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US devastates Iran's nuclear sites

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tel Aviv

The United States inserted itself into Israel's war against Iran by dropping 30,000-pound bombs on a uranium enrichment site early Sunday, raising urgent questions about what remains of Tehran's nuclear programme and how its weakened military might respond.

Iran lashed out at the US for crossing "a very big red line" with its risky gambit to launch strikes on three Iranian nuclear sites with missiles and the bunker-buster bombs.

"The warmongering and lawless administration in Washington is solely and fully responsible for the dangerous consequences and far-reaching implications of its act of aggression," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said, adding that he would immediately fly to Moscow to coordinate positions with close ally Russia.

Amid fears of a wider regional conflict, the Trump administration sent a clear message that it wanted to restart diplomatic talks with Iran. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth told reporters that the US "does not seek war" with Iran. But Tehran said the time for diplomacy had passed and that it had the right to defend itself.

President Donald Trump earlier warned there would be additional strikes if Tehran retaliated against US forces. "There will either be peace or there will be tragedy for Iran," said Trump, who acted without congressional authorisation.

The Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran confirmed that attacks took place on the Fordo and Natanz enrichment facilities as well as the Isfahan nuclear site. Both Iran and the UN nuclear watchdog said there were no immediate signs of radioactive contamination around the sites.

Trump claimed the US "completely and fully obliterated" the sites, but the Pentagon reported "sustained, extremely severe damage and destruction." US defence officials said an assessment was ongoing.

With the attack, the United States has inserted itself into a war it spent decades trying to avoid. Success could mean ending Iran's nuclear ambitions and eliminating the last significant State threat to the security of Israel, its close ally. Failure — or overreach — could plunge the US into another long and unpredictable conflict in the Middle East.

For Iran's supreme leader, it could mark the end of an ambitious campaign to transform the Islamic Republic into a greater regional power that holds enriched nuclear material a step away from weapons-grade.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei last spoke publicly on Wednesday, warning the US that strikes targeting the Islamic Republic will "result in irreparable damage for them."

Iran, battered by Israel's largest-ever assault on it that began on June 13, has a few ways it could retaliate. It could launch a wave of attacks on US forces stationed in the Middle East with the missiles and rockets that Israel hasn't destroyed. It could attempt to close a key bottleneck for global oil supplies, the Strait of Hormuz between it and the United Arab Emirates.

Screenshot from BBC video of Iranian nuclear facility bombing by US

IRAN SHUTS HORMUZ STRAIT, IMPACTS OIL TRADE

Iran retaliates to US, strikes Israel

Aviv: Hours after the US struck three Iranian nuclear sites; Iran launched more than 40 missiles toward Israel on Sunday, wounding 23 people and destroying apartment buildings and homes in three cities.

At an impact site in Tel Aviv, the blast had sheared off the face of a multi-storey residential building and damaged several others — including a nursing home — in a radius of hundreds of metres. But few people were wounded, as many residents had been evacuated and others made it to bomb shelters.

Later in the evening, Iran's Parliament has approved a measure to close the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic global oil choke point, following the US's strikes on the Islamic Republic's three nuclear sites, State-run media reported on Sunday. The vote, described as symbolic but politically significant, reflects growing pressure on the Iranian leadership to retaliate after what officials in Tehran labelled a "blatant act of aggression" by the United States and its allies.

Deputy Mayor Haim Goren, who assisted at the scene, said it was nevertheless "miraculous" that more people were not hurt. Relatives and health aides helped residents - many with wheelchairs or walkers - to leave the nursing home, where windows were blown out up to the top on the 11th floor.

"It's like a typhoon came through my apartment," said Ofer Berger, who lives near the impact site on the seventh floor of a high-rise. "All of the apartments in this area are destroyed," he said.

Emergency services said one person was moderately wounded by shrapnel in Sunday's missile barrage while dozens of others were injured.

Berger said he hoped the war with Iran would end soon. "Most of the tit-for-tat strikes like this end with a lot of tears," he said.

Residents sat with their pets and suitcases outside the damaged buildings. One person sat next to a shopping cart filled with Buddha statues and a child's bicycle.

Families gathered what they could and stepped gingerly around piles of glass and twisted metal. Dozens of volunteers from an organisation called "One Heart" showed up to help residents salvage their belongings. Strikes have displaced more than 9,000 people from their homes since the start of the war, according to

Or it could hurry to develop a nuclear weapon with what remains of its program.

The Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran insisted that its nuclear program will not be stopped.

In concluding his briefing, the US Defence Chief attempted to once again reiterate unwillingness for America's intervention in Iran to turn into a protracted war and labelled the overnight strikes as "intentionally limited."

"I would just say, as the president has directed and made clear, this is most certainly not open-ended," Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said, adding that it doesn't limit US ability to respond and it will do so if necessary. "The most powerful military in the world is postured and prepared to defend our people," Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said.

Related Report on >> P8, P10

Modi urges Iran for dialogue, diplomacy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday conveyed to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian India's "deep concern" over Iran's conflict with Israel and called for immediate de-escalation of the situation through "dialogue and diplomacy".

The phone conversation between Modi and Pezeshkian came hours after the US bombed three major nuclear sites — Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan — in Iran, bringing itself into the Israel-Iran conflict.

In a social media post, Modi said he expressed "deep concern" at the recent escalations and that dialogue and diplomacy is the way forward for the early restoration of regional peace. "We discussed in detail about the current situation. Expressed deep concern at the recent escalations," Modi said.

"Reiterated our call for immediate de-escalation, dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward and for early restoration of regional peace, security and stability," the Prime Minister added.

The US attack on the Iranian nuclear facilities has triggered fears of a wider regional conflict, with many leading countries and blocs calling for restraint.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the US has committed a "grave violation" of the UN Charter, international law and the nuclear non-proliferation treaty by attacking Iran's "peaceful nuclear installations". The Iranian Foreign Minister said he is travelling to Moscow to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"The events this morning are outrageous and will have everlasting consequences. Each and every member of the UN must be alarmed over this extremely dangerous, lawless and criminal behaviour," he said. Iran reserves all options to defend its sovereignty, he said in a statement.

> **Reiterated our call for immediate de-escalation, dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward and for early restoration of regional peace, security and stability**
> — NARENDRA MODI, PM

On its part, Russia strongly condemned the "irresponsible" US strikes on the Iranian nuclear facilities and said it "grossly" violated international law, the UN Charter and UNSC resolutions.

China too strongly condemned the US bombing of the nuclear facilities, saying the actions "seriously" violated the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and international law and have "exacerbated tensions" in the Middle-East.

"China calls on the parties to the conflict, Israel in particular, to reach a ceasefire as soon as possible, ensure the safety of civilians and start dialogue and negotiation," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said. The 27-nation EU urged all sides to step back.

The ByStander

PIONEER IN SHORT

311 Indian nationals evacuated from Iran

India on Sunday evacuated more than 300 Indian nationals from Iran amid the escalating tensions between the Persian Gulf nation and Israel following the US bombing of three Iranian nuclear sites. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said 311 Indians landed in Delhi on a special flight from the Iranian city of Mashhad. With the fresh batch of evacuees, the total number of those brought back from Iran now stands at 1,428. Three-hundred eleven Indian nationals arrived in New Delhi on a special flight from Mashhad at 1630 hours on June 22, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

He said a total of 1,428 Indian nationals have been evacuated from Iran so far. India launched Operation Sindhu last week to bring back Indians from Iran and Israel in view of increasing hostilities between the two nations.

FULL REPORT ON P4

Nitish shares design of 'Janki Mandir'

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday shared the final design of the "Janki Mandir" which will be constructed at Punauradham, a Hindu pilgrimage site in Sitamarhi district that is considered the birthplace of goddess Sita.

The Government has also constituted a trust to expedite the ongoing redevelopment works of the 'Punaura Dham Janki Mandir'.

In a post on X on Sunday, the CM said, "I am very happy to inform you that the design of the grand temple and other structures for the redevelopment of Jagat Janani Maa Janaki's birthplace Punauradham, Sitamarhi is now ready. A trust has also been formed for this so that the construction work can be expedited." The Chief Minister posted several images of the proposed temple.

FULL REPORT ON P5

DGCA revise guidelines to prioritise safety

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

In the backdrop of recent helicopter accidents in Kedarnath region killing all seven on board, including a two-year-old child and an IndiGo flight enroute to Srinagar encountering severe turbulence, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has revised its operational guidelines to prioritise safety over schedule adherence during adverse weather, urging pilots to divert flights as necessary in unpredictable conditions.

These updates, specified in an operations circular for both scheduled and non-scheduled operators, emphasise cross-checking visual cues with instruments to ensure accurate approaches and landings, particularly during night operations or on wet runways.

IndiGo Delhi-Srinagar flight (6E 2142) of May 21, 2025, which had had encountered a hailstorm enroute and then it had landed safely at Srinagar after declaring an emergency with its radome (nose cone) damaged.

The circular also comes against the backdrop of recent helicopter accidents in Kedarnath region and an IndiGo flight enroute to Srinagar encountering severe turbulence last month.

Citing the growing impact of climate change on operational unpredictability, DGCA has advised flight crew to maintain heightened vigilance, "with an emphasis on safety taking precedence over schedule adherence".

> **These updates emphasise to ensure accurate approaches and landings, particularly during night operations or on wet runways**

"Captains are encouraged to initiate diversions or air-turnbacks, as required by prevailing conditions," the DGCA said in a statement on Sunday.

The circular outlines conditions under which flight crew are expected to consider diversion, return, or rerouting due to adverse weather, including severe turbulence, wind shear, icing, obstructive thunderstorms, or sudden visibility deterioration.

NIA arrests two Pahalgam residents

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

In a significant development in the investigation into the 'horrific' Pahalgam terror attack, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested two Pahalgam-based residents for harbouring the terrorists before the attack.

The NIA has also confirmed that the three terrorists who carried out the brutal massacre, which claimed 26 lives and left 16 others grievously injured, were Pakistani nationals and cadres of the proscribed Pakistan-based terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

The duo arrested by the NIA has been identified as Parvaiz Ahmad Jothar of Batkote, Pahalgam and Bashir Ahmad Jothar of Hill Park, Pahalgam. The arrests, made under Section 19 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, mark the first significant breakthrough in the case, coming exactly two months after the attack.

According to local reports, both the arrested men were staying with their families and working as pony wallahs during peak tourist season to earn a livelihood. 26-year-old Parvaiz and 33-year-old Bashir Ahmad used to escort tourists on ponies hired from others during the peak season. Sleuths of the National Investigation Agency zeroed in on these men based on initial leads about the possible involvement of locals in the area.

According to an official NIA statement, Parvaiz and Bashir knowingly harboured the three LeT terrorists in a seasonal hut (*dhok*) in the Hill Park area of Pahalgam before the assault. They provided food, shelter and logistical support to the terrorists, who selectively killed tourists based on their religious identity, making it one of the most gruesome terrorist attacks ever."

During interrogation, the arrested individuals confirmed that the attackers were Pakistani nationals and revealed their identities, marking a breakthrough in the case registered as RC-02/2025/NIA/JMU.

Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and President of the National Conference Farooq Abdullah welcomed the arrests, stating, "Now we will find out who they [the terrorists] were and where they came from."

The NIA took over the investigation from the Jammu and Kashmir police on April 27, 2025, following orders from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Since then, the agency has questioned over 2,000 individuals, detained more than 150, and conducted extensive searches across Kashmir, including Shopian, Kulgam, Pulwama, Sopore and Kupwara. Forensic evidence, including over 40 cartridges recovered from the scene and satellite phone activity in Baisaran Valley, further corroborates Pakistan's involvement in the deadly attack.

Sketches of three suspects were released on April 24, with a ₹20 lakh bounty offered for information leading to their capture. Currently, the NIA is actively pursuing leads to locate the three absconding terrorists, believed to be either hiding in Kashmir or having fled to Pakistan.

In the absence of their whereabouts, it is suspected that they may be using encrypted communication devices to evade detection. Meanwhile, the NIA is expected to produce the accused before a special court in Jammu.

No monsoon reprieve for Naxals: Amit Shah

Union Home Minister Amit Shah with Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai during foundation stone laying of the NFSU campus and a Central Forensic Science Lab in Nava Raipur, Chhattisgarh PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Raipur

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said Naxalites won't get rest during monsoon as operations against them will continue during rains, even as he ruled out talks and appealed to the ultras to lay down arms and join the journey of development. Since January last year, more than 400 Maoist ultras have been gunned down by security forces in separate encounters in the State, the most notable being the killing of Nambala Keshav Rao alias Basavaraju (70), the general secretary and top most operative of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist), in Bastar on May 21.

"Every time during monsoon, Naxalites used to get rest (as swollen rivers hamper anti-Naxal operations inside dense forest).

But this time, we will not let them sleep during monsoon and we will move further to achieve the target of 31/3 (2026 to eliminate Naxalism)", Shah said.

He appealed to Naxals to surrender, join the journey of development and avail of the benefits of a "lucrative" surrender policy. No need for talks.

England cancel out India's first innings lead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Leeds

KL Rahul drove his way to a sublime 47 after England negated India's advantage by totalling 465 in their first innings as the visitors had another ordinary day in the field on day three of the first Test here on Sunday.

India dropped as many as five catches and barring Jasprit Bumrah, the effort from the pacers left a lot to be desired, allowing England to even out the game after the Shubman Gill-led side posted 471 in its first essay.

At stumps, India reached 90 for two with Rahul (47 batting off 75) and Shubman Gill (6 batting off 10).

Brydon Carse had Yashavi Jaiswal (4 off 11) caught behind with a ball that seamed away while Ben Stokes got rid of debutant Sai Sudharsan (30 off 48) for the second time in the game, the southpaw's flick falling into the hands of Zak Crawley at mid-wicket.Rahul was a delight to watch as he majority of his seven fours came via the cove driver off the fast bowlers. He did not look any discomfort whatsoever despite the ball doing a bit in overcast conditions.

Stumps were drawn when rain arrived at Headingley with India leading by 96 runs.

In an extended afternoon session, Harry Brook ran out of luck on 99 before Jasprit Bumrah completed a well deserved five wicket haul to ensure a slender six run first innings lead for India.

Before Bumrah castled Josh Tongue to end England innings, Chris Woakes (38 off 55) punished a predictable Indian pace attack to take his team close to India's 471.

Hosts continued to find the boundaries at will as they collected 138 runs in 23.4 overs in the afternoon session with the loss of five wickets.

Prasidh Krishna removed Jamie Smith (40 off 52) and Brook (99 off 112) with the short ball but leaked too many runs at the same time with his one dimensional tactic, conceding 128 runs in 20 overs.

India's captain Shubman Gill appealing to the umpire during day three of the first cricket test match between England and India at Headingley in Leeds, England on Sunday PTI

Two more arrested in Raja Raghuvanshi murder case

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

File Photo

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Meghalaya Police has arrested two more persons from Madhya Pradesh in connection with the sensational murder of Indore-based transport businessman Raja Raghuvanshi, bringing the total number of arrests in the case to seven.

Raghuvanshi, who went missing during a honeymoon trip to Meghalaya in late May, was found brutally murdered in a gorge near the Weisawdong Falls in Sohra (Cherrapunji) on June 2.

The 32-year-old was allegedly killed by three men on May 23 with machetes near a secluded parking lot in the East Khasi Hills district. His wife, Sonam Raghuvanshi, is accused of conspiring in the murder along with her alleged lover Raj Kushwaha and his associates.

On Saturday evening, Meghalaya Police arrested Silome James, a property dealer from Indore, at Bhonrasa toll plaza in Dewas district as he attempted to flee to Bhopal. James, who runs a property management firm, had leased a flat in Heera Bagh Colony, Indore, where Sonam stayed after returning from Meghalaya and allegedly concealed a box containing jewellery, documents, and possibly a firearm.

Later that night, around 2 am on Sunday, the SIT apprehended Balla Ahirwar, a security guard posted at the same property, from his native village in Ashok Nagar district.

The Pioneer

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CM makes emergency landing as MP weather turns rough

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

The southwest monsoon has swept through Madhya Pradesh with unusual speed and intensity, drenching the entire state within just five days of its onset. After entering the state on June 13–14—only a day behind its usual date—the monsoon quickly covered all 55 districts, bringing widespread rainfall, cooling temperatures, and triggering a series of rain-related incidents.

On Sunday alone, more than 22 districts reported significant rainfall, with Tikamgarh receiving the highest at 2 inches in just nine hours. Mandla recorded 1.5 inches, followed by Narmadapuram (1.4 inches) and Gwalior (1 inch). Bhopal experienced steady rainfall throughout the day, which eased by evening, while heavy showers also lashed Ratlam, Betul, Dhar, Indore, Shivpuri, Ujjain, Chhindwara, and Balaghat's Malajkhand region.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast continued heavy rainfall through June 24, with temperatures expected to hover between 23°C and 27°C. While a brief pause in the downpour is anticipated, another intense spell is likely from June 24 onward, prompting officials to remain on high alert for potential disruptions.

The quick advancement of the monsoon comes after an initial delay. Despite entering India eight days early, the monsoon stalled at the Maharashtra-Chhattisgarh border for 15 days before entering Madhya Pradesh. Within three days, it had

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav's helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing at the Pipariya helipad on Sunday

spread to 53 districts, and by June 21, it had completed its progression with Bhind and Mauganj being the last to receive rainfall—an acceleration in stark contrast to last year's June 21 arrival.

The heavy rains have caused structural damages in several areas. In Ujjain, a portion of the plaster ceiling collapsed in the tunnel connecting Palki Hall to the Ambulance Gate of the Shri Mahakaleshwar Temple around 8 am Sunday. Constructed under the Temple Expansion Scheme for emergency access, the tunnel had been leaking for days. Fortunately, no injuries were reported as visitors were being evacuated through the tunnel at the time. Temple authorities have initiated an investigation and are expected to conduct a full structural assessment.

A similar incident occurred in the Garoth area of Mandsaur district, where water seepage caused the plaster ceiling of a police station to fall. No casualties were reported.

The agriculture sector, meanwhile, is viewing the rains as a boon. With soil moisture improving significantly, farmers have been advised to begin sowing operations. Vidisha district recorded an average of 16.1 mm rainfall, with some pockets receiving up to 40 mm, greatly benefiting agricultural planning.

In a related development underscoring the severity of the weather, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav's helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing at the Pipariya helipad on Sunday afternoon due to inclement weather. The chief minister and his family were en route to the Pachmarhi hill station when heavy rain made further air travel unsafe. They completed the journey by road and later returned to Bhopal in the evening.

The rapid onset of the monsoon and its immediate impact across multiple sectors—transport, infrastructure, and agriculture—highlight the urgent need for improved monsoon preparedness and resilient systems to manage extreme weather events. Authorities continue to monitor the situation closely as more rain is expected in the coming days.

Pedestrians brave the rain as they walk along a road in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

CM highlights water conservation efforts, announces awards

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav emphasized the crucial role of water conservation in securing a prosperous future, asserting that "water is the key to a bright and prosperous future." He stressed that through collaborative efforts between the government and society, and with active public participation, the Jal Ganga Sanvardhan Abhiyan (Water Ganga Conservation Campaign) has evolved into a widespread people's movement. Dr. Yadav's remarks came during a review of water conservation initiatives under the campaign, which was held at the Chief Minister's residence.

The Chief Minister further announced that districts showcasing exceptional performance in water conservation and management would be graded, with the top three districts set to be publicly declared and honoured. The names of these top districts will be revealed on June 30, during the closing ceremony of the campaign, which will coincide with the Watershed Conference scheduled in Khandwa. The event is expected to be attended by Union Minister of Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, and Labour Prahlad Singh Patel, Water Resources Minister Tulsiram Silawat, Minister of State for Panchayat and Rural Development Radha Singh, along with local MPs, MLAs, and senior officers from the Government of India.

Dr. Yadav emphasized that the ongoing success of the water conservation efforts under the Jal Ganga Sanvardhan Abhiyan should inspire all districts across the state to expand similar initiatives. He specifically mentioned the inclusion of historical water sources such as Bawankund in Ujjain and Kundi Bhandara, also known as 'Khooni Bhandara', in Burhanpur. He directed that these ancient water structures and heritage assets be restored and adapted to meet the modern-day needs of water conservation.

In another key announcement, Dr. Yadav revealed that the state government will undertake tree plantation along the Narmada Parikrama Path, with more than 224 identified rest spots set to be developed. This initiative aims to enhance the pilgrimage route, making it more convenient, pleasant, and attractive for both devotees and travelers. The move is expected to significantly improve the experience of pilgrims, while also contributing to environmental sustainability along the revered Narmada River.

During the meeting, Principal Secretary for Rural Development, Deepali Rastogi, briefed attendees on the major activities carried out under the campaign. She shared that the Jan Abhiyan Parishad has played a crucial role, engaging over 40 lakh people in water collection, conservation, and promotion activities. The Parishad has been instrumental in mobilizing public participation at the village and panchayat levels, with district administrations providing support.

Dr. Yadav congratulated the Jan Abhiyan Parishad for its proactive involvement, acknowledging the significant role the organization has played in promoting water conservation.

Rare and complex Bentall Surgery performed at AIIMS

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

The Department of Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgery (CTVS) at AIIMS Bhopal has successfully performed a highly complex and life-saving Bentall procedure on a 44-year-old male patient from Sehore district. The patient had been suffering from persistent chest pain and palpitations for six months, and medical investigations revealed a dangerously enlarged Aortic Aneurysm measuring 8–10 cm along with severe leakage in the aortic valve.

Despite consulting multiple hospitals, the patient and his family found no viable solution until they approached AIIMS Bhopal. After a thorough evaluation by the CTVS team, it was determined that the patient required an urgent Bentall surgery—a procedure involving the replacement of both the aorta and the aortic valve with artificial grafts.

The complexity of the case was further heightened by the patient's rare B-negative blood group, which posed additional challenges for intraoperative management.

The surgical team, comprising Dr. Yogesh K. Niwaria, Dr. M. Kishan, Dr. Surendra Singh Yadav, Dr. Rahul Sharma, Dr. Vikram Watti, and Dr. Aditya Sirohi, carried out the high-risk surgery with exceptional precision. The damaged section of the aorta and the leaking valve were successfully removed and replaced. Remarkably, the surgery was completed without the need for a blood transfusion, despite the patient's rare blood type—a testament to the surgical expertise and meticulous planning of the team.

Following the procedure, the patient was transferred to the ICU, where he is recovering steadily and showing consistent signs of improvement. Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal, Prof. (Dr.) Ajai Singh, lauded the team's achievement, stating, "This case is a shining example of AIIMS Bhopal's clinical excellence. Performing such a complex surgery on a patient with a rare blood group, without requiring blood transfusion, demonstrates our capability and commitment to delivering world-class healthcare services to the people of Madhya Pradesh."

He further emphasized that the entire treatment was provided free of cost under the Ayushman Bharat scheme. "Earlier, patients from Madhya Pradesh requiring such advanced procedures had to travel to high-end centers outside the state. Today, AIIMS Bhopal offers this expertise locally, marking a proud milestone in our institution's journey," Dr. Singh added.

17-year-old dies in high-speed crash on Airport Road

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A 17-year-old youth, Danish Zaheer Khan, died in a tragic road accident on Bhopal's Airport Road on Sunday, once again exposing the city's fragile traffic enforcement during high-mobility weekends. Danish, a resident of Housing Board Colony in Karond, was driving a Scorpio SUV when the vehicle lost control around 1 pm near Data Colony. The high-speed car climbed the road divider, overturned, and collided with a loading auto coming from the opposite direction.

Danish died on the spot, while two of his friends, whose identities remain unconfirmed, were critically injured and rushed to Hamidia Hospital. The auto driver also sustained injuries in the crash. According to Kohefiza police station in-charge KG Shukla, the group had been returning from a dhaba on Parwaliya Road when the accident occurred near Gulmohar Garden. The SUV struck cement pots placed on the divider before flipping over and hitting the oncoming vehicle. Emergency teams took nearly an hour to extricate the injured by cutting open the car.

