxiety. Karma Yoga is the art of taking this very action, which otherwise binds us, and turning it into a means for Self-realisation.

Once a man went to a feast and ate a great deal of ghee, and the very next day he was seriously ill with indigestion. Unable to bear the pain, he went to a doctor who told him, "Bring me a little ghee, and I will prepare a medicine for you."

The man was astonished. He replied, "It was ghee that gave me this trouble in the first place, and now you ask me to fetch more?" Still, at the doctor's insistence, he reluctantly brought it. The doctor mixed it with certain herbs, gave it to him in a particular way, and the ailment was cured.

In just this way, actions done carelessly and with a wrong attitude fill a person's life with suffering, and yet the remedy for that suffering is also action itself. Once the attitude behind the action is set right, action is no longer a source of pain; it leads to the good of oneself and the good of the world.

Sometimes, however carefully we labour, the result we hoped for does not come. A farmer toils and sows his crop, and just as it ripens, a sudden downpour destroys the entire field. From this we learn that the fruit of action does not rest on our effort alone. That is why Sri Krishna tells us in the Gita to act while offering the fruit to God.

We are also deeply attached to the people and things around us, and this can stand in the way of performing our



ACTIONS DONE CARELESSLY AND WITH A WRONG ATTITUDE FILL A PERSON'S LIFE WITH SUFFERING, AND YET THE REMEDY FOR THAT SUFFERING IS ALSO ACTION ITSELF

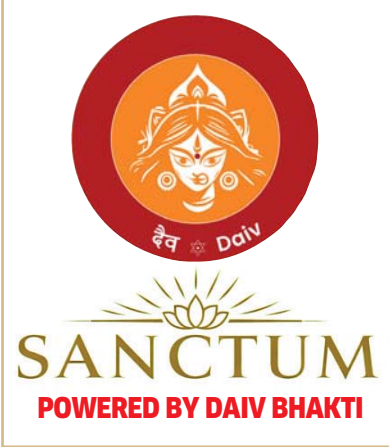
duties. Even the most experienced surgeon will not dare to operate on his own wife or child. Even a righteous judge will not bring himself to pass sentence on his own son when the boy stands accused. From this we see how greatly attachment interferes with our judgement and affects our actions.

In truth it is not actions that bind us, but the pride we take in them and the craving for their fruits. Karma Yoga is the way to act with the fullest skill

and yet stay free of those bonds. The karma yogi knows that the results are not up to us, that we are but instruments in the hands of God.

So, whatever the task, a karma yogi does it beautifully, and whatever the outcome, it is received as the will of God. In this way, Karma Yoga lets us work in the world in practical ways with keen discernment, while at the same time moving steadily towards the ultimate goal - liberation.

(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 the Mata Amritanandamayi Math, an NGO that reaches across more than 50 countries, working in the areas of healthcare, disaster relief, education, gender equality, and environmental restoration)



My True Identity

Names, professions and achievements may define how the world recognises a person, but they cannot define the real self. The body changes, circumstances shift and accomplishments fade, yet the *atman* remains eternal and indestructible

DR SWAMI GYANANANDDAS

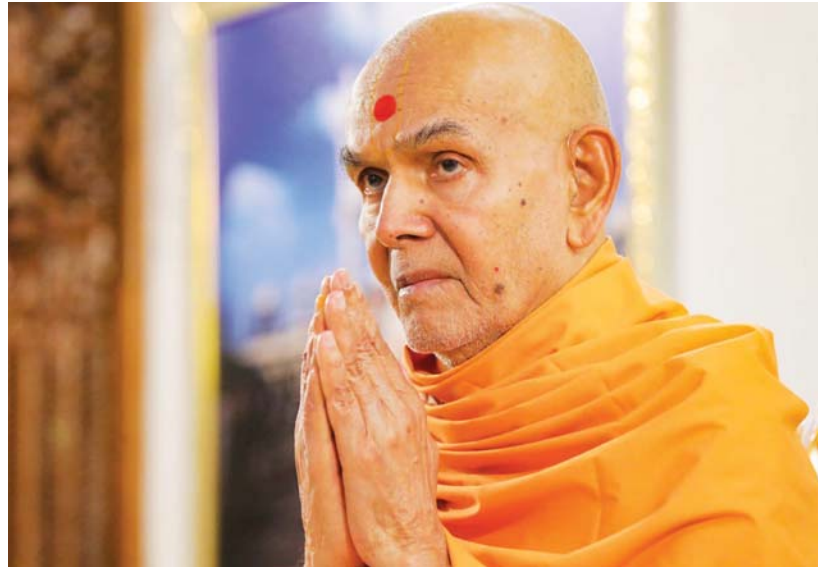
The greatest crisis facing the world today is not economic or political; it is a crisis of identity. Humanity is searching for an answer to one fundamental question: "Who am I?" Unfortunately, most people are looking for that answer in the wrong places. Some define themselves by their caste, others by their cult, language, nationality, profession, wealth, social status, or physical appearance. This mistaken understanding of identity has become one of the deepest causes of personal suffering and global conflict.

Consider this: if you lose your job, does your identity disappear? If a doctor is stripped of his title, an engineer of her degree, a businessperson of his wealth, an actor of her fame, or a political leader of power, do they cease to exist? Certainly not. These are not their true identities; they are merely roles and introductions. Yet, in today's world, people have confused their introductions with their identity.

This misunderstanding has filled history with division and conflict. Most wars have not been fought because people were human beings, but because they identified themselves with external labels: state, race, language, cult, ethnicity, or political ideology. "My state," "my community," "my cult," and "my people" have often become walls that separate one human being from another. If these external identities were the ultimate truth, then in this age of unprecedented scientific progress and technological advancement, violence should have disappeared long ago. Instead, conflicts continue because humanity still has not discovered its true self.

At the heart of this confusion lies another illusion: people mistake the body for the self. Consequently, the world has become obsessed with physical beauty, appearance, and attraction. A compliment about one's appearance inflates the ego, while criticism can shatter one's confidence. If the body is who I am, then praise of the body becomes my honor, and criticism of it becomes my humiliation. But is the body permanent?

The body you possessed as a child no longer exists. Science tells us that most of the body's cells are continually replaced over time. If the body is constantly changing, then who is the unchanging "I" that has witnessed every stage of life, from childhood to youth and beyond? There must be something deeper than the body, something constant amidst all change.



The Bhagavad Gita provides a profound answer: You are not the body; you are the *atman* (soul). The body is merely a garment, while the *atman* is its eternal wearer. Positions change, circumstances change, relationships change, and even the body changes, but the soul remains unchanged. It is neither born nor does it die. One who understands and lives with this awareness gradually rises above fear, insecurity, pride, jealousy, and hatred. This is the true identity of every human being.

The need of our time, therefore, is not to create a new identity but to rediscover the one we have forgotten. We may be doctors, engineers, admin-

THE BHAGAVAD GITA PROVIDES A PROFOUND ANSWER: YOU ARE NOT THE BODY; YOU ARE THE ATMAN (SOUL). THE BODY IS MERELY A GARMENT, WHILE THE ATMAN IS ITS ETERNAL WEARER

istrators, entrepreneurs, artists, or political leaders. We may be Indians, Americans, or citizens of any nation. We may be young or old. Yet all these are temporary roles we perform throughout life; they are not our essential nature.

An actor may portray a king in one play, a beggar in another, and a scholar in a third. Yet, once the curtain falls, the actor returns to his true identity. Life is much the same. We perform many roles on the stage of the world, but beneath them all lies our

unchanging spiritual identity.

His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj reminds, "Self-realization is not merely a philosophical concept; it is the greatest science of inner peace."