Police have launched an investigation into how Danish, a minor, gained access to the vehicle. Officials are also examining the vehicle's registration and ownership. The incident has intensified scrutiny on Bhopal's traffic management, particularly regarding underage and high-speed driving. As the city continues to witness an alarming rise in fatal weekend accidents, the lack of adequate traffic enforcement remains a growing concern.

Artistes perform a dance drama 'Prane Jalam', choreographed by Padmashri Geeta Chandran during a six-day ongoing cultural programme 'Sadaneera' under Jal Ganga Samvardhan Campaign at Bharat Bhawan in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

Woman and two children abducted at gunpoint

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

In a chilling incident that has shocked residents of Sumeri village under Lavkushnagar police station of Chhatarpur district, a woman and her two young children were forcibly abducted at gunpoint in broad daylight on Saturday afternoon by a group of armed men.

According to police, the abduction was orchestrated by Sanjay Singh Rajput, son of notorious former dacoit Panchu Lodhi. Sanjay, accompanied by nearly a dozen armed accomplices, stormed the village wielding firearms and sticks. The group allegedly opened fire before forcibly dragging 26-year-old Mithlesh Prajapati, her 4-year-old son Sarthak, and 5-year-old daughter Bhumi into a waiting vehicle.

The victim's husband, Hariram Prajapati, who attempted to intervene, was brutally assaulted by the assailants. He sustained serious injuries and is currently undergoing treatment at the district hospital. "Sanjay had been stalking my wife. He was loitering outside our house the previous day. When I confronted him, he threatened me. Now he's taken her away," Hariram said, recounting the harrowing incident.

A disturbing video of the kidnapping, reportedly filmed by a bystander, shows Sanjay dragging the woman against her will as his associates brandish weapons and threaten local villagers. The children are seen being forcibly pushed into the vehicle.

Lavkushnagar Sub-Divisional Officer of Police (SDOP) Naveen Dubey confirmed that police have seized a Bolero SUV and a motorcycle believed to be used in the crime. Two suspects were initially detained, and later, three more were arrested as part of the expanding investigation. Search operations are underway at over 25 locations across the region to apprehend the remaining accused.

Chhatarpur Superintendent of Police Agam Jain has announced a reward of Rs 10,000 for information leading to the arrest of the main accused, Sanjay Singh Rajput. Five dedicated police teams have been constituted to trace the abducted woman and her children and bring the perpetrators to justice.

A case has been registered under multiple sections of the Indian Penal Code, including kidnapping and criminal assault, along with relevant provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

Officials said that the search is progressing swiftly and expressed confidence that the abducted victims will be recovered soon. The incident has sparked fear and outrage in the village, as residents demand swift justice and enhanced security in the area.

Cong to hold daylong fast on June 25 in support of Ambedkar's statue

PNS ■ Gwalior

Madhya Pradesh Congress Media Department Chairman Mukesh Nayak reaffirmed the party's commitment to constitutional values and announced a one-day fast on June 25 at Surya Namaskar Tiraha in Gwalior in support of installing a statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution.

Nayak was talking to media persons here on Sunday.

Senior Congress leaders, including Madhya Pradesh in-charge Harish Chaudhary and State Congress President Jitu Patwari, along with many party workers and leaders, are expected to participate in the fast.

Speaking to the media, Nayak stated unequivocally, "The statue of Dr. Ambedkar, who gave this nation its Constitution, should be installed within the Gwalior High Court premises. Any opposition to this is unacceptable. We strongly condemn attempts to turn this issue into a caste-based conflict."

He further emphasized, "The Congress party's stance is clear—we do not support casteism, nor are we against any specific caste. We stand firmly with the Constitution, its makers, and the principles of social justice."

Nayak added that any ideology that is not universal and timeless cannot sustain itself in this country. Through the fast, the Congress aims to send a strong message across the state and the nation that nothing is more important than the Constitution and social harmony.

The press conference was attended by several Congress leaders including City District Congress Committee President Dr. Devendra Sharma, Rural Congress President Prabhu Dayal Johare, State Congress Spokesperson Praveen Dhaulpure, Dharmendra Sharma, R.P. Singh, Ram Pandey, Rahul Raj, Ambika Sharma, Priyanka Sharma, Jayaraj Chauhan (President, Sanitation Workers Cell), City Congress Working President Maharaj Singh Patel, and City Congress Spokesperson Piyush Jain, among others.

8 Indore liquor shops fined Rs 20.82 Lakh

PNS ■ Indore

Conducting a region-wide check, the Excise Department fined eight liquor shops in Indore, recovering a total of Rs 20.82 lakh for violationd of pricing norms on alcohol sales.

The department found 18 outlets selling liquor either above the maximum retail price or below the minimum support price. All were issued notices, and their cases were presented to Collector Ashish Singh. Eight of these cases have now been resolved, with penalties imposed and updated on the e-Excise portal by Assistant Excise Commissioner Abhishek Tiwari. The remaining cases are under process.

Fines were imposed on shops at Palasia No. 2 (Rs 3,20,937), Lasudiya Godam No. 2 (Rs 6,42,696), Bengali Chouraha No. 1 (Rs 7,23,943), Girota (Rs 58,951), Machhi Bazaar (Rs 1,08,035), Sanyogitaganj (Rs 1,26,271), Borsi (Rs 61,929), and Todi (Rs 39,553).

The department emphasised that all liquor shops are required to display price lists and QR codes, enabling customers to verify the permissible price range of each liquor brand and label.

Madhav College celebrates International Yoga Day

PNS ■ Ujjain

Madhav College, a Prime Minister College of Excellence, celebrated International Yoga Day with a special "Yoga Sangam" program on its campus, emphasizing both physical well-being and environmental consciousness through its unique 'Green Yoga' initiative.

Speaking at the event, Principal Prof. Kalpana Virendra Singh highlighted the unifying power of yoga, stating, "Yoga binds us together in a unified thread. A healthy mind resides only in a healthy body. For better health, we must also consume locally grown vegetables." She announced that as part of the Green Yoga campaign, multiple saplings would be planted on the campus, with the goal of transforming Madhav College into a green and eco-friendly institution.

The yoga session was led by Yogacharya Dr. Simmi Saxena, who was honored with the Saraswat Samman for her significant contributions to yoga and wellness.

The program began with a live broadcast of the state-level Yoga Day event held in Bhopal, attended by Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, followed by a telecast of the national celebration from Visakhapatnam, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation.

The program was skillfully conducted by Dr. Zafar Mehmood, while the vote of thanks was presented by event coordinator Dr. Mamta Pawar.

The event saw enthusiastic participation from faculty and students alike. Notable attendees included Rajeev Saxena, Meeta Solanki, Mayuri Shivhare, Dr. B.S. Akhand, Dr. Neelima Verma, Dr. Keshav Mani Sharma, Prof. Ayushi Suryavanshi, Dr. Nalini Tilkar, Prof. Chintamani Suryavanshi, Dr. Rafiq Nagauri, Dr. Pramod Malviya, Dr. Sunil Suryavanshi, Dr. Dinesh Verma, Dr. Ganesh Rathore, among others. The celebration not only promoted the importance of yoga for mental and physical health but also underscored the college's commitment to environmental sustainability.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and his wife Seema Yadav distribute mangoes to children on their way to Pachmarhi, at Bariam village, Narmadapuram district of Madhya Pradesh on Sunday. Pioneer photo

25 junked vehicles seized from MP Nagar

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

In a major clean-up drive on Sunday, the Bhopal Municipal Corporation seized 25 junked vehicles and demolished unauthorised sheds from MP Nagar Zone 1 and 2.

The enforcement was carried out in coordination with district administration officials and police, targeting encroachments on roads, footpaths, corridors and public areas that were obstructing vehicular movement.

Acting on Commissioner Harendra Narayan's directions, anti-encroachment teams used cranes and dumpers to remove the vehicles, which were later parked at TT Nagar Dussehra Ground. Incidentally, the BMC had recently removed dozens of derelict vehicles from this neighbourhood.

Alongside the vehicle seizure, illegally erected tin sheds and temporary roofs were razed using JCB machines in various places in MP Nagar, the mainstay commercial district in?tbf state capital. Senior officials from the SDM office, Tehsildar, the municipal corporation and district administration were present during the day-long operation.

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Union Health Ministry probes procurement of medicines at AIIMS

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A team of officials from the Union Health Ministry visited AIIMS Bhopal on Thursday to investigate allegations of irregularities in the procurement of medicines at inflated prices.
The probe follows serious accusations raised by Bhopal MP Alok Sharma, who alleged that the institute has been bypassing central procurement norms and directly purchasing medicines at significantly higher rates compared to other AIIMS facilities across the country.
The visiting officials arrived at the AIIMS campus early in the morning and spent several hours reviewing procurement-related documents and purchase records. They also held a detailed meeting with the Executive Director of the institute and other senior administrative and medical officers to understand the procedures being followed in the acquisition of drugs and medical supplies.
The controversy came into the spotlight after MP Alok Sharma, who is also a member of the AIIMS Standing Committee on Finance, raised the issue during a high-level meeting of the committee held in New Delhi on May 15. The meeting, chaired by Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava, included senior officials from AIIMS institutions across India. Sharma presented comparative data indicating stark discrepancies in medicine prices at AIIMS Bhopal.
According to Sharma, a cancer drug, Gemcitabine injection, was reportedly procured by AIIMS Bhopal at Rs 2,100 per unit. In contrast, AIIMS Raipur purchased the same injection for Rs 425, while AIIMS Delhi acquired it for just Rs 285. He alleged that similar disparities were observed in the prices of other essential medicines, raising concerns over transparency and financial prudence.
"During the COVID-19 pandemic, direct procurement was allowed as a special measure. But now that the crisis is over, the continued use of direct purchase methods without open tendering violates government procurement policies," Sharma stated. He further alleged that the cumulative value of such procurements at AIIMS Bhopal had reached several crores of rupees, without adherence to standard protocols.
Sources within the institute suggest that the Health Ministry team is examining whether there was any procedural deviation or intent of malpractice in the purchase decisions. The team is also reviewing whether AIIMS Bhopal ignored central guidelines mandating bulk procurement through Government e-Marketplace (GeM) or rate contracts negotiated by the Medical Store Organization (MSO) under the Health Ministry.
The issue has sparked fresh debate over transparency in the financial operations of AIIMS institutions, especially in the post-COVID period. While some officials argue that urgent medical requirements often demand faster procurement processes, others point out that the system is vulnerable to price manipulation if proper checks are not enforced.
AIIMS Bhopal, one of the premier tertiary care centers in central India, caters to a vast population from Madhya Pradesh and neighboring states. Allegations of inflated procurement not only raise questions about internal accountability but also affect public trust in the institution.
The Union Health Ministry is expected to submit its report after a detailed examination of the records and interactions with key personnel. If discrepancies are confirmed, corrective actions and accountability measures are likely to follow.
Meanwhile, MP Alok Sharma has reiterated his demand for a full audit of medicine purchases at AIIMS Bhopal and urged the Health Ministry to standardize procurement procedures across all AIIMS institutions to prevent such irregularities in the future.

Engineer-in-Chief of Public Works Department KPS Rana with officials inspects quality of Hamidia Road, in Bhopal on Sunday.

Madhya Pradesh High Court Justice Sanjeev S Kalgaonkar addresses a State-level workshop on Interoperable Criminal Justice System,(ICJS) organised by State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB), Police Headquarters, Bhopal, at Kushabhau Thackeray convention center in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

MP hosts India's first State-level workshop on ICJS integration

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh has become the first state in the country to host a state-level workshop on the Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS), bringing together senior officials from all five pillars of the justice system—police, courts, prosecution, jails, and forensics—on a single platform to advance digital integration.
The workshop, titled "ICJS Implementation and Digital Integration," was held at Kushabhau Thackeray Auditorium (Minto Hall) in Bhopal on Sunday. Organized by the State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB), Police Headquarters, Bhopal, the event marked a major step in modernizing and streamlining the criminal justice system through digital coordination.
Driven by regular reviews and policy direction from Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Chief Secretary Anurag Jain, and Director General of Police Kailash Makwana, the workshop was conducted under the leadership of Acting Chief Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva of the Madhya Pradesh High Court and DGP Kailash Makwana. The event was coordinated by ADG (SCRB) Jaideep Prasad and DIG Hemant Chauhan.
The workshop was inaugurated with a lamp-lighting ceremony by Chief Guest Justice Sanjeev S. Kalgaonkar, Judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court, and Special DGP Pawan Kumar Srivastava, along with other dignitaries. The primary objective was to enhance digital integration across justice delivery institutions, address implementation challenges, and establish a collaborative framework to improve the efficiency and accountability of the criminal justice process.
Justice Kalgaonkar lauded the efforts of all stakeholders involved in the ICJS initiative, acknowledging their commitment and performance despite resource limitations. He called for stronger inter-agency coordination to meet the evolving expectations of digital justice delivery.
Special DGP Pawan Kumar Srivastava highlighted the progress made by Madhya Pradesh Police in adopting ICJS tools and adapting to the new criminal laws. He underlined the importance of coordinated digital systems to ensure faster and more transparent justice.
Cyber law expert Dr. Nishith Dixit delivered a keynote lecture on the "Validity of Electronic Evidence in Courts," providing legal insights into handling digital documentation and evidence under the evolving judicial framework.
Key presentations included Uttar Pradesh DGP (Telecom) Ashutosh Pandey on "Digital Transformation in Prosecution Process," ADG Chanchal Shekhar on "Digitization in Police," and SP Dewas Puneet Gehlot sharing a ground-level perspective on the ICJS Pilot Project in Dewas. NIC experts Deepak Kumar and Kaushi Jan elaborated on digital integration strategies, while Health Commissioner Tarun Rathi discussed coordination between police and health services via the MedLeaPR system.
FSL Director Shashikant Shukla presented the capabilities of the newly introduced e-Forensic application. The workshop concluded with a group discussion, inviting practical suggestions and feedback from the participants

Reckless driving kills two in Gwalior, BJP Councillor's son held

PNS ■ Gwalior

In a tragic incident that has sparked widespread public anger, Harsh Rai (27), son of BJP councillor Rekha Chandan Rai, was arrested on Saturday for allegedly mowing down a woman and her daughter with his Thar SUV in the Badnapura area of Gwalior on Friday night. The victims, who were riding a motorcycle along with the woman's son, died on the spot. The boy survived with injuries and is undergoing treatment.
The accused was already absconding in an attempted murder case from April 2023 but had remained at large. He was arrested after police traced his mobile phone location, which contradicted his claim of being out of town during the time of the fatal crash.
A video that surfaced soon after the incident shows Harsh Rai and his friend, Harsh Kumar, performing dangerous stunts in a black Thar near Motijheel's Badnapura turn—the very spot where the accident occurred. In the footage, both are seen standing with doors open in the moving vehicle, while friends recorded the act. The video has added weight to allegations of reckless and negligent driving.
Local residents expressed outrage over the delayed police response, claiming that officers arrived at the scene nearly two hours after the incident. Senior Superintendent of Police Dharmveer Singh confirmed that the vehicle had been seized and that the accused misled authorities about his location. "We are taking strict action. The suspect claimed to be out of Gwalior, but his phone records placed him near the scene of the incident," Singh said.
Harsh Rai has a known history of criminal activity. In April 2023, he was booked in an attempted murder case after allegedly opening fire on his friend Ankesh following a heated altercation during a resort party. Despite a case being registered, he had been evading arrest for over a year.
The Rai family wields considerable political influence in the region. Harsh's mother, Rekha Rai, is a sitting BJP councillor from Ward-4 (Ghasmandi Rai Colony), while his father previously held the same position. The family is reportedly closely associated with Madhya Pradesh Energy Minister Pradyuman Tomar and Assembly Speaker Narendra Tomar. Rekha Rai declined to comment on the matter.
Police are now investigating whether Harsh was under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the crash. A medical examination is pending. The case has triggered fresh concerns over political interference and lapses in timely police action, especially in cases involving influential individuals.
Demands are growing for a fair and independent investigation to ensure accountability. Civil society groups and opposition leaders have criticized the delay in arresting a known offender, calling it a failure of law enforcement and a test of the administration's willingness to act without bias.

Action against private schools dodging fee disclosure

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Despite repeated instructions from the Madhya Pradesh government, around 8,000 private schools have failed to upload their fee structures for the upcoming academic session, prompting the Education Department to prepare penalty notices.
The move signals a shift from the official negligence that long enabled private school operators to ignore norms with impunity. These self-styled educators often operate with no accountability, altering syllabi arbitrarily and charging unjustified fees. Worse, students are frequently humiliated or barred from exams if they are unable to pay fees. These punitive actions leave lasting psychological scars and deepen inequality in access to education. Many parents, though aware of such practices, hesitate to raise complaints. Fearing retaliation from school managements or damage to their child's academic prospects, they often suffer in silence and comply with unjust demands.
To identify the violators, the Directorate of Public Instruction has asked the National Informatics Centre to provide data on schools that have not submitted their fee details. Once identified, these schools will face fines — Rs 5,000 for those with a Rs 1,000 registration fee, and Rs 25,000 for those charging Rs 5,000.
Under the Madhya Pradesh Private School (Fee and Related Matters Regulation) Act, 2020, schools must upload class-wise and category-wise fee structures for the 2025–26 session on the official portal.
However, schools charging less than Rs 25,000 annually have recently been exempted from this requirement. While meant to ease the burden on low-fee institutions, critics warn it may allow continued exploitation under the radar. Officials insist the fines are just the beginning of wider reforms aimed at holding private schools accountable and protecting students from arbitrary and harmful practices.

Madhya Pradesh to host major MSME event in Ratlam

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

The RISE 2025 Conclave, set to take place in Ratlam on June 27, is poised to usher in a new era for the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector in Madhya Pradesh. Held under the leadership of Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, the event underscores the state government's renewed focus on entrepreneurship, employment generation, and innovation.
During the conclave, the Chief Minister will perform bhoomi pujan and dedicate over 35 industrial infrastructure projects, clusters, and departmental buildings, collectively valued at more than Rs 350 crore. Additionally, foundation stones will be laid for 50 new industrial units with a proposed investment exceeding Rs 1,500 crore. These developments are expected to create substantial employment opportunities for the youth of the state.
Chief Minister Yadav will also distribute letters of intent and land allotments to 500 entrepreneurs and employment offer letters to 500 young job seekers. Under the Lokmata Devi Ahilyabai Training Programme, grants will be awarded to over 100 beneficiaries.

Crime Branch busts black magic extortion racket

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

The Bhopal Crime Branch has arrested three members of a gang involved in a shocking case of fraud, where a woman was duped of Rs 40 lakh by exploiting her fear of black magic and supernatural threats. The key accused, Ankit Singh, posed as a tantrik (occult practitioner) and manipulated the victim into believing that her family was under a deadly curse that could only be lifted through costly rituals.
According to police, Singh emotionally blackmailed the woman by convincing her that her parents and brother were in imminent danger of death from evil forces. Over time, he extorted Rs 20 lakh in cash and gold and silver jewellery worth another Rs 20 lakh under the pretense of performing exorcisms and supernatural rituals.
Acting on a written complaint lodged by the victim, the Crime Branch launched an investigation and arrested Ankit Singh from the Ashoka Garden area on Saturday night. During interrogation, Singh confessed to the crime and revealed that he had mortgaged the stolen jewellery through his landlord, Sunny Awasthi.
Following this confession, Awasthi was also arrested. He admitted to assisting Singh in mortgaging the jewellery at branches of IDFC First Bank and IIFL Gold Loan. Police recovered jewellery and mortgage receipts from the banks, along with additional valuables and documents seized during a raid at Awasthi's residence. The investigation further led to the arrest of Singh's maternal uncle, Mohit Singh, from Mandvi in Gujarat's Kutch district. Mohit confessed to receiving Rs 5.40 lakh in cash from Ankit and acknowledged receiving Rs 3.60 lakh via PhonePe in multiple transactions. Police have obtained digital evidence of these monetary transfers.
Two other accused—Ankit's brother, Asu Singh, and his roommate, Lucky Pandey—are still on the run, reportedly carrying a portion of the stolen money and jewellery. Police teams are conducting raids at various suspected hideouts to apprehend the absconding duo. Officials stated that the case highlights the continued exploitation of superstition for financial gain and urged citizens to report such fraudulent practices. Further investigations are ongoing.

Bhopal Mayor hosts screening of Sitaare Zameen Par

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

In a heartwarming gesture, Mayor Malti Rai on Sunday arranged a screening of Sitaare Zameen Par for 200 speech- and hearing-impaired children at Jyoti Cinema, joining them in the audience and sharing in their delight.
Directed by RS Prasanna, Sitaare Zameen Par stars Aamir Khan and Genelia D'Souza. A Hindi remake of the Spanish hit Champions, Sitaare Zameen Par tells the story of a disgraced basketball coach sentenced to community service, who is tasked with training a team of neurodivergent players. Initially resistant, the coach soon finds purpose and humility through the journey, which becomes life-changing for both him and the team.
Mayor Rai told the children they were "stars on the earth", observing how their radiant smiles and laughter lit up every corner of the cinema.
Volunteers called it a golden-toned morning and noted the palpable spirit of inclusion and joy.
The children, many from orphanages, along with social workers including Meeta Wadhwa and Dr Priya Bhave, expressed heartfelt thanks.
The event underscored the power of Sitaare Zameen Par as accessible cinema—capable of inspiring empathy, celebrating diversity and uniting communities.

Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla inspects Atal Park in Rewa during his morning visit and gave necessary instructions to the Municipal Commissioner regarding the arrangements. Municipal Commissioner Dr. Saurabh Sonawane and local residents were present on the occasion. Pioneer photo

Turns of phrase on every corner: Bent bridge regales Bhopalis

KISHAN SINGH RANA ■ Bhopal

It hasn't opened yet, but the Aishbagh Railway Overbridge (ROB) is already a hotspot in Bhopal—just not for the reasons engineers might have hoped.
On Sunday morning, it continued to draw a steady crowd of curious locals. Some walk past in silence, others pause to click photos or sip chai across the road, trading punchlines about the ROB's now-infamous 88-degree turn.
While traffic experts warn of safety risks, most residents have responded with dry wit and disbelief. Akash Mishra, a 24-year-old engineering student sipping tea near a chai stall, said, "That turn? It's not a curve, bro—it's an attitude problem.'"
Neha Verma, 21, a student from TT Nagar, added with mock solemnity, "If I ever take that route, play Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham in the background. At least let me exit in style."
Bhavna Thakur, a homemaker who had come for a morning walk, said, "That turn looks like it was inspired by a TikTok transition. Swipe left and crash."
Some Bhopalis are calling for disclaimers. Richa Tiwari, 35, a banker who stopped by with her son, remarked, "It should come with a warning board: 'Turn at your own risk. Life not included.'"
Robin Anthony, 33, a tourist from Indore taking selfies with his friends, quipped, "In Indore, we have poha and traffic. In Bhopal, you have poha and parachute landings. What a combo!"
Even those familiar with construction are baffled. Govind Ahirwar, a 40-year-old labourer from BHEL who has worked on road projects, stood staring at the curve. "I've helped build bridges. This one looks like the architect gave up and said, 'Jo hoga dekha jayega.'" ("We'll deal with whatever happens.")
Some memes have already gone viral. A reel by 17-year-old Kareem Ali, who was shooting videos with his friends, was being passed around on phones. Captioned "Me trying to make U-turns in life, but the bridge said—hold my concrete," it had gathered over a thousand shares. "Honestly, my school van uncle already drives like it's Formula One. This bridge completes the vibe," Kareem said.
But not everyone found it funny. Jitendra Sahu, 52, an auto-rickshaw driver waiting near the corner, said, "I showed it to my auto. It stalled. That was the engine's way of saying 'Mujhse naa ho payega.'" ("I can't do this.")
Jyoti Kashyap, 29, a software engineer out for a walk with her headphones on, chuckled while pointing to the bend. "ChatGPT would say 'Invalid route' looking at that turn. Honestly, I'd rather code my resignation than drive through that stunt."
Retired maths teacher Sanjeev Dubey, 67, walking with a stick and looking closely at the gradient, said, "That's not 88 degrees. That's a right hook from life. This turn belongs in MMA, not civil engineering."
Others seemed to be turning to prayer. Nitin Patel, who runs a paan shop nearby, observed, "Every time I see that turn, I mentally chant 'Jai Bajrang Bali.' It's my own pre-drive puja now."
Pankaj Baghel, 26, a Zomato delivery boy who rides past the bridge on his daily route, shook his head and said, "Zomato should offer a 'risk allowance' for this route. Imagine delivering biryani and turning it into khichdi."
Senior citizens, too, had their say. Shakuntala Sharma, 68, walking with her husband Vinod, 72, paused near the site. "If he drives me over that bridge, I'll bring haldi-kumkum and do aarti halfway," she said. Vinod laughed and added, "After retirement, you need fun and happiness. Thank you PWD and administration."
For now, the Aishbagh ROB remains closed to vehicles but wide open to observation, commentary, and comic relief. It hasn't yet connected roads—but it has connected the city through jokes, jibes, and a shared sense of disbelief.
As one student called out while filming:
"Bhai, ye bridge nahi, content hai!" ("Mate, this isn't a bridge, it's pure content!")