On 3 March 1820, at Gadhada (Gujarat), when Muktanand Swami asked Bhagwan Swaminarayan how one could remain composed amid lust, anger, greed and fear. Bhagwan Swaminarayan answered: "Firm realization of the *atman* as distinct from the body is the key to inner composure."

The day a person truly realises, "I am not this body; I am the eternal soul," the inner war begins to end. The roots of external conflicts lie in this inner confusion about who we really are. Therefore, what the world needs today is not merely more sophisticated technology, but a deeper spiritual vision.

While modern psychology speaks of self-acceptance, Indian spirituality goes a step further; it guides us from awareness of the self to devotion to the Supreme Self. In other words, genuine peace does not arise merely from accepting ourselves as we are, but from recognising our eternal spiritual identity and cultivating a living relationship with God.

Thus, my true identity is not my body, my profession, my social status, or any external label. My true identity is that I am a pure, conscious, eternal *atman*. This realisation brings peace to the individual, love into relationships, and transforms humanity from a culture of conflict into a civilisation of cooperation, compassion, and lasting harmony.

(Dr Swami Gyanananddas is a dedicated follower of the Swaminarayan tradition and has earned a PhD from MS University)

Spirituality in the Leadership

SADHGURU

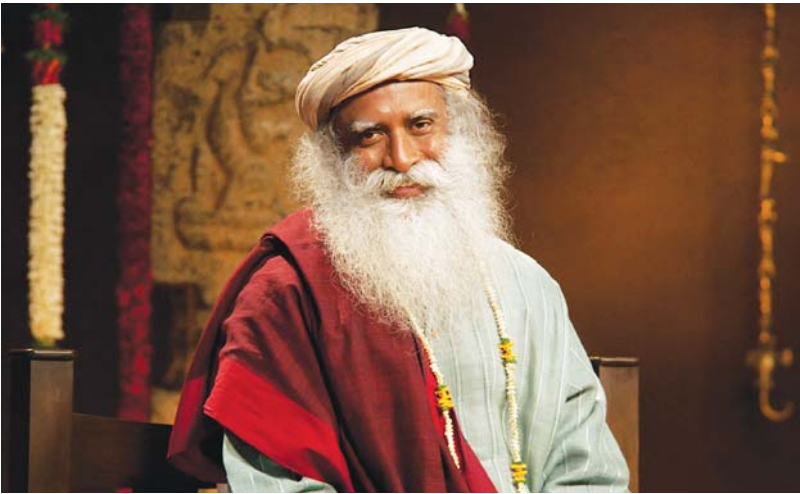
Leadership is not dominance; it is a certain sacrifice. It is not a question of ruling someone, but an opportunity to make someone's life. Leadership essentially means that you are capable of creating the necessary atmosphere for people to go beyond the limitations that they have set for themselves. In your presence, people should be able to do things they never imagined they could do.

The very fundamentals of leadership are that you aspire to achieve a certain vision and take people with you towards that goal. And if, for whatever reason, that is not achieved, that you don't become a bundle of frustrations, but instead see how to make it happen. These are essential qualities for leadership. If you have your own issues, concerns, tensions and fears, you will never function to your full capacity. It is extremely important that the leadership in the world is functioning on full capacity, not as self-curtailed capability.

When I say leadership, I am not referring to presidents and prime ministers. Whatever sphere one is in, whether spiritual, political, economic or social, or even within the family, everyone is a leader in some capacity; it is only a question of scale. Whether one is managing and leading two people or one billion people, everyone is some kind of a leader. If a leader

does not feel a deep sense of inclusion, if he does not feel that people around him are a part of him and grasp the fundamentals of who they are — not understanding as an intellectual process but as an experiential sense of oneness with the people around him — he cannot be a genuine leader. He can only manipulate situations — for better or for worse.