Crane driver ends life, alleges harassment by family members

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A 22-year-old crane driver from Bismillah Colony in the Ashbagh area of Bhopal committed suicide on Saturday night, leaving behind a chilling note accusing three brothers and two sisters-in-law of daily harassment and physical abuse.
The deceased, Mohammad Musharraf Khan, was found hanging in his room by family members. Police recovered a diary from the scene, in which Musharraf wrote, "I am giving up my life because of two sisters-in-law and three brothers. I am beaten and thrashed every day. I am ending my life because of them."
Musharraf, the youngest of four brothers, lived in a joint family with five sisters. His note has sparked a detailed investigation by police, who are probing the possibility of sustained domestic abuse. However, a conflicting claim was made by his brother Mohammad Bilal, who attributed the incident to an argument with their alcoholic father. "Musharraf often opposed our father's drinking. He had a heated argument with him shortly before taking this step," Bilal said.
Sub-Inspector Pradeep Gurjar, who is leading the investigation, confirmed that the suicide note is being examined for handwriting verification. "We have found a diary in which the deceased named his three brothers and two sisters-in-law. He wrote that he was subjected to daily beatings and could no longer endure the abuse. We will record detailed statements of all family members and are investigating all angles, including both the contents of the note and the family's statements," Gurjar said.
Following a post-mortem on Sunday, Musharraf's body was handed over to the family. Police are treating the case with seriousness, looking into the possibility of mental trauma caused by domestic violence or conflict within the household. No arrests have been made yet, and further action will depend on the outcome of forensic examinations and witness testimonies.

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Bihar polls: EC mulls house-to-house verification of voters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
New Delhi

The regular exercise of revision of electoral rolls is undertaken annually throughout the country by the EC and also before the holding of elections or bypolls

Seeking to ensure greater accuracy in electoral rolls in Bihar where assembly polls are due later this year, the Election Commission (EC) is mulling intensive house-to-house verification during the revision of the voter list in the State.

In the past, concerns have been raised by various civil society organisations, political parties and others persistently over the inclusion or deletion of names in the electoral rolls. Several parties, including the Congress, have accused the poll authority of fudging data to help the BJP.

Officials lamented that despite following a detailed protocol, insinuations and allegations are often made against the EC of arbitrarily inflating the electoral roll, even though the exercise is conducted with complete transparency and under constant scrutiny of political parties.

To make the system robust and free of any kind of errors, the poll panel is contemplating an intensive house-to-house verification during the upcoming electoral roll revision before Bihar assembly polls to "purify" the electoral rolls, sources said.

Such intensive and rigorous revision of the electoral rolls has been done in the past as well with the last such exercise undertaken in 2004, they pointed out.

The regular exercise of revision of electoral rolls is undertaken annually throughout the country by the EC and also before the holding of elections or bypolls.

The provisions regarding eligibility to be registered as a voter and disqualification are clearly laid down in Article 326 of the Constitution and Section 16 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 respectively, they said.

The voter list is revised regularly due to deaths and inclusion of new voters. Inter-state and intra-state movement of voters is another key reason why rolls need updation.

For instance, during 2024, according to the forms received by the EC, 46.26 lakh people shifted their residence, 2.32 crore applied for corrections and 33.16 lakh requested for replacement.

Thus, in a single year, nearly 3.15 crore changes were required to be made across the country. According to EC, there are several reasons why continuous updating of the voter list is necessary:

Change of residence: People in the country frequently move from one state, district, or area to another for reasons such as marriage, employment, education, or family matters.

Removal of names of deceased voters: Usually, family members do not inform the Commission about the death of a voter, due to which names of deceased persons remain in the list.

Inclusion of new youth turning 18: Every year, a large number of young people turn 18 and need to be added to the voter list.

Corrections in voter details: People also apply for changes in their names, photos, addresses, etc., which makes it necessary to update the list.

Reorganisation of polling stations: This is being done for multiple reasons, particularly because the Election Commission has now set a maximum limit of 1,200 voters per polling station, down from the earlier limit of 1,500.

The Commission also wants to ensure that no voter has to travel more than two kilometres to cast their vote.

Identification and removal of illegal foreign nationals: If a foreign illegal citizen is found to be listed in the electoral roll, they are identified and removed.

Left parties condemn US strikes on Iran

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
New Delhi

Left parties on Sunday strongly condemned the US strikes on nuclear sites in Iran and said the move was a grave violation of Iranian sovereignty and the UN Charter. In a statement issued here, the Left parties said the US action will inflame global tensions, destabilise West Asia and have severe economic repercussions.

"The undersigned five Left parties strongly condemn the United States' bombing of Iran. This is a grave violation of Iranian sovereignty and the UN Charter and it will inflame global tensions, destabilise West Asia and have severe economic repercussions," they said in the statement.

The statement was jointly issued by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, Revolutionary Socialist Party and Forward Bloc.

The five Left parties said the US and Israel are justifying their attacks by claiming that Iran was on the verge of developing a nuclear weapon, however, it is important to note that the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, said on June 19 that they did not have any proof of a systematic effort on Iran's part to develop a nuclear weapon.

"Even US intelligence agencies acknowledged that they did not possess conclusive evidence indicating that Iran was developing a nuclear weapon. Furthermore, Iran remains a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)," they said.

The Left parties said Israel launched an attack on Iran on June 12 to sabotage any potential negotiations between the latter and the US and now, the US has joined Israel in this act of aggression, even though President Donald Trump had given a two-week window to Iran for talks.

"This clearly demonstrates that the US-Israel axis has little regard for its own intelligence assessments or any diplomatic process and is intent on imposing war on Iran and the entire West Asian region. This makes it evident that the real intention is to destroy Iran, establish imperialist hegemony over West Asia, and control the global flow of resources," they said.

"This attack is aimed at serving the interests of the military-industrial complex and enabling international capital to navigate its way out of the prolonged crisis," they said.

The Left parties compared the situation with the US invasion of Iraq, which they said was done on "similarly unverified claims that were later proven false".

"It is ironic that the US, the only country to have ever used a nuclear weapon — despite Japan being ready to negotiate at the end of the Second World War — is now speaking about the threat of nuclear weapons!" they said.

The Left parties said the US attack will, in all likelihood, drastically escalate the conflict, with disastrous implications for global peace and the livelihoods of ordinary people — especially in countries like India, which rely heavily on West Asia for oil imports and opportunities for migrant labourers.

"The already-burdened working masses will be the worst affected by the economic fallout of the war," they said.

They asserted that the Indian Government should "immediately abandon its pro-US, pro-Israel foreign policy stance and join global efforts to stop the war".

"We call upon all our units to immediately organise protest actions against this act of imperialist aggression and urge all peace-loving people of our country to join us in condemning the US attack," the parties said. In a post on X, CPI(M) general secretary M A Baby warned that the fallout of the strikes will be global, including for India.

"The economic and political fallout will be global, including for India. The US has proved itself to be the No. 1 rogue state. Call for protest action wherever possible," he said.

Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya said the peace-loving people of the world must condemn this blatant act of US aggression.

"The US has now directly attacked Iran. After destroying Iraq, Libya and Syria, the US-Israel axis of aggression wants to destroy Iran and destabilise and subjugate the whole of West Asia," he said in a statement.

NGT seeks response from CPCB over felling of palm trees in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
New Delhi

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has sought a response from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and others in a matter related to the large-scale felling of palm trees in Bihar which is reportedly causing an increase in lightning-related deaths.

The green body was hearing a matter where it had taken suo motu cognisance of a newspaper report on alleged widespread cutting of palm trees that is directly linked to a sharp increase in lightning-related fatalities, with over 2,000 lives lost since 2016 in Bihar.

In an order dated June 5, a bench of NGT's judicial member Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi and expert member A Senthil Vel said, "According to the article, dozens of towering palm trees are being felled, leading to more frequent lightning strikes that result in deaths."

According to the report, after the ban on toddy tapping due to Bihar's prohibition policy, palm trees lost their economic value and have since been widely cut down. This ecological loss appeared to have made rural areas more vulnerable to lightning strikes, with the state recording over 2,000 lightning-related deaths since 2016.

"The article states that the number of lightning deaths began to rise following the rampant felling of palm trees. The worst-affected districts include Aurangabad, Patna, Nalanda, Kaimur, Rohtas, Bhojpur and Buxar. Most lightning-related deaths occur between 12:30 and 4:30 pm, when many people are outside for work," the NGT said, citing the report.

It further noted that the area under palm tree cultivation in the state had decreased by 40 per cent and that plantation of the trees had almost stopped.

"The matter seems to attract the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act," it said.

The tribunal impleaded CPCB, Bihar State Pollution Control Board, regional office of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and Bihar Disaster Management Department as parties or respondents.

"Let notices be issued to the respondents for filing their response/reply," the NGT said, listing the matter for further proceedings on August 7 before the eastern zonal bench in Kolkata.

311 Indian nationals evacuated from Iran

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
New Delhi

India on Sunday evacuated more than 300 Indian nationals from Iran amid the escalating tensions between the Persian Gulf nation and Israel following the US bombing of three Iranian nuclear sites.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said 311 Indians landed in Delhi on a special flight from the Iranian city of Mashhad.

With the fresh batch of evacuees, the total number of those brought back from Iran now stands at 1,428.

Three-hundred eleven Indian nationals arrived in New Delhi on a special flight from Mashhad at 1630 hours on June 22, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

He said a total of 1,428 Indian nationals have been evacuated from Iran so far.

Indian nationals arrive through a special flight after being evacuated from Iran amid its conflict with Israel, as part of 'Operation Sindhu' in New Delhi PTI

India launched Operation Sindhu last week to bring back Indians from Iran and Israel in view of increasing hostilities between the two nations.

Israel and Iran have fired hundreds of missiles and drones at each other's cities and military and strategic facilities since the hostilities began over a week back.

The tensions escalated significantly following the US bombing of three major Iranian nuclear sites on Sunday morning.

India has evacuated its nationals on chartered flights operated from the Iranian city of Mashhad, the Armenian capital of Yerevan and the Turkmenistan capital of Ashgabat since Wednesday.

Iran lifted airspace restrictions on Friday to facilitate three chartered flights from Mashhad.

NIA arrests man for supplying drone to CPI(Maoist)

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Sunday arrested an accused for supplying a drone to the banned CPI (Maoist) outfit to further its violent anti-national activities, officials said.

The probe agency has also seized digital devices, including hard drives, pen drives and mobile phones, as well as other incriminating material during a search in the west Delhi house of the accused, identified as Vishal Singh, originally from Uttar Pradesh's Mathura, they said. The investigations have revealed that the accused, a member of the CPI (Maoist), had delivered a drone to leaders of the banned terror outfit in Chhakarbanda/ Panchrukhiya forest area of Bihar to further its violent anti-national activities, said a statement issued by the NIA.

He had imparted technical training to other cadres of the CPI (Maoist) and had also attended meetings with its central committee members in deep forest areas of Bihar in 2019, it said. The NIA had earlier in August 2024 arrested another accused, Ajay Singhal alias Aman, the in-charge of the State Organising Committee (SOC) Haryana and Punjab of the CPI (Maoist), in the case, the statement said.

The case relates to the terror organisation's conspiracy to re-energise its decrepit influence in the Northern Regional Bureau (NRB) area, comprising Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, the NIA said.

The conspiracy involves recruitment of cadres and strengthening of the organisation in the region through underground cadres working in urban areas along with some Over Ground Workers (OGWs) operating in the guise of activists, it said.

Engaging with States to ensure implementation of UMEED portal for Waqf properties: Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
New Delhi

The Minority Affairs Ministry on Sunday said it has been actively engaging with states and union territories to ensure effective implementation of the UMEED portal, stressing that details of all registered Waqf properties across India are to be mandatorily uploaded on this platform within six months.

In line with this effort, the ministry said, Minority Affairs Secretary Chandra Shekhar Kumar visited Mumbai on June 21 to hold a comprehensive review meeting with the state secretary, senior officials and Maharashtra State Waqf Board CEO.

This marks his second such visit following a similar review in Bihar last week, it said.

During the meeting, Kumar apprised the officials of the rules to be rolled out shortly to support the statutory requirements of the portal, the statement said.

He encouraged proactive participation and invited suggestions from State authorities to streamline the implementation process, it said.

As per the mandate of the UMEED portal, details of all registered Waqf properties across India are to be mandatorily uploaded within six months

The CEO of the Waqf Board requested the Centre to revisit and ease certain leasing provisions related to Waqf properties. Kumar assured that the request will be examined sympathetically, reaffirming the Centre's commitment to empowering Waqf Boards and enhancing Waqf property management, the statement said.

Apart from reviewing UMEED implementation, the Secretary also assessed the status of projects under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK) in Maharashtra.

He directed the state officials to submit all pending proposals to the ministry within one week for necessary action.

Kumar also held a meeting with officials of the Haj Committee of India (HCoI) in Mumbai, congratulating them on the smooth and successful conduct of Haj 2025.

He noted with satisfaction that this year recorded the lowest number of deaths and health-related incidents among Indian Haj pilgrims.

Kumar attributed this achievement to improved coordination between the Ministry, Haj Committee of India, deputationists, Saudi authorities and local support systems.

The secretary especially acknowledged the effectiveness of the Haj Suvidha App, which played a crucial role in enhancing pilgrim experience and easing on-ground challenges. He affirmed that insights from this year's Haj operations will be used to further improve arrangements for Haj 2026.

The Ministry of Minority Affairs remains committed to ensuring efficient administration of waqf properties and a dignified pilgrimage experience for all Hajis through digital empowerment and responsive governance, the statement said.

Following the launch of the Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development Act, 1995 (UMEED) Central Portal on June 6, 2025, the Ministry of Minority Affairs has been actively engaging with states and union territories to ensure the effective implementation of this statutory platform, it said.

Air India to reduce 118 weekly flights operated with narrow-body planes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
New Delhi

Air India on Sunday said it will temporarily reduce 118 weekly flights operated with narrow-body planes on 19 routes as well as suspend services on three routes.

The temporary cuts in services account for about 5 per cent of the airline's overall narrow-body operations and the move is aimed at ensuring operational stability amid disruptions in the wake of the fatal plane crash in Ahmedabad on June 12.

All the 19 routes where reduction in narrow-body services have been done are domestic and of the three routes where flights have been suspended, two are international and one is domestic.

The announcement comes days after the Tata Group-owned carrier said it will cut international flights operated with wide-body planes by 15 per cent temporarily.

In a statement, the airline said it is going for "temporary cuts of less than 5 per cent to its overall narrow-body network".

"This voluntary decision leads to the temporary suspension of Air India's services on 3 routes and reduction of frequency on 19 routes. The changes are effective until at least 15 July 2025," it said.

As many as seven weekly flights each on three routes — Bengaluru-Singapore, Pune-Singapore and Mumbai-Bagdogra — have been suspended till at least July 15.

Flights on various other routes, including Delhi-Bengaluru and Delhi-Mumbai, have been reduced.

On the Bengaluru-Chandigarh route, the weekly services have been cut to seven, Delhi-Bengaluru to 113, Delhi-Mumbai to 165, Delhi-Kolkata to 63, Delhi-Coimbatore to 12, Delhi-Goa (Dabolim) and Delhi-Goa (Mopa) to seven each.

Also, weekly flights on the Delhi-Hyderabad route have been reduced to 76, Delhi-Indore to 14, Delhi-Lucknow to 21, Delhi-Pune to 54, Mumbai-Ahmedabad to 37, Mumbai-Bengaluru to 84 and Mumbai-Kolkata to 30.

The statement said weekly flights are also being cut on Mumbai-Coimbatore route to 16, Mumbai-Kochi to 34, Mumbai-Goa (Dabolim) to 29, Mumbai-Hyderabad to 59 and Mumbai-Varanasi to seven.

"Despite these temporary reductions, Air India will continue to operate close to 600 daily flights with its narrow-body aircraft on 120 domestic and short-haul international routes," the statement said.

According to the airline, the reductions are aimed at strengthening Air India's network-wide operational stability and minimising last-minute inconvenience to passengers.

Blocking of Hormuz Strait will have global impact: Experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
New Delhi

Any blocking or disruption of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz — a narrow passage connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea — will have significant global and regional impact, including for India's energy security, strategic affairs experts said on Sunday.

Following the US bombing of three major Iranian nuclear sites, Tehran has indicated that closing the Strait of Hormuz for shipping is one of the options on the table to pressure its adversaries.

Nearly 30 percent of global oil and a third of the world's LNG (liquefied natural gas) passes through the strait daily and its closure would immediately reduce global supplies triggering a spike in prices, they said.

The closure of the narrow passage would have significant global repercussions across energy markets and it will impact India's energy security as well, Dr Laxman Kumar Behera, Associate Professor at Special Centre for National Security Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, said.

Behera said any disruption in the critical shipping lane will majorly impact India's crude oil import from Iraq and to an extent from Saudi Arabia.

Captain D K Sharma (retd), a former Indian Navy spokesperson who closely follows developments in the Gulf region, said Iran's threat to block the Strait of Hormuz could lead to significant disruptions in global oil trade.

The closure of the narrow passage would have significant global repercussions across energy markets and it will impact India's energy security as well

Any disruption in shipping traffic could impact insurance premiums, causing costlier rerouting of oil shipments, he argued.

"Oil prices are expected to surge due to the increased tensions in the region, with some analysts predicting prices to reach $80-$90 per barrel or even $100 per barrel if Iran responds with retaliatory measures," he noted.

Sharma also said that the currencies of the countries in the region may experience significant volatility, and investors may look for other stable markets.

According to a recent analysis by the International Energy Agency, even a brief disruption of passage through the Strait of Hormuz will have a significant impact on oil markets.

"With geopolitical and economic uncertainties affecting oil producers and consumers alike, oil supply security remains high on the international energy policy agenda," it said.

The US on Sunday morning bombed three major nuclear sites — Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan — in Iran, bringing itself into the Israel-Iran conflict

Later, President Donald Trump said the Iranian nuclear sites were "totally obliterated".

Behera said Iran will also face economic consequences if it shuts down the Hormuz strait as such a move will severely cripple Tehran's exports.

Since the start of Iran's hostilities with Israel, Iranian officials have spoken about the possibility of shutting the Strait of Hormuz.

NIA chargesheets key aide of Khalistani terrorists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has chargesheeted Jatinder Singh alias Joti, a key aide of Babbar Khalsa International terrorist Lakhbir Singh alias Landa and dreaded gangster Pavittar Batala in a Punjab terror conspiracy case, officials said on Sunday.

The chargesheet was filed before a special NIA court in Mohali on Friday,.

Jatinder Singh, hailing from Gurdaspur district of Punjab, was arrested by the NIA from Mumbai on December 23, last year in the case, according to an official statement.

Jatinder Singh was involved in illegal procurement and supply of firearms from Madhya Pradesh to Punjab-based gangsters, the agency said.

He was facilitating the supply of weapons to ground operatives of Batala, a close associate of designated individual terrorist Landa, it said.

Batala's foreign-based associates were coordinating Jatinder Singh's operations in India, the NIA said.

The weapons were being used by Batala's operatives in Punjab to promote Babbar Khalsa International's criminal-terror activities, it said.

It was further found during the NIA investigation that Jatinder Singh used to procure illegal weapons from a known arms supplier, Baljeet Singh alias Rana Bhai, in Madhya Pradesh.

Baljeet Singh had already been arrested and chargesheeted by NIA. The accused were using virtual numbers and encrypted applications to avoid detection by law enforcement agencies, the statement said.

The Pioneer
BHOPAL | MONDAY| JUNE 23, 2025

Nitish shares design of Janki Mandir to be constructed at birthplace of Sita

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday shared the final design of the "Janki Mandir" which will be constructed at Punauradham, a Hindu pilgri-mage site in Sitamarhi district that is considered the birthplace of goddess Sita.

The Government has also constituted a trust to expedite the ongoing redevelopment works of the 'Punaura Dham Janki Mandir'.

In a post on X on Sunday, the CM said, "I am very happy to inform you that the design of the grand temple and other structures for the redevelopment of Jagat Janani Maa Janaki's birthplace Punauradham, Sitamarhi is now ready.

A trust has also been formed for this so that the construction work can be expedited."

The Chief Minister posted several images of the proposed temple.

"We are determined to complete the construction of the grand temple in Punauradham, Sitamarhi soon," he said adding that it would be a matter of pride for all. The State Cabinet recently approved the appointment of a Noida-based private firm as the design consultant for the development of "Punaura Dham Janki Mandir".

It is the same organisation which was the consultant for Master Planning and Architectural Services of the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

A large number of pilgrims including those from abroad visit the Punaura Dham. Earlier also, the state cabinet had approved ₹120 crore for the overall development of the temple. Nitish Kumar on December 13, 2023 had laid the foundation stone for the overall development of Punaura Dham Janki Mandir.

Under the new development plan, the state government will develop 'Sita-Vatika', 'Luv-Kush Vatilka', construct a parikrama path, display kiosks, cafeteria, children's zones etc.

All connecting roads to the pilgrim site are also being developed. Besides, thematic gates and parking areas are being constructed around the pilgrim site.

Odisha CM asks officials to make Puri Rath Yatra incident-free

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Puri

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday asked officers to make this year's Rath Yatra in Puri 'incident-free'.

Majhi gave this direction to the officers at a meeting to review preparedness made for the annual festival scheduled to be held here on June 27. Speaking to media persons after the meeting, he said the administration is fully prepared for the smooth conduct of the Rath Yatra which attracts lakhs of devotees to Puri each year.

Sibling deities Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra travel from the Jagannath temple to another shrine (Gundicha) on chariots during the festival.

"The State administration has made all necessary arrangements to ensure an incident-free Rath Yatra," the CM said adding that all departments are working in coordination in this regard.

Notably, the idol of Lord Balabhadra fell on servitors injuring nine of them while it was being taken out from the chariot to a temple as part of the Rath Yatra festival last year.

Majhi said artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled CCTV cameras will monitor key areas across the pilgrim town during the annual festival to be held under tight security arrangements.

In view of the diarrhoea outbreak in various districts, the health department and all other related departments were asked to keep a close watch on the situation.

It is very important to ensure that unhealthy food or water is not sold at any place. Along with this, safe drinking water and healthy food should also be available for the tourists during the festival, the Chief Minister told the officials.

He sought the cooperation of the servitors for smooth and timely completion of the rituals during the Rath Yatra.

Speaking about security arrangements at the meeting, Director General of Police Y B Khurania said a five-level security arrangement with over 10,000 police personnel has been made for the Rath Yatra.

Quick response teams and drone support will be deployed and the Coast Guard will be stationed on the coastline to ensure a safe and smooth celebration of the festival. Besides, central armed forces will be deployed at the entrance points of Puri town, Khurania said.

Among others, Deputy Chief Ministers Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo and Pravati Parida, Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan and Health Minister Mukesh Mahling were present at the meeting.

Sivankutty alleges Raj Bhavan behind ABVP protests, BJP accuses CPI(M) for violence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Thiruvananthapuram

Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar (left) and Kerala Minister V Sivakutty (right) FILE PHOTO

Kerala General Education Minister V Sivankutty on Sunday claimed that the protests by the BJP's youth and student groups against him, over the 'Bharat Mata' controversy, were aimed at causing riots in the State and were allegedly held on instructions of the Raj Bhavan.

Hitting back at the CPI(M), BJP state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar accused the Left party of trying to suppress protests by resorting to violence against the protestors. He warned that if the Left government uses force to suppress protests, it will face retaliation in the same manner.

Earlier in the day, Sivankutty told reporters that he has been attacked and his travels obstructed during the last couple of days after he walked out of a programme at the Raj Bhavan where a portrait of 'Bharat Mata' — as seen in RSS events — was displayed. He said that as a minister, MLA and a citizen, he has the right to protest against the actions of the Governor at the Raj Bhavan and that is what he did.

"The Governor has said that he will continue with it (the portrait) and we have not responded to that," he added.

Subsequently, the BJP youth wing Yuva Morcha and student organisation — Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) — attacked him and obstructed his vehicle at various places in the State during the last two day, the minister claimed.

Meanwhile, Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, in an interview given to BJP mouthpiece Janmabhumi, said that the concept of 'Bharat Mata' became more clear to him when he was jailed during the emergency period in the country. He said that during that time he saw the concept of Bharat Mata as being above ideology and politics.

"I got a strong urge to work more for Bharat Mata. The inspiration to become a 'sangh pracharak' also became stronger during that time," he said in the interview.

Sivankutty, during his press conference in the morning, also alleged that at one such protest, ABVP activists tore apart the national flag, a claim reportedly denied by the student organisation.

The minister also alleged that the protests and attacks against him were being carried out on the instructions of the Raj Bhavan, "but they were unable to gather enough youth for the same". He said that the protests against him by the two organisations were carried out by a handful of youngsters who acted as "suicide squads" and jumped in front of his moving vehicle. ABVP and Yuva Morcha activists had waved black flags at the minister's vehicle in Kozhikode on Saturday and also burned his effigy in protest against his walkout from the Raj Bhavan event.

Sivankutty said that ABVP and Yuva Morcha should realise that showing support to the Governor, who is allegedly acting contrary to the Constitution, will turn people against them.

He also claimed that two hardcore RSS activists in the Raj Bhavan were advising the Governor to act in this manner.

The minister said that he will not name them, but everyone knows them very well. The Congress too spoke out against the Governor's recent actions and said the Raj Bhavan should not be turned into a venue for political activities.

Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) chief Sunny Joseph also said that protests against the Governor's actions need not be taken to the streets.

Later in the day, Chandrasekhar, in a statement, claimed that it was the CPI(M) which was behind the violence against the ABVP and Yuva Morcha protestors because the BJP exposed the Left party's "anti-nationalism" and "appeasement politics".

He also accused the Left parties of being "intolerant" towards protests against them.

The BJP leader said that protests against the Governor by the Students Federation of India and the Democratic Youth Federation of India — the student and youth wings of the CPI(M), respectively — were acceptable, but agitations against a Left minister were not.

This is an "authoritarian style" of communist parties, he claimed. He warned that if attacks on BJP and related organisations' workers are not stopped, the Left parties and their leaders will have to pay a heavy price.

"If the CPI(M) is trying to suppress the protesters by taking the law into its own hands, and if the police decide to help them by standing by, then the national movements, including the BJP, will take to the streets," the BJP leader said.

Second FIR in a week against Bengal BJP chief

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

In a politically charged up electoral season filled with filthy slangs used by mutually competing netas an FIR has been lodged against Bengal BJP president Sukanta Majumdar for comparing the State police with sex workers.

The incident comes barely a week after the police lodged a previous FIR against the junior Union Minister for hurling a pair of sandals — during an agitation outside Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's residence — at a crowd that "inadvertently" landed on the head of a Sikh gentleman.

In her police complaint a woman Trinamool Congress councilor Sunanda Sarkar has alleged that Majumdar during his Saturday speech compared the law and order situation in Bengal with the sex workers of Sonagachi — which incidentally has the dubious distinction of Asia's oldest and arguably the country's largest red-light area. The larger portion of Sonagachi falls within

Sarkar's Ward Number 18, she alleged adding such "derogatory and sexists" remarks were not only insulting to the police but also the women engaged in the trade. In tandem with lodging the FIR the TMC also shared a post where Majumdar was shown saying that the police had turned the law and order situation into a state of affairs found in Sonagachi.

"You have turned the law and order situation of West Bengal into the sex workers of Sonagachi," he was allegedly quoted by the TMC as saying.

The development took place close on the heels of Majumdar referring to an attack on him at Budge Budge in South 24 Parganas where he stones and shoes were thrown at him by alleged TMC goons — all in presence of the police men who instead of preventing such attack looked right through it. Shah promptly wrote letters bringing the incident to the notice of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla complaining breach of privilege and BJP national president JP Nadda. He alleged "willful negligence, dereliction of duty, and enabling political violence." The TMC leadership immediately shot back alleging Majumdar's statement was not only filthy but it also emitted the kind of "hate" that they nourished against the womanhood.

A TMC post read "this is the filth that passes for political discourse in BJP, today. Their state president Dr Sukanta compared Bengal's law and order situation to 'sex workers'. This filth came from a Central minister. Not some fringe troll. Not some anonymous handle," adding how "behind all their slogans lies an ugly, hate-fuelled mindset that sees women as objects of abuse and insult, and the poor as tools to be exploited or mocked."

Senior TMC leader and party spokesperson Kunal Ghosh hit out at Majumdar too for "not insulting the police but also the entire women folk with his demeaning language."

He said "in his acts it is amply clear what the BJP leadership, particularly its ministers think of the common man, today he throws slippers at a crowd that lands on the head of a Sikh policeman, tomorrow he attacks the police personnel with filthiest words and in doing so he also expresses the kind of mindset his party nourishes against the women at large, this is not only misogyny, it is filth in the name of politics. We strongly protest this comment."

Railways to boost crime control, passenger safety measures: GRP Chiefs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
New Delhi

In a major step towards enhancing safety on trains and railway premises, Indian Railways through a joint effort by the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP) has announced several new initiatives to strengthen crime control and protect passengers.

These include converting theft complaints from the Rail Madad portal into formal FIRs, using facial recognition technology for tracking suspects, deploying "Meri Saheli" teams for women's safety and improving coordination among states to target inter-state gangs.

These decisions were part of the 6th All India Conference of GRP Chiefs, which concluded in New Delhi under the chairmanship of RPF Director General Manoj Yadava.

The event brought together DGPs, ADGPs and senior GRP officers from states and union territories, along with officials from the Ministry of Railways.

The conference focused on better coordination and intelligence-sharing among security agencies to tackle the growing incidents of theft, fraud, smuggling and crimes against women and children on trains and at railway stations.

Officials discussed the need for joint strategies, proactive surveillance and inter-agency teamwork to prevent criminals from taking advantage of jurisdictional gaps.

Special attention was given to curbing theft of passenger belongings and creating public awareness about common tricks used by thieves.

The conversion of theft complaints into FIRs is expected to improve investigation and raise conviction rates.

The safety of women passengers remained a top priority, with officials calling for more targeted patrolling, wider CCTV coverage at stations and inside trains, and the presence of Meri Saheli teams to assist female travelers.

The conference also addressed concerns over drug trafficking through rail routes, urging tighter checks and use of real-time intelligence to catch offenders.

The Intelligence Bureau made a key presentation on possible terror threats to railway infrastructure, high-lighting the need for stronger security protocols and vulnerability assessments.

Child safety was also discussed, with a focus on timely rescue and rehabilitation of vulnerable children at risk of trafficking or exploitation.

DG RPF Manoj Yadava concluded the event by saying, "Railway security is a shared responsibility. Today's conference reflects our united resolve to ensure Indian Railways becomes safer, more secure and crime-free for every passenger."

Manipur mourns AI crash victim Nganthoi

Mortal remians of Kongbrailatpam Nganthoi Sharma are being brought to Imphal on Sunday PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Imphal

Thousands of people lined up on both sides of the roads to pay tributes to Ahmedabad crash victim Kongbrailatpam Nganthoi Sharma, whose mortal remains were brought to Manipur on Sunday.

Sharma was an air crew memberof the London-bound Air India flight AI 171 which crashed into a hostel complex in Ahmedabad's Meghaninagar moments after take-off from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport at 1.39 pm on June 12, killing 270 people, including 241 on board. One passenger survived.

"The moment was profoundly moving, she was received with deep dignity, solemn respect, and heartfelt sorrow by Team Imphal Airport, not merely as colleagues in uniform but as family in mourning — united in silence and reverence.

"With bowed heads and heavy hearts, she was tenderly handed over to her family, friends and loved ones, whose presence spoke volumes of the love they carry and the void her absence leaves behind," Imphal airport said in a post on Facebook. A cousin of Nganthoi Sharma said the at airport officials, family members and others paid floral tributes to her mortal remains after it was brought to Imphal airport aboard an IndiGo flight.

Her mortal remains were accompanied by her father and elder sister who had gone to Ahmedabad for DNA testing, she added.

The mortal remains were later taken to her residence in Thoubal on an open truck as thousands lined up on both sides of the road to pay their tributes.

Her last rites would be conducted later in the evening, another family member said.

The mortal remains of another crew member from Manipur, Lamnunthem Singson, were brought to the state on June 19.

Four-day Ambubachi Mela begins in Assam's Kamakhya Temple

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Guwahati

The annual 'Ambubachi Mela' at Kamakhya temple, atop the Nilachal hill in Guwahati, commenced on Sunday with around 12 lakh devotees expected to attend the religious event till June 25. The mela is held for four days in June every year when the temple doors are closed, coinciding with the ritualistic menstrual cycle of Goddess Kamakhya.

"Today marks the beginning of the #Ambubachi Mahayog, an annual celebration of Maa Kamakhya's divine femininity. Spiritual Gurus and devotees from across the country will dawn upon the sacred Nilachal Hills to pray for Bharat," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on X. "I welcome all pilgrims to Assam and wish everyone a divine experience and the choicest blessings of Maa Kamakhya," he added.

Temple authorities said the doors were closed at 2.56 pm on Sunday with the start of 'prabritti', and worship will resume after 3.19 am on Thursday morning, after 'nribritti'.

The 'Ambubachi Mela' is held over the four days when the temple doors are closed. Officials said around 12 lakh devotees from across the country, including many from abroad, are expected to attend the mela, and wait for the resumption of worship to pay obeisance to the goddess.

Provisions for toilets, street lights, health camps and barricades on roads at certain locations have been made, while the street leading to the main temple has been closed for all vehicles, except emergency and utility services, they said.

Besides, police personnel and volunteers have also been deputed in the area. Sarma had earlier said that camps to accommodate around 20,000 devotees have been set up.

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Editor's TAKE

A celebration of India's soft power

The world is in need of healing and India — through yoga is offering its heart and soul to the cause

As the Israel-Iran war raged and the endless Ukraine war continues, 21 June — International Yoga Day — came as a refreshing break, when the world came together once again to celebrate a global movement that was seeded by India and has now grown into a symbol of holistic well-being, peace, and collective consciousness. India, with its ancient wisdom and evolving wellness ecosystem, is emerging as a global hub for healing. Yoga, India's timeless gift to the world, is awakening global recognition of the country's soft power. What makes yoga unique is not just its physical or medical relevance, but its spiritual and philosophical depth.

As Prime Minister Modi recalled on Yoga Day, India's proposal to mark June 21, as the International Day of Yoga received the unprecedented backing of 175 countries at the United Nations — a powerful reminder of the world's trust in India's cultural and moral leadership. This year's theme, Yoga for One Earth, One Health, reflects a deeper truth: the well-being of individuals is inseparable from the health of the planet. Yoga teaches harmony — between body and mind, human and nature, self and society.

In a world burdened with conflict, climate crisis, and rising mental health concerns, yoga offers a moment of pause, a chance to recalibrate, to breathe deeply and reconnect with the essence of life. As the Prime Minister said, yoga moves us from "Me" to "We." It is a philosophy of unity that transcends borders, faiths, and ideologies. India's growing influence through yoga is a compelling example of soft power — the ability to inspire and lead not through coercion, but through culture, values, and ideas.

Yoga is now practised on mountaintops, navy ships, in prisons, and among visually impaired individuals who read yoga texts in Braille. From the Sydney Opera House to the summit of Everest, the message is the same: yoga belongs to all of humanity. In a world divided by power politics, India's legacy of non-violence, wellness, and inner transformation presents an alternative vision of leadership.

To build on this momentum, India must look beyond symbolism and invest in creating a lasting global ecosystem of wellness. This includes promoting wellness diplomacy through cultural missions abroad, creating international education hubs for yoga and Ayurveda, launching digital platforms to democratise access, and developing globally recognised certification systems for traditional practices. India should also align its tourism, healthcare, and cultural initiatives under a unified identity that presents the country as a sanctuary of healing.

Moreover, India's spiritual traditions can meaningfully contribute to global conversations on climate change, sustainability, and mental well-being. The celebration of Yoga Day is not just about 'asanas' and mass gatherings; it is about reaffirming India's identity as a civilisational force grounded in compassion, balance, and universal brotherhood. In a fractured world seeking healing, yoga offers a timeless path. India, as its birthplace, stands ready to lead with wisdom, not weapons. The spirit of yoga is the spirit of unity — calm amidst chaos. Let us carry this light forward, together, one breath at a time.

PIC TALK

A toddler performs yoga during a session on the International Day of Yoga, at the lawns of Kartavya Path in New Delhi. PTI

Anatomy of a manufactured catastrophe

This is not merely a war between two nations — it is a theatre where the myths of empire and the machinery of global power collide, leaving civilian lives shattered and the region teetering on the brink of deeper disintegration

That was brutal and predicated on years of fabricated deceit. But that is how power operates. Netanyahu is not acting in isolation; he was ushered into this calamity with calculated endorsement from the West. For both Iran and Israel, this is a zero-sum confrontation — a tragic entanglement where ancient antagonisms, contemporary geopolitics, and enduring colonial residues violently intersect.

What is most intellectually arresting is the glaring paradox Western powers routinely embrace. When Netanyahu launches a premeditated and unlawful assault on Iran, it is euphemistically labelled as a measure of self-defence. Yet when Vladimir Putin deploys forces into Ukraine, the West decries it as an unprovoked invasion.

This hypocrisy in moral reasoning illustrates the incoherence of Western ethical frameworks — marked by selective outrage, selective jurisprudence, and selective memory. Netanyahu is actively courting American bombardment of Tehran, even venturing so far as to suggest the types of ordnance most suitable for maximum devastation. Trump, meanwhile, hesitates — not over Iran's fate, but because the ensuing ramifications will inevitably encircle him. This cynical arithmetic typifies the geopolitical stage on which empires perform their cruelties. A week has now passed since Netanyahu's incursion into Iran — a deliberate campaign tacitly sanctioned by the United States and its constellation of affluent allies, whose modern prosperity is inseparable from centuries of extraction and systemic plunder. War, whether desirable or not, remains the central mechanism by which empires assert dominion, redraw territories, and dismantle resistance. Israel's open defiance of international law — manifest in its missile barrage on Iranian soil — lays bare an unsettling truth: if global powers truly revered international legal norms, Netanyahu's actions would face unequivocal denunciation. Instead, one could argue — chillingly — that he affirms history's most ominous prophecies.

NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

Western media, complicit in sanitising this act of aggression, frames it as an "unprecedented" strike — yet again resorting to euphemism to mask illegality. This was not an improvisational operation; it was the culmination of extensive clandestine preparation by Netanyahu and his ultranationalist Orthodox coalition. Israel's intelligence apparatus has, over decades, embedded itself within the architecture of Iranian society, executing key figures and orchestrating strategic assassinations. The latest Friday strikes were not merely military engagements — they constituted a coordinated political decapitation, targeting senior officials central to the Iranian state. Iranian society today endures compounded crises. Their tenacity and national pride remain steadfast, yet they are economically suffocated by Western sanctions, which have induced runaway inflation and scarcity. From first-hand experience in Tehran, Iranians are not consumed by a siege mentality; rather, they display a cautious hospitality that, once trust is earned, transforms into deep generosity — qualities starkly misrepresented in Western discourse. In contrast, Israelis are socialised into a perpetual state of existential fear. "Security" is not merely policy — it is a psychological infrastructure, permeating every aspect of public and private life. Israel's economy thrives not only through sanctioned trade but also through its robust arms industry and cyber-warfare enterprises, often exported under the guise of national expertise. This divergence in societal conditioning is critical: it reflects distinct historical wounds and geopolitical compulsions.

To grasp Israel's war on Iran, one must situate it within the long arc of Western imperial entrenchment in West Asia. This history is punctuated by covert operations, artificial borders, and a strategy of managed chaos. The 1953 CIA-backed coup in Iran — toppling the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and reinstating the autocratic Shah — is emblematic of this trajectory. For decades, Western powers suppressed indigenous sovereignty while installing compliant strongmen. The 1979 Islamic Revolution was not merely theological upheaval; it was a radical assertion of national agency forged in the crucible of sustained foreign domination. In the revolution's wake, Iranian society was reconstituted through a deep-rooted collectivism and assertive nationalism that continues to shape its resistance against external coercion.

Viewed through this prism, Netanyahu's tenure may be remembered as one of the most corrosive in Israel's history. By fusing religious chauvinism with militaristic expansionism, he has eviscerated Israel's democratic ethos, transforming "security" into a tool of territorial expropriation and systemic Palestinian disenfranchisement. His escalation against Iran is not merely a tactical error; it is an incitement to regional disintegration. Framed as a crusade for "unconditional surrender", his belligerence risks igniting a broader conflagration whose consequences will inevitably recoil upon Israel itself.

Netanyahu, then, appears less as a strategist than as a provocateur, recklessly agitating the region's deepest historical and sectarian fissures. According to Haaretz, an independent Israeli media outlet operating despite a severely censored and often propagandistic Israeli media environment, several prominent progressive Jewish groups were notably absent from the so-called "joint unity statement" backing Israel's strikes on Iran. They argue that diplomacy, not bombs, has proven effective in preventing nuclear proliferation — revealing significant divisions within the Jewish community over Netanyahu's war. Despite sustained bombardment, millions of Iranians remain in Tehran. Their refusal to flee is not naïveté—it is a visceral affirmation of identity and resistance. The Iranian public consciousness, hardened by decades of war, sanctions, and subterfuge, manifests a collective defiance often misread in the West. The state's nationalist discourse resonates beyond clerical authority; it channels a cultural memory of resistance against imperial intrusion. Moreover, the disproportionate risk to civilians is staggering. Israeli operations ostensibly targeting senior military personnel inevitably endanger entire urban populations, as these individuals live and operate within densely populated civilian zones.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly found no conclusive evidence that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon systematically. Yet, Western powers wield this unverified threat as a pretext for military aggression. The contradictory statements from US officials — from intelligence directors denying Iran's weaponisation efforts to presidents asserting Tehran is "very close" to the bomb — reflect a politicisation of intelligence designed to justify interventionism.History has shown the futility of liberal interventionist fantasies: that democracy can be air-dropped or imposed through market restructuring.

The Arab Spring, once heralded as a democratic revival, instead expedited the collapse of fragile states and exacerbated regional instability. Netanyahu's war on Iran is not an anomaly — it is the terminal result of accumulated imperial failures, ideological rigidity, and historical amnesia. It confirms a grim axiom: when utopias collapse, it is always the powerless who bleed. His offensive, cloaked in the pieties of national security, belongs to a longer, darker chronicle, one whose conclusion will define the fate of West Asia and the very contours of justice in our century.

(The writer is a Colombo-based journalist and columnist. Views are personal)

Israel–Iran conflict: A test of India's diplomatic agility

SECOND Opinion

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Iran marks the most intense direct military confrontation between two Middle Eastern nations in decades. On June 13, 2025, Israel launched "Operation Rising Lion", deploying over 200 aircraft to target Iran's nuclear and military installations at Natanz, Tabriz, and areas near Tehran. The strikes reportedly set back Iran's uranium enrichment programme by several years. In swift retaliation, Iran launched waves of ballistic missiles and drone swarms targeting Israeli civilian areas, prompting mass evacuations in cities like Haifa and Tel Aviv. Israel's strategic calculus is centred on preemption and deterrence.

Faced with Tehran's decade-long pursuit of nuclear weapons, Israel opted for precise air strikes instead of a prolonged ground campaign — aiming to decapitate Iran's atomic leadership, cripple enrichment facilities, and weaken the Quds Force, the external operations arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Iran, in contrast, has relied on asymmetrical warfare: launching over 100 missiles at Israeli urban centres, mobilising its proxy networks in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, and deploying cyber-attacks to complement its kinetic operations. Domestically, economic turmoil and rising public discontent in Iran may be pressuring Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to explore diplomatic back channels, even as he publicly vows retaliation. The Israel–Iran confrontation has shaken global oil markets. In early June, Brent crude spiked nearly $10 per barrel, peaking at $78 amid fears of disruptions to the Strait of Hormuz, a critical chokepoint through which one-fifth of the world's seaborne oil flows. The volatility underscores the fragility of energy markets, where even minor strikes on oil infrastructure can trigger disproportionate swings in futures, fuelling global inflationary pressures. For India, which imports between 80 and 85 per cent of its crude oil, such price shocks have immediate consequences. On June 13, the Reserve Bank of India intervened in currency markets as the rupee slid to a two-month low of ₹86.20 against the US dollar. Rising fuel costs threaten to widen the trade deficit, erode household purchasing power, and reignite inflationary pressures. Yet, India's projected 7.5 per cent GDP growth in FY2025 provides some fiscal room to absorb external shocks.

MONICA B SOOD

Additionally, the Government's proactive fuel hedging strategies and a diversified supplier base offer crucial buffers against supply volatility.

India maintains robust ties with both Iran and Israel. Tehran remains a strategic partner in energy and regional connectivity, particularly through the Chabahar Port project, which facilitates access to Central Asia despite Western sanctions. Simultaneously, India–Israel relations have flourished, with bilateral trade exceeding $7 billion, deepening defence cooperation, and intensified intelligence sharing on counterterrorism. Navigating this tightrope requires deft diplomacy to avoid alienating either side while preserving broader strategic alignments with the US and Gulf nations. India's dual engagement underscores its commitment to strategic autonomy and multipolar diplomacy. Beyond immediate crisis management, India has the opportunity to assume a proactive diplomatic role. Leveraging its upcoming G20 presidency and leadership within the Quad, India could initiate a "West Asia Stability Dialogue" — a Track II peace process involving the Arab League, the EU, Iran, and Israel under one neutral platform. Simultaneously, fast-tracking the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) would reinforce India's position as a key trade and energy bridge.

Deepening partnerships in green hydrogen and solar energy with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations would also help reduce oil dependence while supporting a broader regional stability agenda.The Israel–Iran conflict illustrates the perils of unchecked nuclear proliferation and proxy warfare. For India, this is a test of diplomatic agility, energy resilience, and economic foresight, as well as a chance to assert leadership in shaping a multipolar, rules-based order in West Asia. By championing multilateralism, reinforcing strategic autonomy, and accelerating its energy transition, India can not only safeguard its national interests but also play a pivotal role in stabilising one of the world's most volatile regions.

(The author, a socio-economic and geopolitical strategist, is based in Chandigarh. The views expressed are personal)

Letters to the Editor

US joins the Israel–Iran war

By launching strikes and claiming the obliteration of Iranian nuclear sites, the US has formally joined Israel in the war between the two nations.

In retrospect, it appears President Trump providing a two-week reprieve to Iran from US strikes was a red herring to lull the Islamic state into complacency. It also explains why he hosted a lunch for the Pakistan Army Chief, Asim Munir, in the White House.

Whenever the US faces trouble in the Middle East, it seeks Pakistan's support, even if it is aware of the double games the country is known to play — of accepting a generous package from the US, while at the same time, sheltering terrorists. For sure, there will be retaliation on US bases in the Middle East by Iran, drawing some other nations also into the conflict.