A non-religious spiritual process can play a phenomenal role in experiencing this inclusiveness that makes a true leader. A spiritual process is about going deeper into life, not living on the surface but wanting to know the depth of life. This is very essential for leaders, as they are bound to face challenges, and above all, are required to function at their optimal potential. If one is experiencing tension,



anxiety, stress or anger, one's body, mind and emotions will not work at their best. Everything within oneself functions at its best when one is peaceful and joyful, this is a proven fact and a medical reality today.

The whole science and wisdom of what we refer to as "Inner Engineering" means not seeing joy as something that we could achieve in our life, but seeing joy as the very basis of our lives. Joy is not the goal, but the square one of your life. Other wonderful things can ensue only if this happens. Inner Engineering is a way of exploring the inner nature of who you are. We do not consider the body or the mind as inner nature, because we have accumulated the content of both from outside. There is an intrinsic intelligence and competence within you which can transform a piece of bread into a human being within three to four hours. If even a drop of this intelligence becomes a conscious process, your life will become magical in every possible way. Whether you are an entrepreneur or a leader, this intelligence will make your life truly fabulous.

It is extremely important that we provide people with leadership of a certain quality.

Many thousand years ago, there was a king in India whose name was Janaka. Janaka aspired for his spiritual growth and when he found his Guru, Ashtavakra, he was enlightened, after much sadhana. When he attained, he went to his Guru's hermitage, wanting to live there, but Ashtavakra said, "You cannot live here, you must be a king." Janaka replied, "What is the point? These pleasures, the palace, the power of being king and all that comes with it, mean nothing to me. All I want to do is sit at your feet." Ashtavakra said, "What you want is no longer important. You have found what

you want within yourself. Now the people deserve an enlightened king. That is important."

Every nation needs a focused and enlightened leadership, not a confused leadership. There was a time when in a society, a few people were spiritual and everybody else just went to them for blessings and sustained their lives. Today, with the tools of science and technology, we have brought ourselves to a self-threatening situation where everybody in society needs to turn spiritual. Otherwise, there is no survival for this world. With the kind of technology and capabilities we have, it just takes one fool to blow the world up. There are any number of such fools standing in the queue to get to the top. Spirituality is no longer a fancy pursuit. It is an absolute necessity for our own survival and the planet's survival. Unless some sense of oneness touches people — especially in the leadership — self-destruction is a live threat.

Skeptics are quick to ask, "Is such a thing possible?" Well, do not think of the future on the basis of existing realities. Existing realities just look at the number of people that were slaughtered today or the number of bombs that exist on the planet. Statistics cannot measure what is beating in human hearts. Existing realities do not take into consideration people's will and commitment, and the love in them. If only we can stoke that, if only we can stir up what is happening in individual hearts, miracles are possible.

(Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic and visionary, and a prominent spiritual leader. An author, poet, and internationally-renowned speaker, Sadhguru's wit and piercing logic provoke and widen our perception of life)

Independence Day Special

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

Our youth are dynamic, enthusiastic, focused, and full of potential. There are times when that energy gets depleted, and we need to renew and uplift it.

It is drugs that deplete our life energy. But why do people turn to drugs in the first place?

Nobody likes to live with stress. Some turn to drugs simply to get relief from stress. Some are saturated with what they see, hear, smell and experience. Some are searching for happiness, love or an altered state of consciousness. Beneath all these searches is one longing: to feel something more, to experience a thrill beyond the ordinary.

My answer to the youth looking for such a high has always been simple- come here, we will give you a better high-a high that you will never want to get rid of.

It is the high of creativity, of service, of unconditional love. When you taste even a little of this, you discover that you don't need anything outside yourself to feel alive. You begin to experience a joy that does not deplete you, but gives you more energy. That is the real high-the one that does not take life away from you, but gives you more of it.

I believe our young people are sitting on an inheritance that they are learning to value. India is a world leader. Consider what this country holds. India is very highly placed in several fields, starting with spirituality, Ayurveda, and yoga. Worrying doesn't make any difference, but working does, and spirituality gives one the strength to work. India has always shown light to the world, leading the world towards the path of peace. Yoga, too, is more than a physical exercise; it is a study of life, a study of the body, breath, mind, intellect, memory and ego, a study of our own inner faculties. Ayurveda reminds us that health is not mere absence of disease; it is the dynamic expression of life itself.