The right and the wrong of the US decision will be debated threadbare by the world media. However, one needs to note that Iran has, for long, been raising the slogans of 'Death to America' and 'Death to Israel'. If it were to develop a nuclear weapon, who will be its immediate or eventual target is a foregone conclusion, not with standing its assertion of 'using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes'. One can now expect a long-drawn-out conflict in the Middle East, with the oil prices shooting up as the immediate fallout, causing misery to the people the world over.

V JAYARAMAN | CHENNAI

Concerns about nuclear proliferation

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has flagged a 2020 incident involving a Chinese-origin cargo bound for Pakistan that was seized by Indian authorities at Gujarat's Kandla Port. The shipment, mis-declared as industrial dryers, was found to contain autoclaves — equipment that can be used in the production of ballistic missile components. Investigations linked the consignment to Pakistan's National Development Complex, which is involved in developing long-range missiles.

The vessel, Da Cui Yun, had originated from China's Jiangyin Port and was headed for Karachi's Port Qasim. India's intelligence agency, R&AW, had received inputs that the cargo included dual-use technology — items that can be used for both civilian and military purposes.

The autoclaves are listed under the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), of which India is a member but Pakistan is not. In a more recent development from March 2024, Indian authorities seized Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machinery — another dual-use item — at Mumbai's Nhava Sheva Port, again en route from China to Pakistan.

These incidents highlight growing concerns about nuclear and missile proliferation in the region. The FATF may face renewed pressure from India to re-list Pakistan on its grey list over terrorism financing and WMD.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Olympic Day: Games for Harmony

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) laid the foundation for Olympic Day in 1948, inspired by Baron Pierre de Coubertin's dream of the modern Olympics, envisioned on June 23, 1894, at the Sorbonne University in Paris.

This dream now brings over 200 nations together on one platform, where sports symbolise not only competition but also equality, unity, and inclusivity. The 2025 theme, "Leveling the Playing Field, Moving Together," deepens this spirit, calling for everyone, regardless of background, to connect and empower through sports. The IOC's goal is to make sports a part of every life and spread its values — respect, friendship, and excellence — worldwide. This day inspires millions with its message of "Move, Learn, Discover."

International Olympic Day stands for inclusivity and unity. The five colorful Olympic rings — blue, yellow, black, green, and red — connect five continents, transcending boundaries of race, religion, and gender to give wings to dreams.

At the 2024 Paris Olympics, India sent 117 athletes and won 6 medals. India's 65 per cent youth population holds hope for the future. The 2024 Olympic motto, "Harmony in Diversity," inspires India to aim higher with better facilities and training.

RK JAIN ARIJEET | BARWANI

WHY UNDERSTANDING THE NEED OF CO-EXISTENCE IS SO IMPORTANT

The article on the need for co-existence rather than conflicts (21-6-25) should sensitise the political and religious leaders to start with. Because the common people have no issue in adjusting with anyone and any situation, it is the leaders who spit venom with their chauvinist versions and expressions for their pecuniary benefits and to promote their identity. Life experiences teach enough about the inevitability of co-existence and the reality of interdependability.

It continues even after one's death. Though this is a crude fact understood naturally by people, they are pitched to hate and react violently against a group for no significant reason or eternal benefit. Every religion recommends love, compassion, and co-existence. Yet we still witness scenes of clashes between inter- and intra-faith groups. But the underlying fact is that every instance of hate and conflict is ultimately aimed at material benefits. Even the conflicts carried on or the wars waged in the name of religion and God are bogus, and the people need to understand this and frustrate those who promote them.

These basic facts — though understood by the people — need to be reminded as often as possible. In schools, it should be taught at every standard to get the messages of co-existence and interdependability deeply rooted in their minds, to empower them to handle effectively any attempt to disturb this understanding.

People should be taught and trained to understand the hidden motives behind every call for hate and conflict promoted by a politician or religious head — and discard them. Leaders may not shoulder the responsibility of bringing about such lasting change. Therefore, it is only the people who can bring about a transformation. Let this happen for the people to enjoy and experience the benefits of lasting peace.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

Please send your letter to the letterstopioneer@gmail.com. In not more than 400 words. We appreciate your feedback.

NITI Aayog's Push for Genetically Modified Imports Sparks Outrage

NITI Aayog's recommendation to allow genetically modified (GM) agricultural imports under the proposed India-US trade agreement has sparked strong opposition from farmer organisations. This could undermine India's food security and erode the country's agricultural sovereignty

FIRST Column

A few days ago, in a working paper, NITI Aayog recommended, to the Indian Government that the import of genetically modified (GM) agricultural products should be allowed in the currently proposed India-US trade agreement. In this, NITI Aayog has also specifically mentioned crops like maize and soybean. It has also been suggested in the working paper that the Government should also offer opening of the import of those agricultural products also, which are either not produced in India or their production is so low that their import will not have any significant impact on the farmers. In this regard, the working paper gives examples of rice, black pepper, soybean oil, shrimp, tea, coffee, dairy products, poultry, apples, almonds, pistachio etc., whose import has been recommended to be opened.

After the recommendations by NITI Aayog in this working paper, there have been strong reactions from the farmer organisations including the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) and in this regard, NITI Aayog has been vehemently criticised and it has been said that these suggestions are against the interests of the country in general and farmers in particular. For example, the BKS has said that these suggestions are against the interests of the country and the farmers. The BKS also says that NITI Aayog has kneeled before the US, which is not a happy sign.

On the other hand, there is also news that the trade talks between India and America have come to a halt because the Government is not ready to concede the US demand for opening markets for the USA's GM and other agricultural products. In such a situation, this working paper of NITI Aayog is not able to acknowledge the position of the Government. This may also be interpreted that Niti Ayog is trying to impact the anti-GM position of the Government. Both these situations are not good for the country. Previously Also NITI Aayog had Supported GM. This is not the first time that NITI Aayog has advocated GM crops. Earlier also, Aayog, under the vice-chairmanship of Prof Arvind Panagariya, also had released a report in favour of GM crops. At that time too, there was strong opposition to the same.

ASHWANI MAHAJAN

There has been opposition to GM crops in the country for a long time. Proponents of GM have constantly been making efforts in favour of GM. However, due to strong opposition to GM and its solid arguments, GM supporters could not succeed. There are many reasons for their opposition:

The first reason is that most GM crops are herbicide tolerant. That is, when these crops are grown, all the surrounding herbs can be destroyed by using designated herbicides and GM crops are not affected. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has classified glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic to humans". It is worth noting that when these herbicides are used during the production of GM crops, some of their residues remain in those agricultural products and soil, which can cause cancer. Statistics show that in the USA, there are 350 cancer patients per lakh of the population, whereas in India this figure is 100 per lakh. One reason for this is also the excessive use of herbicides in GM crops in the USA.

Although the use and import of GM food products are prohibited in India, due to the shortage of edible oils, the import of edible oils from the US and other countries has been increasing for some time, out of which some amount of GM edible oils is also being imported unknowingly. The Government of India has also accepted this earlier. Due to this, the incidence of cancer in India is continuously increasing. Where there were only 8 lakh cancer patients in 2000, by the year 2024 their number has reached 15 lakh. Consumption of GM edible oils could also be one of the reasons for the same.

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The second reason for the opposition to the import of GM crops is that the production and import of GM crops are not legally allowed in the country, as per the law of the land. In international trade, no dispute can be raised by other partner countries in this regard, while respecting our rules. Under the WTO rules, every country has the right to ban goods coming from other countries given its right to protect the health of its citizens.

As per international rules, it is possible to stop GM products coming from the US from entering the country.

Since Indian farmers are already suffering financial losses due lack of remunerative prices for their produce, if cheap GM products are allowed to be imported, our farmers will suffer, and in such a situation, if farmers stop practising agriculture, the food security of the country itself may be in danger.

Thirdly, the sale of GM products is not possible under the food safety rules framed by the Food Security and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which mandates that food products cannot have more than a threshold limit of GM ingredients. In such a situation, after allowing the import of GM products into the country, they will become part of the food chain in India, which will not only circumvent the rules of the country but will also pose a threat to the health of the citizens.

Apart from the above reasons, a fourth reason, which goes against the import of GM products in the country, is that the GM products whose import has been recommended by the NITI Aayog are generally not actually consumed by humans in the US.

In the US, corn and soya are mostly used either as animal feed or for making ethanol. It is worth noting that in the US, 40 to 50 per cent of GM corn is used as animal feed, 30 to 40 per cent is used in making ethanol and only 10 per cent is used in food processing. Similarly, soya is also mostly used as animal feed. The inclusion of such GM products in the food chain of India is not only harmful to the health of the countrymen but is also an insult to the people of this country.

Although GM products are constantly advocated by the people sitting in NITI Aayog, due to the opposition by the farmers and enlightened scientists in the country and due to the lack of judicial permission in this regard, they are not able to succeed. In such a situation, when the trade agreement with America is under negotiations, and the ban on GM food in India can be used as a shield to protect the interests of farmers and dairy, such recommendations by NITI Aayog are indicative of their indifference towards farmers, and the health of the people and the food security of the country.

Moreover, we need to realise that India exports nearly 50 billion USD worth of agricultural food products, and a major attraction of Indian food is that it carries a non-GM tag.

Moment, GM enters into our food chain, we may lose a major chunk of our export markets, as Middle Eastern countries Europe and many other countries, do not allow the import of GM food products. Perhaps, NITI Aayog fails to factor in this important risk associated with GM imports and production in India.

The Government of India should ignore these recommendations of NITI Aayog and should rather use the ban on GM food as an argument in international trade agreements and as a shield in the trade war while protecting the farmers, dairy, food security and public health of the country. It seems that despite the opposition of most of the farming organisations of the country, GM supporters want to allow the import of GM into the country at any cost. We should understand that once the import of GM is allowed in the country, it will pave the path for bringing GMOs into agriculture. We need to be cautious of any such efforts.

(The writer is National Co-Convenor of Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Ex-Professor, PGDAV College, University of Delhi. Views are personal)

Crushed by Celebration: A mirror to our misplaced priorities

BY VALSON THAMPU & DEBASISH BHATTACHARYYA

At a time when our society is overwhelmed by daily concerns, chaos, and confusion, the Chinnaswamy Stadium tragedy — like so many heartbreaking incidents before it — will soon fade into oblivion. As always, we will return to our routines, and the media will quickly move on to newer topics of debate and distraction. What will remain in the cricketing records, however, is Royal Challengers Bengaluru's (RCB's) long-awaited and well-deserved Indian Premier League (IPL) triumph.

A sobering truth: over 300,000 fans surged into a stadium built for only 35,000, leading to a deadly stampede caused by overcrowding and mismanagement. Eleven young lives were lost — most of them in their twenties — and more than 75 others were injured. In response, each grieving family was offered ₹15 lakh in compensation: ₹5 lakh from RCB and the Karnataka State Cricket Association, and ₹10 lakh from the state Government.

This compensation comes against the backdrop of the IPL's staggering growth — its top 10 franchises reportedly doubled their combined revenue to ₹6,797 crore in FY24, up from ₹3,082 crore the previous year. Stampede deaths are, tragically, not uncommon in our country — most often witnessed at religious gatherings.

Each such incident reveals how desperately we lose ourselves in life's lesser priorities. The recent tragedy at the Bengaluru stadium is no different. A catastrophe born of misplaced priorities should shake us to the core. But will it? In truth, many of us understand that a life anchored in meaningful goals offers deeper fulfilment.

Yet, in the end, it all comes down to priorities: spectacle over substance, fleeting euphoria over value-driven living, short-term gains over long-term vision, and emotional manipulation over true societal upliftment. The culture of our land was once shaped by unquestioning obeisance to royalty — often at the expense of individuality. Though those days are long past, a significant section of our population continues to indulge in hero worship.

This tendency plays out vividly across the three most popular arenas of public life: cricket, cinema, and — most of all — politics, the ultimate theatre of showmanship and hypocrisy. Ironically, these very spectacles distract us from what truly matters.

They push us to devote our time and energy to lesser priorities, drawing us into emotional pageantry while the real work of nation-building remains neglected. Broadly speaking, human beings long for celebration. We seek joy, purpose, and collective euphoria to escape the monotony and burdens of everyday life. This longing is deeply human. That is why we have created rituals of celebration — festivals, ceremonies, and, in contemporary times, grand spectacles like the IPL. Given all this, should we not pause and ask: What is it that we so eagerly celebrate — and what, in truth, does it cost us? We might say there are two kinds of celebrations. The first is born of genuine effort — where sweat, discipline and dedication converge to yield success.

A team's triumph, for instance, is the result of unwavering commitment, strategic planning, and relentless training. The second is what we call "substitute celebration" — a momentary euphoria borrowed from someone else's achievement. It is a mass-manufactured high, served on a platter, requiring nothing from us but our presence and our frenzy.

This is where the tragedy lies.

The massive crowd that descended upon the stadium contributed nothing to RCB's 18-year-long struggle. They were mere supporters — spectators with no real stake, only a desire to bask in borrowed glory. Their connection was purely geographical. Their thrill comes without toil; their applause, without a trace of personal achievement. While the nation's gaze remained fixed on RCB's celebrations, a moment quieter in spectacle yet far more significant — and deserving of national acclaim — unfolded in Karnataka around the same time.

In a landmark moment for Indian literature, Kannada author Banu Mushtaq received the 2025 International Booker Prize for Heart Lamp, a luminous collection of short stories written in the language of her roots. But where was the mass euphoria? The public frenzy? No rallies. Not even a ripple of excitement compared to the deafening jubilation over the IPL.

The recognition was confined to a quiet state Government felicitation, accompanied by a modest cash award of ₹10 lakh each to the author and her translator, Deepa Bhasthi.

This striking difference reveals a deeper, more troubling truth: we are being conditioned to applaud spectacles that bear little relevance to our lives while ignoring achievements that hold the power to genuinely transform society. This is not to diminish — even remotely — RCB's well-earned achievement; they deserve their moment. However, what does this say about our collective priorities when we glorify such victories, yet overlook far more consequential achievements — achievements that bring far greater honour to the nation?

Here lies the hard truth: when life feels monotonous and insignificant, many seek borrowed glory, mistaking it for their triumph. The more hollow life feels, the more desperate the urge to cling to something larger — even if it bears no relation to their own lived experience. Thus, substitute celebration becomes a balm for a bruised identity. Why has cricket become our national mania? It isn't our indigenous sport. It was a colonial pastime, brought by our former rulers. And yet, it eclipses every other game — hockey, kabaddi, athletics, football, tennis. Why? One word: money. Because money has become the status-obsessed deity — lavishly worshipped and desperately invoked as life's ultimate pursuit. Cricket — especially the IPL — is a multi-billion-rupee industry. In 2023 alone, IPL revenue touched ₹11,770 crores, with the BCCI posting a surplus of ₹5,120 crores. Over three years, its cumulative profits crossed ₹15,000 crores.

And yet, the world's richest sports body pays no tax — shielded by a "charitable" status. In stark contrast, research labs and educational institutions are taxed. As cricket-loving masses erupt in cheer, India's research laboratories quietly scramble for funds.

India's national spending on research and development reportedly remains at a modest 0.6 to 0.7 per cent of GDP — well below the global average of 2.6 per cent. In comparison, the United States allocates 3.5 per cent, China 2.4 per cent, and South Korea a remarkable 5 per cent. Strikingly, more than half of India's R&D expenditure continues to come from the Government, with only minimal contributions from the private sector.What message does this send?

It's time we ask the uncomfortable questions.With all due love and reverence for sport, we must still wonder: has cricket — so often exalted to the skies — become a grand distraction in disguise? Why are cricketers deified, their every gesture imitated? Because they sell dreams. They sell brands. They sell products. They sustain illusions. But illusions—however dazzling — do not build nations. They may soothe us, but they do not strengthen us.

In the manufactured euphoria surrounding India's most popular sport claimed 11 lives — not of the rich or powerful but of the nameless, faceless, and easily forgotten. A fulfilled individual does not perish in a stampede — nor joins a frenzy that feeds on illusion.

So yes, let us grieve. But let us also reflect—and change.It's not enough to mourn 11 deaths. We must mourn the deeper tragedy: a society where lives are lost over spectacles that add no real value.

Let us grieve the cultural void — the misplaced priorities, the intellectual neglect — that keeps us cheering from the sidelines of borrowed games is undeniablee be responsible custodians of her greatness? Let this be our moment of reckoning.

(Dr Valson Thampu is author & former Principal of St. Stephen's College, Delhi and Debasish Bhattacharyya is author and former Deputy General Manager, India International Centre, New Delhi. Views are personal)

Blended Learning: Driving educational transformation

We are living in an era of education that is creating enabling circumstances for students and working professionals, and in which blended learning would be a key game-changer. Within India, the implementation of the National Educational Policy of India (NEP) 2020 is going to revamp the teaching-learning process in India. The vision of NEP 2020 is to reimagine the Indian education system aligned with SDG 4, which focuses on equal opportunity, inclusion and equity. Blended teaching-learning environments, Open Educational Resources (OERs) under Creative Commons (CC) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are essential requirements to build a strong Indian education ecosystem across regions and socio-economic strata. An online survey has been conducted among academic communities including students, faculty members, and library professionals to know the perception during the defence of my doctoral thesis. The survey revealed a low level of awareness among students and faculty members about unconventional learning opportunities and resources that leverage IT infrastructure like online courses which provide access to a large number of students to the latest technical skill enhancement courses. Encouragingly and somewhat expectedly, faculty members surveyed displayed a higher awareness of these matters relative to students or even library professionals. It emphasised that when faculty members incorporate OER educational resources into traditional classroom settings, the quality of OER resources improves, hence enhancing the overall quality of online education. The various stakeholders were found to have the view of integrating OERs with the Library Management System (LMS) and having a strong OER policy framework in the HEIs in India. The favourable views of stakeholders towards integrating OERs with LMS should enable the academic community to gain a better understanding of the culture of open-access licenses and blended learning environments. This is therefore an opportunity to speed up blended learning education, particularly among the peri-urban population and disadvantaged communities living in remote areas. As per 'All Indian Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-22', the distance enrolment mode in Bihar and Assam is one of the lowest despite high population growth and the people are keen on higher education and have little access to direct university enrolment within the state. This is important for climate literacy and climate education.

RATAN KUMAR JHA

The actual adoption of OERs by Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) depends upon various factors such as - time and cost, languages, user-friendliness, infrastructure, quality and library support. The evolution of pedagogical practices is linked to the awareness of Open Educational Resources (OERs), which facilitate the integration of OER materials into traditional teaching methods during in-person classes. Furthermore, Governmental support would augment the utilisation and advancement of OERs at higher education institutions and facilitate the bridging of disparities between information-rich and information-poor entities through high-quality open educational resources, aligning with one of the aims of Sustainable Development Goal #4.

The aim of NEP 2020 is to empower students/learners to inculcate diversified skills by permitting them to pursue two degrees simultaneously. In theory, such flexibilities should empower not only students but potentially the entire workforce for future needs while enabling holistic approaches to education. However, this goal cannot be efficiently achieved and scaled up to address current needs through the conventional classroom pedagogy with its attendance mandates. Rather, it requires a softer and digital approach wherein online learning can be brought to par with regular classroom learning.

Consequently, digital educational resources, online education, Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, and virtual reality can interact to address the necessity for a transformation in the education system in the present and future eras. This initiative assists students from diverse backgrounds in comprehending the interdisciplinary nature of education while providing extensive exposure to various tools and strategies of online learning. This exposure aids in the development of knowledge to tackle challenges at local, regional, and global levels, and to devise solutions aimed at achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals in a meaningful manner. Enhance leadership skills in their particular fields and interdisciplinary areas to improve decision-making acumen and also help them to map with all SDGs and national missions of the country. The Government of India's efforts towards establishing a Digital University with the integration of existing OERs-based capabilities such as SWAYAM-Prabha, Swayam, ePG-Paathshaala, Virtual labs and the National Digital Library etc. will be a landmark transformation for the entire Indian education system. Finally, we can play vital roles in integrating existing library management systems, catalogues and resources with online educational platforms to promote lifelong learning in the student community as well as society at large. Effective implementation of a blended learning education system with adequate cybersecurity measures and timely technological upgrades can go a long way in the achievement of SDG 4 by providing 'inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

(The writer is Assistant Librarian at TERI School of Advanced Studies. Views are personal)

The Pioneer
BHOPAL | MONDAY | JUNE 23, 2025

White House releases situation room photos during Iran strike

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Washington

One image shows President Donald Trump staring straight ahead stone-faced, monitoring the mission that took out three Iranian nuclear enrichment sites on Saturday.

In another image, Trump stands as his chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Dan Caine, appears to speak. And whenever Trump is pictured, he is donning a bright red hat blaring his signature campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again."

The series of photos that the White House published on its X account Saturday gives the public a rare glimpse inside the Situation Room — again stirring the intrigue that occurs any time pictures from the highly secret complex are released.

The photos from Saturday portrayed Trump with senior members of his team, including Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio — doubling as Trump's national security adviser — White House chief of staff Susie Wiles and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. They are gathered around a large wooden table in the main conference room of the Situation Room, known as the "JFK Room" — named for the president who was in office when the Situation Room was established.

Trump is always in sharp focus whenever he is pictured, even as other officials in the foreground — like Hegseth or Vance — are softly blurred.

The two officials closest to Trump when he's seated are Vance and Rubio, perhaps underscoring the depth of their influence as Trump deliberated for days whether to strike Iran. But the president isn't always sitting still. At points, Trump was roaming around the room, standing behind his top aide Wiles as Caine appeared to speak.

Some photos show Cabinet members sitting still, intently watching something, while others show a relative flurry of activities —the joint chiefs chairman pointing animatedly, Hegseth conferring with another official.

There are half-empty water bottles on the wooden conference table, along with disposable cups featuring the White House seal. Colourful highlighters. A thick binder in front of Caine. CIA Director John Ratcliffe had a binder and papers in front of him as well, although his documents appeared to be blurred — certainly for security reasons. Senior administration officials not considered principals were also there. In the back in one photo is Dan Scavino, the president's omnipresent deputy chief of staff. In another, White House counsel David Warrington is pictured.

PUTIN HAS NO PLANS TO TALK TO TRUMP: KREMLIN

Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin has no immediate plans to dial his US counterpart Donald Trump after the US bombardment of Iranian nuclear facilities, the Kremlin said on Sunday.

"There are no such plans," Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. However, he added that a call can be quickly arranged in case of need. His remarks came when asked about the possibility of a phone call between Trump and Putin after US strikes on three Iranian nuclear facilities on Sunday. The US attacked Iran's Fordo, Isfahan and Natanz nuclear sites, aiming to destroy the country's nuclear programme. US President Donald Trump warned of additional strikes if Iran retaliates.

Chair of Duma, Committee of Foreign Affairs, lawmaker Leonid Slutsky believes that from a military point, Trump's strike on Iran had no ground or justification. Trump has been dragged into the regime change scenario in Tehran just like in Iraq, Slutsky told reporters. Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev said that Iran will continue its nuclear programme because he believes the US strikes

have not crippled its critical structure. "What the Americans have achieved by hitting three sites in Iran? It seems the critical infrastructure of the nuclear cycle has not suffered at all or slightly," Medvedev, currently deputy chair of the National Security Council, wrote on his Telegram channel.

Democrats demand 'clear answers' from Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
New York/Washington

President Donald Trump must provide American people "clear answers" on his decision to strike Iranian nuclear sites, a democratic senator said, asserting that no president should be allowed to unilaterally march the country into something "as consequential as war".

Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer said the danger of wider, longer and more devastating war had dramatically increased after the US bombed three major nuclear sites — Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan — in Iran, bringing itself into the Israel-Iran conflict. "We must enforce the War Powers Act," he said, calling on all senators on both sides of the aisle to vote for it.

The War Powers Act is a congressional resolution designed to limit the US president's ability to initiate or escalate military actions abroad. Trump must provide the American people and Congress clear answers on the actions taken tonight (Saturday night) and their implications for the safety of Americans, Schumer said.

"No president should be allowed to unilaterally march this nation into something as consequential as war with erratic threats and no strategy. Confronting Iran's ruthless campaign of terror, nuclear ambitions, and regional aggression demands strength, resolve and strategic clarity," he said.

Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Trump ignored the Constitution by unilaterally engaging the American military without Congressional authorisation.

"I join my colleagues in demanding answers from the administration on this operation which endangers American lives and risks further escalation and dangerous destabilisation of the region," she said. Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he was gravely alarmed by the use of force by the US against Iran. Guterres described it as a "dangerous escalation" in a region already on the edge — and a direct threat to international peace and security.

Guterres cautioned that at this perilous hour, it is critical to avoid a spiral of chaos. "There is no military solution. The only path forward is diplomacy. The only hope is peace," he said.

"There is a growing risk that this conflict could rapidly get out of control — with catastrophic consequences for civilians, the region, and the world," the UN chief said, calling on member states to de-escalate and uphold their obligations under the UN Charter and other rules of international law.

Nations react to US strikes on Iran with calls for diplomacy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Dubai

The US strike on Iran fuelled fears that Israel's war with Tehran could escalate to a wider regional conflict, and other countries began reacting on Sunday with calls for diplomacy and words of caution.

President Donald Trump had said Thursday that he would decide within two weeks whether to get involved. In the end, it took just days, and Washington inserted itself into Israel's campaign with its early Sunday attack.

It remained unclear early on how much damage had been inflicted, but Iran had pledged to retaliate if the US joined the Israeli assault. Some have questioned whether a weakened Iran would capitulate or remain defiant and begin striking with allies at US targets scattered across the Gulf region.

Here is a look at reactions from governments and officials around the world.

Lebanon

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said the US bombing could lead to a regional conflict that no country could bear and called for negotiations.

"Lebanon, its leadership, parties, and people, are aware today, more than ever before, that it has paid a heavy price for the wars that erupted on its land and in the region," Aoun said in a statement on X.

"It is unwilling to pay more, and there is no national interest in doing so, especially since the cost of these wars was and will be greater than its ability to bear."

Lebanon's new leadership, which came after Israel and the Hezbollah's militant group's devastating war, has urged that the country avoids being dragged into more conflict as it tries to rebuild itself and pull itself from years-long economic crisis.

Hezbollah has not taken military action against Israel in solidarity with its key ally Iran in the conflict, but has not yet commented on Washington's overnight strikes.

Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said that Lebanon needs to stay away from any possible regional spillover from the conflict. "It is increasingly important for us to adhere strictly to the supreme national interest, which is the need to avoid Lebanon being ... Drawn into the ongoing regional confrontation in any way," Salam said in a post on X.

New Zealand

New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters urged "all parties to return to talks".

He wouldn't tell reporters Sunday whether New Zealand supported President Trump's actions, saying they had only just happened. The three-time foreign minister said the crisis is "the most serious I've ever dealt with" and that it was "critical further escalation is avoided". "Diplomacy will deliver a more enduring resolution than further military action," he said.

Hamas and the Houthis

Both the Houthi rebels in Yemen and Hamas have condemned the US strikes. The Houthis vowed to support Iran in its fight against "the Zionist and American aggression". In a statement on Sunday, the Houthi political bureau called on Muslim nations to join "the Jihad and resistance option as one front against the Zionist-American arrogance".

Hamas and the Houthis are part of Iran's so-called "Axis of Resistance", the collection of pro-Iranian proxies stretching from Yemen to Lebanon that for years gave Iran considerable power across the region.

China

A flash commentary from China's government-run media asked whether the US is "repeating its Iraq mistake in Iran".

The online piece by CGTN, the foreign-language arm of the state broadcaster, said the US strikes mark a dangerous turning point. "History has repeatedly shown that military interventions in the Middle East often produce unintended consequences, including prolonged conflicts and regional destabilisation," it said, citing the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

It said a measured, diplomatic approach that prioritises dialogue over military confrontation offers the best hope for stability in the Middle East.

South Korea

South Korea's presidential office held an emergency meeting on Sunday to discuss the potential security and economic ramifications of the US strikes.

National security director, Wi Sung-lac, asked officials to coordinate closely to minimise any negative impacts on South Korea, emphasising that the top priority is ensuring the safety of the South Korean people and the continuation of their stable daily lives, according to the presidential office.

China condemns attack; calls for ceasefire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Beijing

China on Sunday strongly condemned the US air strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities saying that it is a serious violation of the UN Charter and heightens tensions in West Asia. Beijing also called on "parties to the conflict, Israel in particular", to reach a ceasefire as soon as possible, ensure the safety of civilians, and start dialogue and negotiation.

The US on Sunday attacked Iran's Fordow, Isfahan and Natanz nuclear sites to destroy the country's nuclear programme. US President Donald Trump said that the US military had carried out a "very successful" attack on three nuclear sites and warned of additional strikes if Iran retaliates. China strongly condemns the US attacks on Iran and bombing of nuclear facilities under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency, a spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a comment posted on the ministry's website.

The actions of the US seriously violate the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and international law, and have exacerbated tensions in West Asia, the spokesperson said.

"China calls on the parties to the conflict, Israel in particular, to reach a ceasefire as soon as possible, ensure the safety of civilians, and start dialogue and negotiation," the spokesperson added.

China stands ready to work with the international community to pool efforts, uphold justice and work for restoring peace and stability in West Asia, the spokesperson further said.

Besides being a close ally of Iran, China is also a large importer of Iranian oil. The conflict between Iran, Israel and the involvement of the US concerns China as nearly 45 per cent of its oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz, which Tehran threatens to close, which could lead to major oil supply disruptions. On Thursday, Chinese President Xi Jinping held telephone talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on the Israel-Iran war and called for an immediate ceasefire "especially" by Israel and stop attacks on civilians.

In his first comments on the current Israel and Iran conflict, Xi said a ceasefire is an urgent priority and the use of force is not the right way to resolve international disputes.

US strikes may not be enough to destroy Iran, says Chinese experts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Beijing

China's official media on Sunday criticised US bomb attacks on Iranian nuclear sites as a further step toward the abyss, while experts here said the American bunker-buster bombs used in strikes may not be enough to destroy Iran's nuclear plants hidden deep underground.

The US on early Sunday morning attacked Iran's Fordo, Isfahan and Natanz nuclear sites to destroy the country's nuclear programme. US President Donald Trump said that the US military had carried out a "very successful" attack on three nuclear sites.

According to media reports, B2 stealth bombers were involved in the strikes on Iran's nuclear sites. While China, which on Saturday called for a ceasefire between Iran and Israel to pause the war, is yet to officially react to the American airstrikes, a flash editorial in the state-run China Daily said the US unilateral military strikes targeting Iranian nuclear facilities constitute a reckless escalation and a flagrant violation of international law. Such unilateralism undermines the rules-based international order and sets a dangerous "might-makes-right" precedent, it said.

The strikes have only served to push the situation further toward the abyss, it said. Chinese experts said the true effectiveness of the American operation remains unclear, and that the strikes may not have been sufficient to completely destroy Iran's underground nuclear facilities.

Fordo's nuclear facility lies nearly 100 meters underground, making it extremely difficult to destroy completely with just one or two strikes, even using bunker-buster bombs, Li Zixin, an assistant research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies, told state-run Global Times. Zhang Junshe, a military affairs expert, shared a similar view. He said the first wave of US strikes may not have been sufficient to destroy Iran's underground nuclear facilities. For example, the Fordo site lies 90 meters beneath solid rock, making it highly resistant. While Israel sees it as a key target, it lacks the means to strike it effectively. Zhang said the US uses B-2 bombers armed with 30,000-pound GBU-57 bunker busters, which are believed to be able to penetrate only about 65 meters. In theory, two bombs used in sequence might be needed, but this tactic has never been publicly tested, so the success of the initial strike remains uncertain, he said.

Referring to the Iranian official's assertion to the BBC that Iran "didn't suffer a major blow because the materials had already been taken out,", he said, "This further demonstrates the difficulty for the US military to completely destroy Iran's nuclear materials."

Regardless of whether the Fordo facility was fully destroyed in the first wave of strikes, it is clear that the US airstrikes inflicted substantial damage to Iran's nuclear infrastructure, he said.

Attack pushed situation in West Asia further toward abyss: Media

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Bejing

The US bombing on three Iranian nuclear sites has only served to push the already fragile situation in West Asia toward the abyss, China's official media said on Sunday, even as Beijing did not offer immediate comment on tensions in the region.

Meanwhile, experts here said the American bunker-buster bombs used in strikes may not be enough to destroy the nuclear plants hidden deep underground.

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Pakistan under fire for nominating Donald Trump for Nobel Peace Prize

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Lahore

The Pakistan Government, as well as the country's military establishment, have come under severe criticism from netizens on social media for recommending US President Donald Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Ishaq Dar, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, has formally sent a letter to the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in Norway, recommending the US President for the award for his "decisive diplomatic intervention" during the recent India-Pakistan conflict. Soon after the announcement, netizens on X began chiding the Pakistani government for pleasing its "master", the US president.

The criticism intensified after the US attacked Iran's Fordo, Isfahan and Natanz nuclear sites to destroy the country's nuclear programme. US President Trump warned of additional strikes if Iran retaliated. "Pakistanis, beware! After an attack on Iran, PM Shehbaz might not only award President Trump the Nobel Peace Prize, but also bestow upon him the Tamgha-e-Jurat (Medal of Courage), Tamgha-e-Shujaat (Medal of Bravery), Tamgha-e-Basalat (Medal of Valour), Tamgha-e-Imtiaz (Medal of Excellence), and perhaps even the Nishan-e-Haider (Pakistan's highest military honour)," a user said on X on Sunday.

Pakistani journalist Ameer Abbas said: "The same Trump that PML-N senior leader Khawaja Saad Rafique once compared to Genghis Khan and Hitler — last night, the very same PML-N Government nominated that 'Genghis Khan and Hitler' for the Nobel Peace Prize. Who is orchestrating such shameful and cowardly decisions?"

"How far will Nawaz Sharif and Asif Zardari go to please the powers that be — throwing the nation, the system, parliament, the Constitution, democracy, and political traditions into the abyss?" he asked.

Political analyst and columnist Raheeq Abbasi sarcastically said that the very Donald Trump whom Westerners were protesting against for war crimes was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

"Is there any sense of honour or humanity in those who nominated Trump, who vetoed the Gaza ceasefire resolution 8 times, for the Nobel Prize?" he asked. "Thank you, Hafiz Sahib (Army Chief Gen Asim Munir)," he said in another post. Another netizen said the government could have nominated Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu for the prize, but thankfully settled for Trump. "It's also possible Netanyahu has been shortlisted for the next category."

One Jarjees Ahmad said: "We are recommending someone involved in the massacre of Palestinians for a Nobel Peace Prize, and at the same time, we claim to stand with Iran. What a supreme level of hypocrisy."

Major (R) Asim accused the military establishment of making decisions at its will and said the "uncrowned kings" of the country were "ready to sell out the nation whenever they please". Another social media user, Aamir Khan, said: "Shahbaz Sharif, Asif Zardari, Nawaz Sharif, and Asim Munir have nominated Donald Trump.

US urges citizens to exercise increased caution while travelling to India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
New York/Washington

The US has issued an advisory for its citizens travelling to India, urging "increased caution" due to crime and rape, and advising them not to travel to certain parts of central and eastern parts of the country due to terrorism. The travel advisory issued last week states that "rape is one of the fastest growing crimes in India" and violent crimes, including sexual assault, happen at tourist sites and other locations.

It added that terrorists, who target tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets/shopping malls and government facilities, may attack with little or no warning.

The advisory issued on June 16 further adds that the US Government has limited ability to provide emergency services to its citizens in rural areas, which stretch from eastern Maharashtra and northern Telangana through western West Bengal.

The advisory also tells US citizens not to travel to parts of Central and East India "due to terrorism." "Maoist extremist groups, or "Naxalites," are active in a large area of India that spans from eastern Maharashtra and northern Telangana through western West Bengal," the advisory said.

Attacks against officers of the Indian Government continue to occur sporadically in the rural parts of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand that border with Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra.

‘Robotaxi’ to give Tesla lift after boycotts, sales plunge: Musk

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Elon Musk promised in 2019 that driverless Tesla “robotaxis” would be on the road “next year,” but it didn’t happen. A year later, he promised to deliver them the next year, but that didn’t happen either.

Despite the empty pledges the promises kept coming. Last year in January, Musk said, “Next year for sure, we’ll have over a million robotaxis.”

Would you settle for 10 or 12?

Musk appears to be on the verge of making his robotaxi vision a reality with a test run of a small squad of self-driving cabs in Austin, Texas, starting Sunday. Reaching a million may take a year or more, however, although the billionaire should be able to expand the service this year if the Austin demo is a success.

The stakes couldn’t be higher, nor the challenges.

While Musk was making those “next year” promises, rival Waymo was busy deploying driverless taxis in Los Angeles, San Diego, Austin and other cities by using a different technology that allowed it to get to market faster. It just completed its 10 millionth paid ride. Boycotts related to Musk’s politics have tanked Tesla’s sales. Rival electric vehicle makers with newly competitive models have stolen market share. And investors are on edge after a $150 billion stock wipeout when Musk picked a social media fight with a US president overseeing federal car regulators who could make the robotaxi rollout much more difficult. The stock has recovered somewhat after Musk said he regretted some of his remarks.

Tesla shareholders have stood by Musk over the years because he’s defied the odds by building a successful standalone electric vehicle company — self-driving car promises aside — and making them a lot of money in the process. A decade ago, Tesla shares traded for around $18. The shares closed Friday at $322. Musk says the Austin test will begin

modestly enough, with just 10 or 12 vehicles picking up passengers in a limited area. But then it will quickly ramp up and spread to other cities, eventually reaching hundreds of thousands if not a million vehicles next year.

Some Musk watchers on Wall Street are sceptical.

“How quickly can he expand the fleet?” asks Garrett Nelson, an analyst at CFRA. “We’re talking maybe a dozen vehicles initially. It’s very small.”

Morningstar’s Seth Goldstein says Musk is being classic Musk: Promising too much, too quickly.

“When anyone in Austin can download the app and use a robotaxi, that will be a success, but I don’t think that will happen until 2028,” he says. “Testing is going to take a while.”

Musk’s tendency to push up the stock high with a bit of hyperbole is well known among investors.

In 2018, he told Tesla stockholders he had “funding secured” to buy all their shares at a massive premium and take the company private. But he not only lacked a written commitment from financiers, according to federal stock regulators who fined him, he hadn’t discussed the loan amount or other details with them.

More recently, Musk told CNBC in May that Tesla was experiencing a “major rebound” in demand. A week later an auto trade group in Europe announced sales had plunged by half.

Musk has come under fire for allegedly exaggerating the ability of the system used for its cars to drive themselves, starting with the name. Full Self-Driving is a misnomer. The system still requires drivers to keep their eyes on the road because they may need to intervene and take control at any moment.

Federal highway safety regulators opened an investigation into FSD last year after several accidents, and the Department of Justice has conducted its own probe, though the status of that is not known. Tesla has also faced lawsuits over the feature, some resulting in settlements, other dismissed. In one case, a judge ruled against the plaintiffs but only because they hadn’t proved Musk “knowingly” made false statements. Musk says the robotaxis will be running on an improved version of Full Self-Driving and the cabs will be safe.

He also says the service will be able to expand rapidly around the country. His secret weapon: Millions of Tesla owners now on the roads. He says an over-the-air software update will soon allow them to turn their cars into driverless cabs and start a side business while stuck at the office for eight hours or on vacation for a week. “Instead of having your car sit in the parking lot, your car could be earning money,” Musk said earlier this year, calling it an Airbnb model for cars. “You will be able to add or subtract your car to the fleet.”

Musk says Tesla also can move fast to deploy taxis now because of his decision to rely only on cameras for the cars to navigate, unlike Waymo, which has gone a more expensive route by supplementing its cameras with lasers and radar.

“Tesla will have, I don’t know,” Musk mused in an conference call with investors, “99 per cent market share or something ridiculous.” Given Waymo’s head start and potential competition from Amazon and others, dominating the driverless market to that extent could be a reach.

But Dan Ives, a Wedbush Securities analyst and big Musk fan, says this time Musk may actually pull it off because of Tesla’s ability to scale up quickly. And even sceptics like Morningstar’s Goldstein acknowledge that Musk occasionally does gets things right, and spectacularly so.

He upended the car industry by getting people to buy expensive electric vehicles, brought his Starlink satellite internet service to rural areas and, more recently, performed a gee-whiz trick of landing an unmanned SpaceX rocket on a platform back on earth.

“Maybe his timelines aren’t realistic,” Goldstein says, “but he can develop futuristic technology products.

Israel recovers remains of three more hostages from Gaza

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tel Aviv

The Israeli military said on Sunday that it has recovered the remains of three hostages held in the Gaza Strip. At least four Palestinians were killed in an Israeli airstrike and 22 wounded while waiting for humanitarian aid, according to a local hospital.

The military identified the remains as those of Yonatan Samerano, 21; Ofra Keidar, 70; and Shay Levinson, 19. All three were killed during Hamas’ October 7, 2023, attack into Israel that ignited the ongoing war. The militant group is still holding 50 hostages, less than half of them believed to be alive.

The military did not provide any details about the recovery operation, and it was unclear if the airstrike was related to it.

“The campaign to return the hostages continues consistently and is happening alongside the campaign against Iran,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement. Kobi Samerano said in a Facebook post that his son’s remains were returned on what would have been Yonatan’s 23rd birthday.

War in Gaza rages on as new front opens with Iran

Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251 people in the October 7 attack. More than half the hostages have been returned in ceasefire agreements or other deals, eight have been rescued alive and Israeli forces have recovered dozens of bodies.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed over 55,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which has said that women and children make up more than half of the dead. It does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. Four people were killed on Sunday in an airstrike in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza,

A tent camp for displaced Palestinians stretches among the ruins of buildings destroyed by Israeli bombardments in west of Gaza City on Saturday PTI

according to Al-Awda Hospital, where the bodies were brought. It said another 22 people were wounded while waiting for aid trucks.

Palestinian witnesses and health officials say Israeli forces have repeatedly opened fire on crowds seeking desperately needed food, killing hundreds of people in recent weeks. The military says it has fired warning shots at people it said approached its forces in a suspicious manner.

Separately, World Central Kitchen, the charity run by celebrity chef Jose Andres said it had resumed the distribution of hot meals in Gaza for the first time in six weeks after shutting down because of Israel’s blockade, which was loosened last month amid fears of famine.

The October 7 attack and Israel’s offensive ignited a chain of events leading to Israel’s surprise attack on Iran last week. The United States entered the war overnight with attacks on three Iranian nuclear sites.

The Hostages Families Forum, the main organisation representing families of the hostages, has repeatedly called for a deal to release the remaining captives.

“Particularly against the backdrop of current military developments and the significant achievements in Iran, we want to emphasize that bringing back the remaining 50 hostages is the key to achieving any sort of victory,” it said in a statement Sunday. Hamas has said it will only release the remaining hostages in return for more Palestinian prisoners, a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

Netanyahu has rejected those terms, saying Israel will continue the war until all the hostages are returned and Hamas is defeated or disarmed and sent into exile.

Nigerian police arrest 22 suspects after deadly bus attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Abuja

Police arrested on Sunday 22 suspects accused of a mob attack that left at least a dozen people dead two days ago in central Nigeria.

A passenger bus was mobbed in the Mangu area of the state of Plateau, according to a police statement released Saturday.

The passengers travelled from Zaria, in north-western Kaduna state, about 400 kilometres from Mangu and were on their way to a wedding when the attack happened Friday night after they lost their way.

Police said 21 were rescued from the “angry mob,” and that some passengers were killed, without providing further details. Nigeria’s police, a federal authority, often provide lower death tolls than local authorities and witnesses.

Meanwhile, rights group Amnesty International said 12 people were instantly killed and 11 others injured in the attack.

“Authorities must ensure that the actual persons behind the horrific attack are brought to justice,” the rights group said in a statement on Saturday.

Plateau Gov. Caleb Mutfwang said law enforcement should ensure justice is served and implement measures to prevent any recurrence.

Nigeria’s north-central region has been plagued by increasing violence, driven by farmer-herder clashes and attacks on communities by armed gangs.

At least 100 people were killed in a deadly gun attack on a village in neighbouring Benue state about two weeks ago.

Japan, South Korea mark 60 years of ties

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tokyo

Japan and South Korea are marking the 60th anniversary of the normalisation of their diplomatic relations Sunday. The two Asian powers, rivals and neighbours, have often had little to celebrate, much of their rancour linked to Japan’s brutal colonial rule of Korea in the early 20th century. Things have gotten better in recent years, but both nations — each a strong ally of the United States — now face political uncertainty and a growing unease about the future of their ties.

Here’s a look at one of Northeast Asia’s most crucial relationships, from both capitals, by two correspondents from The Associated Press.

The view from Seoul

South Korea’s new liberal president, Lee Jae Myung, is determined to break sharply from the policies of his disgraced predecessor, Yoon Suk Yeol, who now faces a trial on charges of leading an insurrection over his imposition of martial law in December.

Relations with Japan, however, are one area where Lee, who describes himself as a pragmatist in foreign policy, may find himself cautiously building on Yoon’s approach.

Before his removal from office in April, the conservative former president tried to repair relations with Japan. Yoon wanted to also tighten the countries’ three-way security cooperation with Washington to counter North Korean nuclear threats.

In 2023, Yoon announced a South Korea-funded compensation plan for colonial-era forced laborers. That decision caused a strong backlash from victims and their supporters, who had demanded direct payments from Japanese companies and a fresh apology from Tokyo.

Yoon’s outreach boosted tourism and business ties, but there’s still lingering resentment in South Korea that Japan failed to reciprocate Seoul’s diplomatic concession by addressing historical grievances more sincerely.

While advocating for pragmatism and problem-solving in foreign policy, Lee has also long criticized Japan for allegedly clinging to its imperialist past and blamed that for hurting cooperation between the countries.

Some experts say the stability of the countries’ improved ties could soon be tested, possibly around the August 15 anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japanese colonial rule at the end of World War II, when Lee is expected to publicly address the nation’s painful history with Japan.

Some in Seoul want Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba to mark the anniversary with a stronger statement of remorse over Japan’s wartime past to put bilateral ties on firmer ground.

Athens’ theatre hosts final festival season before closing

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Athens (Greece),

For visitors to Athens, the ancient Odeon of Herod Atticus is the must-see theatre at the foot of the Acropolis. Artists revere it for the majestic stage where legends have performed. And for the Greek capital’s residents it is the touchstone of their summer cultural calendar.

The Odeon of Herod Atticus recently opened the 70th season of the annual Athens Epidaurus Festival, a cherished annual tradition for many Greeks. But this edition marks the last before the theatre that’s more than 18 centuries old shuts down for maintenance and restoration work that is expected to last at least three years. While theatre and dance grace its stage, music is its cornerstone. Renowned artists who have performed here include Luciano Pavarotti, Frank Sinatra, Coldplay, and Greece’s own Maria Callas.

Its closure will be a profound loss for spectators who have long enjoyed first-class performances under the stars in one of the world’s most iconic open-air theatres.

“When (people) think of the Athens cultural scene, everyone thinks of the festival and Herodion,” said Katerina Evangelatos, the festival’s artistic director since 2019, calling the theatre by its commonly used Greek name. “It has become a synonym of the festival. It is the heart of the festival.” When the Greek National Opera opened this season’s festival with Giacomo Puccini’s opera Turandot, it erected temporary structures behind the Roman-era odeon’s arched walls to expand available space for performers’ dressing rooms. The permanent underground facilities weren’t enough.

The production also needed more space inside the venue to accommodate the scale of the production. To meet the opera’s scenic and casting demands, a crew constructed a wooden, balcony-like platform to partially extend over the orchestra pit. This adaption allowed space for the large cast and complex staging, including the emblematic scene in which the emperor, Turandot’s elderly father, is ceremonially rolled out in his towering throne to watch suitors attempt to solve his daughter’s riddles - at the risk of execution. The scene requires significant simultaneous on-stage presence by multiple performers.