Every state and province in our country has a unique and different cuisine, dance styles, and dressing styles, and they celebrate festivals in their own unique way too. Every few kilometres, the dialect, food and culture change.

When we organised the World Culture Festival in Delhi, nearly 40,000 artists shared one stage. People from every part of India came to display their art, and the world was shocked to see it. One-third of the world's population was connected to that festival in some way, across seven lakh locations. This is why India's cultural diversity cannot be replicated anywhere else on earth.



And similarly, our cuisine is so diverse. When we organised the Annam Brahman festival, fifty-six thousand different dishes were prepared, from Tripura to Kerala, dishes most of us have never even heard of. Ask for Putharekulu in Hyderabad, and you will get a sweet dish tucked inside rice wafers as thin as paper. In Maharashtra we call it Anarasa. Ask for Mandapeta, and they will send you to Orissa. There, ask for Channa Poda, and you'll get a sweet found nowhere else. When we visited the tribal belt, we were served a meal of 108 different dishes. This cuisine has never been given the platform it deserves. Abroad, the world knows only the samosa and gulab jamun, when we have a treasure trove here.

Our garments and jewellery have the same richness. Every piece has its own name, its own form, its own beauty and a story from the region it comes from. In every state, there are different kinds of necklaces — one close to the neck, another long, each with its own charm. The same is true of our garments. Every state has its own colours and styles.

This diversity is a very special gift of our country. But today, we are slowly forgetting it. Instead of appreciating what is our own, we are simply imitating what has been created somewhere else.

And then there is tourism. Greece is a small country, yet twelve million tourists visit it every year to see pillars and old temples. India has ancient sites, monuments rich in history and architecture, and knowledge we are not taking full advantage of. If you go to Switzerland,

you cannot go to the beach; you can only go skiing. But if you go to Spain, you can go to the beach, but you cannot go skiing. In India, you have all the possibilities. We have beaches, and we have ski slopes in the same country, a possibility very few nations on earth have. But we need to improve our infrastructure, our connectivity, our facilities, because these are what hold us back.

This is the India our youth must fall in love with, not a borrowed idea of glamour from somewhere else, but the depth that already belongs to them.

Which brings me back to why so many of our young people are being drawn away from this richness and towards addiction. For those who have not yet gone towards drugs, we must create a barrier in their minds. When they see the condition of those who have been caught in addiction-unable to sit, unable to get up, unable to see properly-they understand where this path leads. A barrier forms in the mind. And for those who have already gone there, we will not reject them. We will bring them back with love and care.

There are two extremes seen in our young people today. One is that they consider this act of taking drugs as heroic, and it fills them with false pride. On the other hand, getting addicted to drugs has stigma attached to it that affects them and their self-esteem begins to shrink. Both groups are suffering. If we are to help them, we have to encourage society to embrace those who are struggling rather than keep them at a distance. Those who are taking drugs are still our own. When we create a sense of belonging, people stop falling into guilt and self-pity.

The secret in overcoming the addiction and need for a high really lies in something every one of us already possesses and rarely uses- our own breath. A few minutes of pranayama and a little meditation can bring a sea of change to a young person's mind, fill them up with energy, enthusiasm and love. It does not take much effort, only willingness.

My dream has always been a society free from violence, a body free from disease, a mind free from confusion, an intellect free from inhibition, and a soul free from sorrow. This is the birthright of everybody. I would like to see a smile on everyone's face.

We are all of the same light, the same consciousness. If we are united with that consciousness, then we do not feel like strangers; we feel like family. This is what each youth needs to know today: that they are not alone; they are part of this big family, this one consciousness. And there is no lack, no lack of anything in life.