It’s like entering a temple

Giorgos Koumendakis, the Greek National Opera’s artistic director, describes the Herod Atticus Odeon as “a strained, fatigued space” which still commands widespread veneration.

“People who are conscious, cultivated, educated - who understand what this space is, its historical significance, the importance of the festival, and the history of the Greek National Opera - respect it deeply and enter it almost reverently,” said Koumendakis. “It’s like entering a temple - a temple of art - and it truly has an impact. I can see it from the singers and the orchestra, too. When they come here, they genuinely want to give their all.”

During previous restoration and conservation projects, the Herod Atticus Odeon had surfaces cleaned, cracks filled with grout and new seating installed. This time, the scope of the work will depend on findings from the studies still underway.

Culture Minister Lina Mendoni said that although the venue’s closing date is certain, at the end of summer, its reopening is not. “This will depend on the problems that the studies will reveal,” she said in an interview to Greek radio station Skai last month. “What is certain is that at least three years will be needed.”

A long intermission

The closure of the Herod Atticus means the Athens Epidaurus Festival will need to consider alternatives for the next few years. Evangelatos reflected on the festival’s 70 years, noting that it began during Greece’s turbulent postwar years of political division and economic hardship. “It’s a miracle of survival and artistic legacy,” she said.

On the festival’s opening night, the backstage area was abuzz with final preparations, with wigs styled, masks adjusted and costumes touched up.

Soprano Lise Lindstrom, who starred as Turandot, took in the gravity of the setting.

“It’s an absolutely magical atmosphere here. To be able to stand on the stage and look directly up and see the Acropolis is a little bit mind-blowing, I have to admit,” she said. “And then also to look out and see all the people sitting there and just being so absorbed into the performance.”

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby notified to the General Public that my clients Mahesh Chand Garg son of Shri Radha Krishna and Manju Garg wife of Shri Mahesh Chand Garg, resident of L-140/394, L-Block, Gali No. 11, Mahipalpur Extension, New Delhi-110037 have evicted / disowned / debarred their daughter Ms. Ekta Garg due to her misbehavior and disobedient behavior towards my clients. She has no claim or right on any property held by or belonging to my clients. My clients no longer have any social, political, economic and familial relationship with her and any person having any relationship with Ekta Garg after this notice will do so entirely at his own risk and responsibility. My clients or their properties will not be responsible in any manner.

Prem Prakash (Advocate)
207, Plot No. 1, MLU Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-110075, Phone:-9818988399

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Salman Shah S/o Aslam R/o A-48 gali no.1 Friday market baccha colony Pappu Colony Ghaziabad-201005 Have changed name from Salman to Salman Shah.
PD(2312)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

General Public is hereby informed that Environment Clearance to the “Proposed Waste to Energy Thermal Power Project of capacity 30 MW by M/s Jindal Urban Waste Management (Bawana) Limited located at DSIIDC Industrial Area, Sector 5, Village Bawana, Sub-district Narela, District North Delhi, Delhi” has been accorded by Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC) vide File No: J-13012/04/2023-IA.I (T) on 18.06.2025. The copy of the Environment Clearance is available with MoEF&CC and Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) and may also be seen at MoEF&CC website: https://parivesh.nic.in

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to all that (1) SHRI VIJAY BHUSHAN BHARDWAJ S/o Late Shri Satya Dev Bhardwaj & (2) MRS. USHA VIJAY BHARDWAJ W/o Shri Vijay Bhushan Bhardwaj, are the joint, absolute and exclusive owners of Entire Second Floor of Freehold Built-up Property bearing No. 23, Sadhna Enclave, New Delhi, along with proportionate undivided, indivisible and impartible ownership rights in the plot of land measuring 1000 Sq. Yds., [say ‘SAID PROPERTY’] by virtue of Sale Deed dated 03.11.2009, duly registered as Document No. 14361, in addl. Book No. I, Volume No. 9615, on pages 109 to 134, on 04.11.2009, in the office of the Sub-Registrar-V, New Delhi.That the said Sale Deed dated 03.11.2009 is lost/ misplaced and the same is not traceable, for which necessary information has been lodged with the Crime Branch, Delhi Police, vide LR No. 2938086/2025 dated 21.06.2025. General public is hereby informed that in case any one finds the same, then he/she is requested to return the same to the undersigned. Further anybody else having any sort of right or interest or claim in the Said Property on the basis of the said Sale Deed or otherwise is required to put forth his/her/its claim with the undersigned within 14 days from the date of publication of this notice, failing which the same shall not be binding. Kindly contact on garv_malhotra@yahoo.co.in or send objection vide registered post on Unit No 507, Second Floor, Deep Plaza Building Opposite District & Session Court Gurugram, 122001. ADV GARV MALHOTRA
ENROLLMENT NO D/2709/2015

PUBLIC NOTICE

Dr. Anmol Rattan Sidhu and Smt. Sonika Intend to purchase /construct on Residential Plot no B-13 Block BP Kalkaji Delhi Measuring 1060 Sq Yard allotted to/registered in the name of M/s Grewal Estates Pvt Ltd through Sh.Ved Prakash at Kalkaji Delhi. They have been informed by way of DDR No. 2025/019530 dated 21- 6-2025 that the original Allotment Letter No./Sale Deed No. 2552 dated 08.04.2013 registered at Delhi for the said property has been lost. Dr.Anmol Rattan Sidhu and Smt.Sonika Intend to purchase/construct on the said property and wish to create charge viz mortgage or otherwise, on the said property for a loan facility from State Bank of India, Sector 17 Main Branch Chandigarh, Branch Code 00628.The DDR has already been filed with the police in respect of the above. In case any party has any Claim towards the relevant property(ies), the same should be lodged with the intending party and also with the above stated branch of State Bank of India, within 15 days from publication of this notice.

कार्यालय नगर निगम, हरिद्वार

पत्रांकः– 146 / सी०सी०(न०नि०हरि०) / 2025–26, अल्पकालीन दर निविदा सूचना दिनांकः– 21.06.2025

नगर निगम हरिद्वार द्वारा मा० महापौर महोदया व नगर आयुक्त महोदय नगर निगम हरिद्वार की स्वीकृति उपरान्त कांवड मेला–2025, चार धाम यात्रा व अन्य स्नानपर्वो के दृष्टिगत निगम क्षेत्रांतर्गत सफाई व्यवस्था सुचारू एवं प्रभावी रूप से किये जाने हेतु वित्तीय वर्ष 2025–26 में निम्नानुसार सफाई उपकरण, कीटनाशक रसायन, अन्य उपकरण क्रय किये जाने हेतु www.uktenders.gov.in दर निविदा आमंत्रित करता है जिसका विवरण निम्नानुसार हैः–

S. No.	Scheduled/Information	Date	Time
1	Date of Online Publication	23.06.25	10:00 AM
2	Document Download Start Date	23.06.25	11:00 AM
3	Online Bid Submission Start Date	23.06.25	12:00 PM
4	Online Bid Submission End Date	02.07.25	12:00 PM
5	Offline Submission of Hard/Orignal copy of document End date	02.07.25	01:00 PM
6	Bid Opening Date	02.07.25	02:00 PM

उक्त तिथियों व निविदा में किसी भी प्रकार का कोई संशोधन मात्र www.uktenders.gov.in पर प्रेषित किया जायेगा।

सामग्री का विवरण निम्नानुसार हैः–

क्र०सं०	सामग्री का नाम	क्र०सं०	सामग्री का नाम	क्र०सं०	सामग्री का नाम
1	बुझा हुआ चूना द्वितीय ग्रेड	8	रंगीन चूना (पीला)	15	फिनायल सफेद
2	ब्लीचिंग	9	रंगीन चूना (हरा)	16	फलोरोसेंट जैकेट
3	टेमीफोस (एण्टी लार्वा)	10	झाडू सीख वाली डण्डा सहित	17	गम बूट
4	साबुन	11	मास्क यूस एण्ड थ्रो	18	मैलाथियान टैक्नीकल 50 प्रतिशत
5	फावडी बिन्टा सहित	12	गलब्स रबड	19	पायरेथरम एक्सट्रैक्ट 2 प्रतिशत
6	तसले (18 इंच)	13	गलब्स यूस एण्ड थ्रो	20	डेल्टामैथ्रीन 2.5 प्रतिशत
7	रंगीन चूना (लाल)	14	फिनायल काला	21	साईफोथीन 5 ई०सी०

उप नगर आयुक्त,नगर निगम हरिद्वार

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NOTICE INVITING TENDER Date: 23.06.2025

E-tenders under two Bid System (Unpriced & Priced) are invited as per the following details:-

NIT No.	Tender Description	Cost of EMD (₹)	Due Date & Time of Submission	Date & Time of Opening
CMC/BY/25-26/RS/AS/6	Establishment of Rate Contract for Execution of 1.1KV,11KV & EHV Schemes in BYPL	2.5 Lakhs	14.07.2025 11:00 Hrs	14.07.2025 11:30 Hrs
CMC/BY/25-26/RS/AS/7	Revival of 11KV Protection & Repairing of Relays of 11KV RMU'S & LTACB in BYPL	7.6 Lakhs	14.07.2025 15:00 Hrs	14.07.2025 15:30 Hrs

Cost of each Tender Document: ₹1,180/-
For details in respect of Equipment/BOM/Services, Qualifying requirements, Terms & conditions, purchase/submission of tender documents, corrigendum etc. please visit our website www.bsesdelhi.com --> BSES YAMUNA POWER LTD--> Tenders-->Open Tenders.
Head (Contracts & Materials)

Regd.Off: BSES Yamuna Power Ltd, Shakti Kiran Building, Karkardooma, Delhi-110032 | CIN: U40109DL2001PLC111525
Website: www.bsesdelhi.com

The Pioneer
BHOPAL | MONDAY | JUNE 23, 2025

Iran-Israel war escalation to impact India's trade: Experts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
New Delhi

Any further escalation of the ongoing war between Iran and Israel will have wider implications for India's trade with West Asian countries, including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen, say experts. They said that the war has already started impacting India's exports to Iran and Israel.

The US attacked three sites in Iran early Sunday, inserting itself into Israel's war aimed at destroying the country's nuclear programme in a risky gambit to weaken a longtime foe that prompted fears of a wider regional conflict as Tehran accused Washington of launching "a dangerous war".

"We are in for big trouble now because of this war. It will have a cascading effect on India's trade with West Asian countries," Mumbai-based exporter and founder chairman of Technocraft Industries India Sharad Kumar Saraf said.

Saraf said that his company is also holding back consignments to both these countries. Technocraft Industries manufactures drum closures, nylon and plastic plugs, capseal closures, and clamps.

"There will be a cascading effect of this war," he added.

Another exporter said that the Indian traders community is already reeling under the impact of the Israel-Hamas conflict and involvement of Yemen-backed Houthis' attack on shipping vessels in the Red Sea. Due to that, shipping lines from India were taking consignments from the Cape of Good Hope, encircling the African continent.

Now, because of the Iran-Israel war, another key trading route — the Strait of Hormuz — is getting affected.

"This route will hit the movement of oil tankers. I have a feeling that oil tankers will find new routes but that will push crude oil prices. It will have implications on inflation as crude oil prices are the mother of all prices," Saraf said. Think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that a wider regional escalation could threaten India's much larger trade with the broader

Firefighters survey the site of a direct missile strike launched from Iran in Tel Aviv in Israel on Sunday PTI

West Asian region, including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen, where Indian exports total $8.6 billion and imports stand at $33.1 billion.

"Any disruption to shipping lanes, port access, or financial systems in this corridor would severely impact India's trade flows, inflate freight and insurance costs, and introduce fresh supply chain risks for Indian businesses," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

India's exports to Iran stood at $1.24 billion in FY2025, with key items including Basmati rice ($753.2 million), banana ($53.2 million), soya meal ($70.6 million), Bengal gram ($27.9 million), and tea ($25.5 million). Imports stood at $441.8 billion last fiscal.

With Israel, India's exports stood at $2.1 billion and $1.6 billion in imports in 2024-25.

He said that the ongoing US-Israel strikes on Iran and the threat of wider conflict could significantly disrupt this trade.

Payment channels already strained by US sanctions may face further blockages, while heightened shipping risks in the Gulf could drive up insurance costs and delay shipments. "Perishable exports like rice, bananas, and tea are especially vulnerable. A prolonged conflict could dampen Iranian demand and squeeze Indian exporters, particularly in the agricultural sector," Srivastava said.

GTRI said that a key concern is the potential disruption to the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly 60-65 per cent of India's crude imports transit. "Any blockade or military escalation in this vital maritime corridor would severely impact India's energy security, drive up oil prices, and trigger inflationary pressures at home," it added. India enjoys deep historical, cultural, and economic ties with Iran, once a major crude oil supplier and views Iran's Chabahar Port as a strategic gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia, providing crucial connectivity while bypassing Pakistan. Yet India also maintains robust relations with the US, Israel, and Gulf Arab states, each now directly or indirectly involved in the unfolding confrontation, Srivastava said.

India's crude oil and half of its LNG imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has threatened to close. This narrow waterway, only 21 miles wide at its narrowest point, handles nearly a fifth of global oil trade and is indispensable to India, which depends on imports for over 80 per cent of its energy needs.

The Strait of Hormuz, which lies between Iran to the north and Oman and the United Arab Emirates to the south, serves as the main route for oil exports from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and the UAE. Many liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments, especially from Qatar, also pass through the strait.

According to the Delhi-based economic think tank, any closure or military disruption in the Strait of Hormuz would sharply increase oil prices, shipping costs, and insurance premiums, triggering inflation, pressuring the rupee, and complicating India's fiscal management.

The present conflict that began with an attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, has brought cargo movement through Red Sea routes to a halt due to attacks by Houthi rebels on commercial shipping. Last year, the situation around the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial shipping route connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, escalated due to attacks by Yemen-based Houthi militants.

Around 80 per cent of India's merchandise trade with Europe passes through the Red Sea, and substantial trade with the US also takes this route. Both these geographies account for 34 per cent of the country's total exports. The Red Sea Strait is vital for 30 per cent of global container traffic and 12 per cent of world trade.

Based on the tariff war impact, the WTO has already said that global trade will contract 0.2 per cent in 2025 as against the earlier projection of 2.7 per cent expansion.

Coal India arm to bring two new mines in financial year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Ranchi

Coal India arm Central Coalfields Ltd plans to bring two new coal mines into production in the current financial year which would ramp up its capacity by 10-12 million tonnes per annum, a top official said on Sunday. The move assumes significance as Central Coalfields Ltd (CCL) aims to cross 110 million tonnes production in the current financial year and 150 million tonnes by 2030.

"We have planned to open two new mines this year," CCL Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) Nilendu Kumar Singh told reporters here. The company plans to begin the production at Kotre Basantpur block (coking coal mine) with a peak rated capacity of 5 million tonnes (MT) by October. In the case of Chandragupt open cast project (non-coking coal) with a capacity of 15 million tonnes per annum (MTPA), the production is expected to start by March 2026. The company produced 87.5 million tonnes of coal in FY25, the highest ever in the history of CCL. The CMD said CCL needs to begin the preparation from now to achieve the target of 150 million tonnes by 2030. The company will focus on increasing the capacity of existing mines and expediting the pace of bringing the new mines into production to achieve the 150 MT target. CCL currently operates 35 open-cast mines and three underground mines in 14 command areas across eight districts of Jharkhand.

Singh said that the company also plans to come up with four new washeries with a combined capacity of around 14 million tonnes in another two to three years. A coal washery cleans raw coal by removing impurities like ash, rocks, and other unwanted materials, improving its quality for various applications, particularly for use in power plants and steel mills.

The company at present has five coal washeries under operation (four coking coal and one non-coking coal), the CMD said.

Banks roped in to set up DPIP to curb digital frauds

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
New Delhi

In a bid to rein in the increasing incidence of digital payment frauds, major public and private sector banks have been roped to develop Digital Payment Intelligence Platform (DPIP) as a Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) under the supervision and guidance of the RBI.

The proposed platform seeks to bolster fraud risk management by facilitating real-time intelligence sharing and gathering, thereby preventing fraudulent digital transactions, sources said.

According to sources, the institutional structure of the proposed entity would be created with the help of both public sector and private sector lenders as fraud is a common monster.

Earlier this month, a high-level meeting in this regard was convened to finalise the structure of the platform where senior bank officials, RBI officials and other stakeholders were present.

Since the issue is one of the top agenda for both the government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), sources said the platform should become operational in the next few months.

Nearly half of India's power generation capacity non-fossil

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
New Delhi

Nearly half of India's installed power generation capacity of a total of 476 GW is non-fossil fuel-based as of June, but coal-based thermal electricity plays a critical part, according to government data.

According to a Government explainer on energy and environment issued on Sunday, India's total installed power capacity has reached 476 GW as of June 2025.

Non-fossil fuel sources now contribute 235.7 GW (49 per cent) of total capacity, including 226.9 GW renewable and 8.8 GW nuclear, it stated.

As of June 2025, India's renewable energy includes 110.9 GW of solar and 51.3 GW of wind power installed capacity. In addition to the installed capacity, 176.70 GW worth of RE projects are under implementation, with 72.06 GW under bidding stages.

It explained that thermal power remains dominant, accounting for 240 GW or 50.52 per cent of installed capacity. It noted that India's energy sector is heavily reliant on non-renewable thermal sources, which together account for the largest share of the country's electricity generation capacity.

Among them, coal alone contributes over 91 per cent of the total thermal energy, highlighting its critical role in powering the nation, it pointed out. The country is successfully balancing the twin goals of meeting rising electricity demand and promoting sustainability. Power shortages dropped from 4.2 per cent in 2013-14 to 0.1 per cent in 2024-25.

Per capita electricity consumption in India rose by 45.8 per cent to 1,395 kWh in 2023-24 from 957 kWh in 2013-14. India's power sector is among the most diversified in the world, with generation from conventional sources like coal, gas, hydro, and nuclear, as well as renewable sources such as solar, wind, biomass, and small hydro, it stated.

With rising electricity demand, India continues to expand its energy capacity to support economic growth and sustainability goals.

India has set an ambitious target of having 500 GW of renewable energy by 2030.

COFFEE EXPORTS UP 125 PER CENT IN LAST 11 YEARS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Bengaluru

The country's coffee exports have jumped about 125 per cent to $ 1.8 billion in the last 11 years on account of a series of measures taken by the Coffee Board of India, according to the central Government data.

The exports stood at over $ 800 million in 2014-15. It was $ 1.28 billion in 2023-24 and $ 1.14 billion in 2022-23, the data showed. Europe remains the top destination for the country's coffee exports. The major countries which import the commodity from India include Italy, Germany, Belgium, Middle East nations, Korea, and Japan.

The major initiatives taken by the Coffee Board of India to push the exports include online issuance with digital signature of registration-cum-membership certificate (RCMC), export permit, certificate of origin, regular interaction with the exporters to discuss bottlenecks and addressing those issues, and providing regular global market information and market intelligence.

The other export promotion steps included transit/freight assistance to maximise export earnings by enhancing the market share of value-added coffee. The Government provides ₹3 per kg for export of value-added products; ₹2 for shipments of high value green coffees to far-off high value markets such as the US, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Finland, Norway, and Denmark.

To support the business community for value addition, the board supports individuals, self-help groups, and growers. It provides 40 per cent cost of machinery with a ceiling of Rs 15 lakh for installation of roasting, grinding and packaging machinery. "These measures are helping us to reach newer markets," Vidi's Coffee Founder Divya Shree G S said.

Further, according to Coffee Board CEO and Secretary M Kurma Rao, in India coffee is cultivated under a diverse canopy of native and mixed shade trees and this system supports biodiversity, ensures soil and water conservation, enhances carbon sequestration and sustains livelihoods for small and marginal farmers by offering opportunities for crop diversification.

Veteran Coffee grower from Coorg Bose Mandana said India is one of the few countries which is promoting shade grown coffee.

बैंक ऑफ इंडिया Bank of India BOI

Zonal Office: MIG 15, Rajeshwar Building, Shivnagar, Damoh Road, Jabalpur- 482002
Email: jabalpur.ard@bankofindia.co.in

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrowers(s) and Guarantors(s) that immovable properties as described in column 3 in table hereunder mortgaged/charged to Bank of India (Secured Creditor), the constructive/physical possession of which has been taken by the **Authorised Officer of Bank of India**, (Secured Creditor), will be sold on **"As is where is" "As is what is" and "Whatever there is"** on **25.07.2025** for recovery of the amount(s), as stated in column 4 of the table hereunder, due to Bank of India (the secured creditor) from the Borrowers and Guarantors as mentioned in column 2 of the following table. The reserve price and earnest money deposit will also be applicable as stated in the following table in column 6 & 7 respectively:

Date of E-Auction - 25/07/2025, Time: 11.00 AM to 5.00 PM

Name of Branch (1)	Name of Borrower/ Guarantors (2)	Description of Property & Owner Name (3)	Dates of Demand Notice U/s 13(2) & Amount (4)	Date of Possession/Type of Possession (5)	Reserve Price (6)	Earnest Money Deposit (7)
Branch: Damoh	**Borrower/Mortgagor- 1. Ms. Ritu Sharma D/o Mr. Dayal Chand Sharma,** Futera Ward No. 02, Narsingh Mandir Ke Pass, Damoh, Tehsil and District- Damoh (M.P.)- 470661 **Guarantor- 2. Amit Sharma S/o Late Mr. Dayal Chand Sharma,** Futera Ward No. 02, Narsingh Mandir Ke Pass, Damoh, Tehsil and District- Damoh (M.P.)- 470661	**(A)** Futera Ward No. 02, District- Damoh, P.C.- 16, Sheet No. 15, Halka No. 16/31, Plot No. 585/1, 585/4, Area- 1575 sq.ft. Registry Dated 31.03.2015, Pustak No. A1, Granth No. 6275, Page No. 51/56, Serial Number- 4065, admeasuring 1575 sq.ft. standing in the name of **Miss Ritu Sharma D/o Mr. Dayal Chand Sharma. Bounded-** East- Kumari Ritu Sharma Ka Bhawan, West- Moolchand Soni Ka Bhawan, North- Mahakali Chourahe Se Narsingh Mandir Link Road, South- C.P. Tiwari Ka Bhawan. **(B)** Futera Ward No. 02, District- Damoh, P.C.- 16, Sheet No. 15, Plot No. 585/1, 585/4, New No. 585/7, Area- 1023 sq.ft. Registry Dated 08.07.2010, Pustak No. A1, Granth No. 5316, Page No. 1/7, Serial Number- 1196, admeasuring 1023 sq.ft. standing in the name of **Miss Ritu Sharma D/o Mr. Dayal Chand Sharma. Bounded-** East- Bhagwati Tiwari Ka Bhawan, West- Shiv Narayan Ka Makan, North- Mahakali Chourahe Se Narsingh Mandir Link Road, South- Chand Prakash Tiwari Ka Makan.	10-10-2024 ₹ 13,59,617/- Interest + Other Charges	24-04-2025 Symbolic	₹ 35.70 Lacs	₹ 3.57 Lacs
Branch : Khurai	**Borrower / Mortgagor - 1. M/s. Vinayak Infratech Prop. Mr. Kailash Singh Parihar**	Khasra No. 525/4, P.H. No. 25, Tagore Ward, Khurai, Dist. Sagar (M.P.) Standing in the name of Kailash Singh Parihar.	22-11-2022 ₹ 16,19,740.75/- Interest + Other Charges	12.05.2023 Symbolic	₹ 23.19 Lacs	₹ 2.31 Lacs
Branch : Khurai	**Borrower / Mortgagor - 1. M/s. R.P Cement Works. Prop. Mr. Pushpendra Pandey Guarantor : Shri Sanjay Dubey S/o Shri Santosh Dubey**	Khasra No. 16/1, P.H.No. 35 area 2024 sq.mtr. Vill. Khajra Harchand Khurai Distt. Sagar (M.P.) Standing in the name of Pushpendra Pandey. bounded as under : East-Kachha Road, West-Land of Mr. Chhabra, North - Land of Hari Ram, South - Land of Niraj Kant Sharma.	29-07-2024 ₹ 14,48,347.24 Interest + Other Charges	27.12.2024 Symbolic	₹ 14.41 Lacs	₹ 1.44 Lacs

DETAILS OF ENCUMBRANCE KNOWN TO THE SECURED CREDITOR: NOT KNOWN

TERMS OF CONDITIONS- 1. Auction Sale / Bidding would be only through "Online Electronic Bidding Process" through the website **https://baanknet.com**
2. If required, there shall be unlimited extension of 10 minutes each. Auction would commence on reserve price and bidders shall improve their offers in multiples of **Rs. 10,000/-** for all above property(ies). The sale shall not take place at or below reserve price.
3. The sale shall be subject to the Terms & Conditions prescribed in the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 and to the following further conditions.
4. The intending bidders should get themselves registered on the above mentioned website. The should make their own inquiries regarding any statutory liabilities, arrears of property tax, electricity dues etc. relating to the above property(ies) before participating in the auction sale process. The properties are being sold along with all existing and future encumbrances, whether known or unknown to the Bank. The Authorized Officer shall not be responsible in any way for any third party claims / rights.
5. The particulars of Secured Assets specified in the Schedule here in above have been stated to the best of the information of the Authorized Officer, but the Authorized Officer shall not be answerable for any error. misstatement or omission in this proclamation.
6. The Authorized Officer is not bound to accept the highest bid or any bids or any or all bids and reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the bids without assigning any reason thereof, and very, modify and waive any condition of sale in his absolute discretion. The Authorised Officer reserves the right to withdraw the above e-Auction without assigning any reason.
7. For detailed term and conditions of the sale, please refer **https://baanknet.com, www.bankofindia.co.in** or Contact: **Shri Rajesh Maurya, Chief Manager ARD, Jabalpur Zone (Mob. No. 7376391515).**
8. This publication is also a 15/30 days notice to the above mentioned borrower(s) / Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagor(s).
9. It shall be the3 responsibility of the successful bidder to remit the TDS @ 1% as applicable u/s 194-IA of Income Tax Act if the aggregate of the sums credited or paid for such consideration is Rs. 50 Lakhs or more. TDS should be filed online b filling form 26QB & TDS Certificate to be issued in form 16 B. The purchaser has to produce the proof of having deposited the income tax into the government account.

Date: 22.06.2025, Place: Jabalpur

Authorized Officer, BANK OF INDIA

Salads: Evergreen Boosters

BY ABHI SINGHAL

People whenever they hear about greens want to run away from them. But a tasty way of eating the greens is by incorporating a salad into your daily diet. It is more than just a healthy habit. It is a transformative lifestyle choice. Packed with essential nutrients, salads offer a variety of benefits that promote overall wellbeing.

Rich in Fibre

Fibre is essential for digestive health and helps you stay full for longer. Salads, especially those with raw vegetables and fruits, are a rich source of dietary fibre. Regular intake can support weight management, lower cholesterol levels, and regulate blood sugar.

Nutritious Way for Taste

Salads make it easier to meet your daily intake of fruits and vegetables. Leafy greens like spinach deliver essential vitamins and minerals while supporting a clean, wholesome diet. Antioxidants found in raw vegetables also help combat free radicals, reducing your risk of chronic diseases.

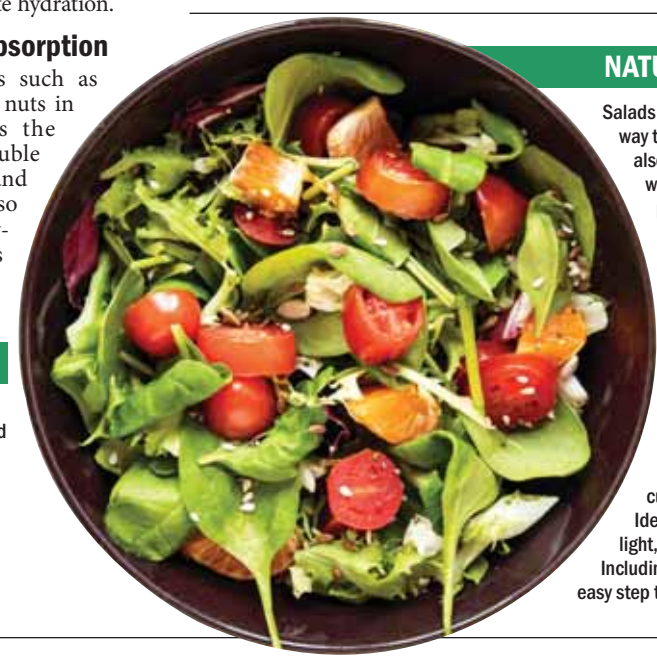
Keeps You Hydrated

Many fruits and vegetables in salads have high water content. Cucumbers, lettuce, tomatoes and watermelon can be over 90% water, contributing significantly to your daily fluid intake. Staying hydrated is crucial for numerous bodily functions, like kidney health, and improving skin complexion. Additionally, water-soluble vitamins such as B-complex and vitamin C require adequate hydration.

Boosts Nutrient Absorption

Including healthy fats such as olive oil, avocados, or nuts in your salad enhances the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins like A, D, E, and K. These good fats also assist in absorbing powerful phytochemicals that protect against disease.

SALADS HAVE LONG BEEN HAILED AS A STAPLE OF HEALTHY EATING. PACKED WITH A COLOURFUL MIX OF VEGETABLES, FRUITS AND GOOD FATS, THEY'RE MORE THAN JUST A SIDE DISH — THEY'RE A POWERHOUSE OF NUTRITION



NATURALLY REFRESHING

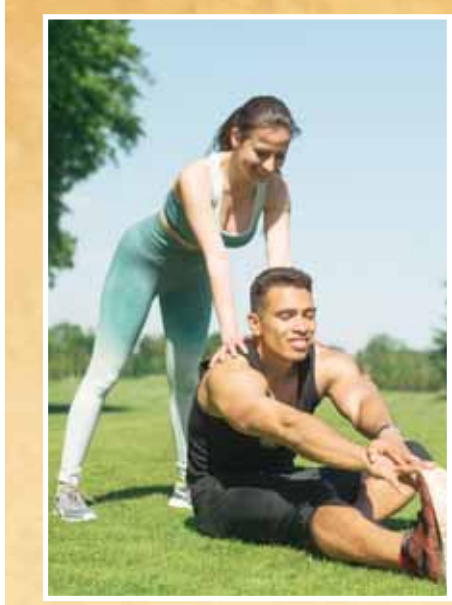
Salads are a nutrient-rich, low-calorie way to support overall health and are also naturally refrenshing. Packed with fibre, they aid digestion, promote fullness, and help manage weight. Leafy greens and colourful vegetables provide essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support immunity and reduce disease risk.

Adding healthy fats like avocados or olive oil improves absorption of fat-soluble nutrients and boosts heart health. Salads also keep you hydrated, as many ingredients like cucumber and lettuce are water-rich. Ideal for hot climates, salads offer a light, refreshing meal option. Including them regularly in your diet is an easy step towards balanced, clean eating.

SUPPORTS WEIGHT LOSS

Starting your meal with a salad can help limit your calorie intake during the rest of the meal. The fibre and water content in salads contribute to satiety, which means you feel satisfied sooner and are less likely to overeat. Leafy greens are nutrient-dense yet low in calories, making them a perfect foundation for those aiming to lose or maintain weight. Be mindful of calorie-dense toppings like cheese, creamy dressings, and croutons.

FIT FACT



Struggling with sleep? Try regular exercise. Physical activity helps you to balance your natural sleep-wake rhythm and reduces stress. They both are the two key factors for a good night's rest. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate movement most days, but avoid intense workouts close to bedtime. Sleep well, stay well!

TRIVIA

Did you know? Watching a comedy can curb post-meal glucose spikes. One study revealed that viewing a humorous TV show reduced participants' blood sugar rise after eating. Moreover, laughter therapy has been shown to lower cardiovascular complications in individuals with type 2 diabetes. Keep calm and carry on the truly laughing daily!

Breast cancer awareness, women health at centre stage

Bringing sensitivity and strength to the screen, the series ShowStopper addresses hardships of a life dealing with breast cancer, writes ABHI SINGHAL

In the world we live in where having a perfect body figure is the need of the hour, medical ailments like the breast cancer generally are not spoken openly with confidence. Like a female suffering from it and loosing a part of her body from which she is identified as the same is traumatising. Cinema possesses a unique power that sets it apart from other forms of communication. Its ability to convey complex ideas in a simple manner makes it an exceptionally effective tool, especially in reaching audiences that may not have access to formal education. When used responsibly, visual media becomes a compelling medium for raising awareness, promoting dialogue, and fostering social understanding on important issues.

One such upcoming series, ShowStopper, is set to premiere on OTT platforms and is poised to make a significant impact. The web series aims to spark crucial conversations around a subject that is often overlooked or considered taboo — women's health, specifically the topic of breasts and bras. Through its narrative, ShowStopper addresses the pressing national concern of breast cancer, shedding light on the importance of early detection, awareness, and care. By tackling these themes within a socially engaging and family-oriented framework, ShowStopper seeks to normalise discussions that have long remained confined to hushed tones. It underscores the role of media in not only entertaining but also educating and empowering audiences.

In doing so, it exemplifies how storytelling can contribute meaningfully to public health awareness and bring about positive cultural shifts.

The cast that includes Digangana Suryavanshi in the lead, playing the girl suffering from breast cancer, she said, "It (breast cancer and the physical appearance after that) is someone's life journey and I am proud to play this role as I got an opportunity to relate to so many people in so many ways."

The Web Series 'ShowStopper' will carry its nationwide awareness campaign of DIISHA one of its flagship digital healthcare pilot project for an unprecedented healthcare transformation.

SOMEONE'S LIFE

Digangana Suryavanshi in the lead, playing the girl suffering from breast cancer, she said, "It is someone's life journey and I am proud to play this role as I got an opportunity to relate to so many"

Invisible Damage of Smoking & Alcohol

TEAM VIVA

Tobacco, alcohol, and vaping don't just take a toll on one's general health; they also damage reproductive health in both men and women. It is the right time to give up on these vices to preserve your fertility

Fertility problems are rampant in women and men. They are not only affected due to age, stress, or reproductive health problems, but also smoking, drinking, and vaping. These vices are often seen as personal choices, but their impact on fertility is not been discussed. Many people believe that reducing or pausing these habits only when planning a pregnancy is enough. However, it is necessary to completely avoid these vices as these substances can cause damage to the reproductive organs, hormones, and even the health of future offspring. Whether you're actively trying to conceive or planning to start a family in the future, don't wait; just get over these vices.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 15 per cent of infertility cases worldwide are linked to smoking and alcohol use. A 2023 study in the Indian Journal of Public Health found that over 25 per cent of men with fertility issues reported regular tobacco or alcohol consumption.

Smoking is a major threat to fertility. "Smoking affects both male and female fertility. In women, it speeds up the loss of eggs, damages the fallopian tubes, and increases the risk of miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy. It also affects the uterus, making it harder for a fertilised egg to implant. For men, smoking lowers sperm count, reduces motility (movement), and causes DNA damage in sperm, which can lead to miscarriage and birth defects. Passive smoking is equally dangerous for reproductive health. It is better to quit now.

ACCORDING TO THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO), MORE THAN 15 PER CENT OF INFERTILITY CASES WORLDWIDE ARE LINKED TO SMOKING AND ALCOHOL USE

A 2023 STUDY IN THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH FOUND THAT OVER 25 PER CENT OF MEN WITH FERTILITY ISSUES CONSUMED REGULAR TOBACCO OR ALCOHOL

Many people believe that quitting smoking or vaping just a few months before trying to conceive is enough to undo any harm, but that's a dangerous myth. In reality, smoking and vaping can have long-term effects on fertility for both the men and women," said Dr Manju Gupta, Senior Consultant — Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, Motherhood Hospitals.

Dr Neha Tripathi, fertility specialist, Nova IVF Fertility said, "Smoking, alcohol, and vaping lead to hormonal imbalance, reduce egg quality, and irregular menstrual cycles, making it difficult to conceive.

Smoking damages the fallopian tubes, while alcohol interferes with ovulation and may cause long-term hormonal imbalances. Vaping, often considered a safer option, contains chemicals that harm the uterine lining and egg development.

Women planning a pregnancy or even thinking about future fertility should quit these habits completely. In men, these substances reduce sperm count, damage sperm DNA, and lower testosterone levels, all of which impact male fertility. Regular exercise, a healthy diet, and timely help for quitting these substances are key to preventing reproductive problems."

IT'S TIME TO QUIT ALL THAT YOU THOUGHT WAS NOT DAMAGING

To protect and preserve fertility, both men and women must completely quit smoking, alcohol, and vaping - not just temporarily when planning a pregnancy, but for the long term. These habits disrupt hormones, damage reproductive organs, reduce egg and sperm quality, and can harm future offspring. Passive smoking is equally harmful. Experts recommend adopting a healthy lifestyle that includes regular exercise, a balanced diet, and seeking timely medical support to quit these vices. Preventive steps today can make a significant difference in ensuring better reproductive health.

The Pioneer
BHOPAL | MONDAY | JUNE 23, 2025

Akshay Bhatia picks another eagle, as Fleetwood leads Travelers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Cromwell (USA)

Akshay Bhatia landed his second eagle in as many days during his steady round of 2-under 68 at the Travelers Championship here to be placed on tied 37th spot.

Bhatia, an outside contender for a Ryder Cup place, is now down two places from overnight T-35.

While the Indian-American Hero golfer, Bhatia, had an eagle and three birdies against three bogeys, another golfer with an Indian connection, Aaron Rai shot a superb 7-under 63, including four birdies in the last five holes.

Rai is Tied-14th and had rounds 68-73 on the first two days. Bhatia, 34th in world rankings, is trying to secure a place in Top-30 to play the Tour Championship for the second straight year. Meanwhile, Tommy Fleetwood, seeking his first PGA TOUR victory in his 159th start, took advantage of great scoring conditions, to shoot 7-under 63 to take a three-shot lead going into the final round of the Travelers Championship.

His bogey-free 63 included five birdies and one eagle on Number 13. Fleetwood has seven DP World Tour titles and three Ryder Cups, but is looking for a maiden PGA Tour title. He has 41 top-10 finishes, the most of any player without a win on TOUR since 1983. He also has five runner-up finishes on TOUR.

Three of Fleetwood's four top-10s this season have come in Signature Events — at The Genesis Invitational (T5), RBC Heritage (7th) and Truist Championship (T4). He was also T4 at Charles Schwab Challenge. Russell Henley carded a bogey-free 61 to be tied second.

He also tied career-low rounds on TOUR and he seeks his second victory of the season and also second Signature Event victory. The 2023 Travelers Championship winner Keegan Bradley carded seven birdies en route to a bogey-free 63.

World Number 1 and 2024 Travelers Championship winner Scottie Scheffler opened the third round with a triple-bogey seven and shot 72.

Amandeep, four other Indians make cut in Czech Ladies Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Beroun (Czech Republic)

India's Amandeep Drall birdied her final two holes as she rallied to an even-par second round and be tied in 12th place after two rounds of the Tipsport Czech Ladies Open here.

Amandeep, who had a superb 8-under 64 in the opening round, added a 72 in round two to make the cut along with four other Indians.

The next best Indian was Hitaashee Bakshi (68-70) at 6-under and in T-32 place. Diksha Dagar (71), Tvesa Malik (69) and Sneha Singh (68) also fought hard to make the cut on the line at T-61. A total of 71 players, including two amateurs, made the cut.

Swiss golfer Kim Metraux produced a career-best round of 63 (-9) to storm into sole lead on 13-under par.

In second spot was Esme Hamilton, the rookie Englishwoman teeing up in only her sixth LET event. She replicated her first round 66 (-6) to remain in contention.

Amandeep had a rough day as she was 2-over through 16 holes with one birdie and three bogeys before she rallied with birdies on the last two holes.

Diksha finished earliest among the Indians with 71 that had four birdies and three bogeys. Later, Hitaashee had a steady 2-under 70 with four birdies and two bogeys on day two. Tvesa and Sneha kept flirting with the cut before landing birdies towards the end. Tvesa picked birdies on two of the last three holes and, despite a bogey on the closing ninth, made the cut.

Sneha, an Order of Merit winner in her home circuit, played bravely to birdie three times in the last five holes to cross over the cut line.

Metraux lit things up from the get-go, carding three birdies in a row on the 10th, 11th and 12th.

Indian women eye fresh start in Asian Cup Qualifiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Chiang Mai (Thailand)

More than three years after a COVID outbreak in the team derailed their campaign in the last AFC Women's Asian Cup, India will make a fresh bid for a place in the continental showpiece, with Mongolia being their first test in the Qualifiers here on Monday.

The upcoming edition of the premier tournament will be held in Australia next year.

It wouldn't be wrong to says that the continent's top competition has been somewhat ill-fated for the Blue Tigresses in the last few decades.

India last made it to the AFC Women's Asian Cup in 2003. And when they hosted the tournament in 2022, a COVID outbreak in the side meant that India had to withdraw after only the first game and the results were declared void.

While India do have three podium finishes in the erstwhile Asian Women's Championship (runners-up in 1980 and 1983, and third place in 1981), they have not achieved anything for more than 40 years.

Besides the opener against Mongolia, India (ranked 70th) will face Timor Leste (ranked 158th) on June 29, Iraq (ranked 173rd) on July 2 and hosts Thailand (ranked 46th) on July 5, at the Chiang Mai Stadium.

Only the group winners will qualify for the final tournament in Australia in March 2026, which will also serve as a qualifier for the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2027.

Apart from Thailand, India have never faced the other three Group B opponents before.

"We don't have much information about Mongolia, Timor Leste and Iraq. They haven't played any matches recently. We do know a bit about Thailand. They played two games against Nepal in the last window, and one of them was closed doors," said head coach Crispin Chettri.

"I tried different variations in our friendlies (against Uzbekistan). I tested many combinations in midfield, involving Sangita (Basfore), Karthika (Angamuthu), Ratanbala (Nongmaithem), Grace (Dangmei) and Anju (Tamang)."

While India lost both friendlies 0-1 against Uzbekistan on May 30 and June 3, it was significant preparation for the all-important qualifiers.

The Blue Tigresses, who had trained in Bengaluru since the start of May, travelled to Chiang Mai a week before the first game, and have had four full training sessions so far, including an intra-squad match.

"I think coming to Chiang Mai earlier has helped us to acclimatise to the weather conditions and adjust to time difference. The weather here is more humid than in Bengaluru. The training ground is great and we're shaping up well for the forthcoming matches. We also played a full 90-minute match among ourselves on Thursday," said Chettri.

With an average age of 23.6 years, Chettri has named a fairly young squad consisting of a lot of newcomers. But that's not to say there's a dearth of experience.

For a Malavika, there's a Dangmei Grace, for a Priyadharshini, there's an Anju Tamang, for a Phanjoubam Nirmala Devi, there's a Ngangbam Sweety Devi.

Definitely no politics, but open to coaching India: Ganguly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Kolkata

Former skipper Sourav Ganguly has categorically ruled out entering politics, but says he is not averse to coaching the Indian team.

Ganguly, who will turn 53 this July, was the Team Director of Delhi Capitals between 2018-19 and 2022-24. "I never really thought about it because I got into different roles," Ganguly said in a free-wheeling podcast interview when asked if he would like to coach the Indian team.

"I finished (competitive cricket) in 2013 and then became Board (BCCI) President," said Ganguly, noting that his biggest contribution to Indian cricket in that role was to promote women's cricket.

When suggested that he could have contributed more by becoming India coach, Ganguly said: "We'll see what the future holds. I'm just 50 (53), so let's see what happens. I'm open to it. We'll see where it goes," the veteran cricket. One thing he is not getting into is politics.

Asked if he would like to join a political party ahead of West Bengal assembly elections in 2026, Ganguly said with a smile: " I am not interested." What if he is promised the state chief minister's post? "I am not interested," he repeated. Ganguly was all praise for incumbent coach Gautam Gambhir, who he feels, has picked up pace as coach since Champions Trophy victory in Dubai earlier this year.

"Gautam (Gambhir) is doing a good job. He started off a little slow, losing to Australia and New Zealand, but he picked up with the Champions Trophy. This is going to be a big series (vs England)," Ganguly said.

Asked how astute a tactician Gambhir is, Ganguly praised the southpaw's passion and his ability to express his opinions in a straight forward manner.

"I haven't seen him from very close in this role, but I know he is very passionate. I haven't observed his strategies closely because I haven't worked with him as a coach.

"He's very straightforward, he sees things clearly, and he's very open about what he feels, about the team, players, people, everything. From the outside, you can tell he's a very transparent person - what you see is what you get."

Ganguly recollected his playing days when he found Gambhir to be very respectful towards senior.

"I've played with him. He was a great guy with a lot of respect for me and the senior players. Even now, I can see he is extremely passionate about his job."

Pant plays numbers game beautifully: Shastri

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Leeds

Rishabh Pant "plays the numbers game beautifully and has his own computer" whose working only he knows, feels former India head coach Ravi Shastri after the swashbuckling wicketkeeper-batter's audacious and entertaining show against England in the opening Test here.

Pant hit an audacious 134 off just 178 balls with the help of 12 fours and six sixes to entertain the Headingley crowd with his unorthodox batting on Day 2. The 'falling paddle', the post-century somersault, there was majesty and madness in equal measure in Pant's memorable knock.

"Outrageous. He (Pant) plays the numbers game beautifully, plays the way he wants. He will block for a bit and then shift gears," Shastri said on Sky Sports. "He has his own computer and only he knows how it works. That's his USP. That's what puts bowlers under pressure and makes him box office, a real entertainer and a match winner," said the former India all-rounder about Pant's 'method to madness'.

The 27-year-old Pant's knock — his seventh Test century and second since a horrific car crash in late 2022 that could have cost him his life — was a joy to watch, and Shastri tried to explain his somersault after the hundred.

"That's why there was that celebration. Thanking the man upstairs for giving him the opportunity," said Shastri.

"I think his recovery from that accident had a lot to do with the frame of his body and being mid-20s. When I saw him in hospital, it wasn't a pretty sight."

Most batters would not have dared to play a big shot when on 99 but Pant is made of different stuff as he carted off-spinner Shoaib Bashir for a one-handed six over mid-wicket to bring up his ton.

David Syd Lawrence passes away at 61

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Gloucester (England)

INDIA, ENGLAND PLAYERS WEAR BLACK ARMBAND IN RESPECT OF DAVID

Leeds: India and England players wore black armbands to pay their respect to former fast bowler David Lawrence, who passed away on Sunday. He was 61.

Lawrence, who was affectionately known as 'Syd', played five Tests (18 wickets) and a lone ODI (4 wickets) for England between 1988 and 1992. Lawrence, the first British-born Black cricketer to represent England, was battling motor neurone disease (MND) since last year.

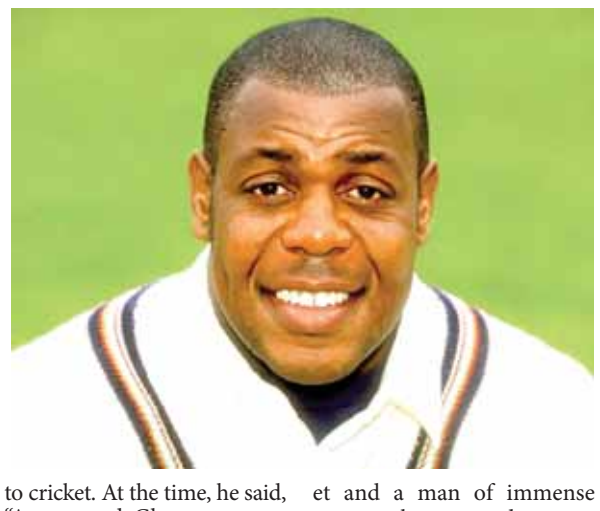
"Both teams are wearing black armbands to pay their respects to former England Cricketer, David 'Syd' Lawrence, who has sadly passed away. There was a moment's applause before the start of play on Day 3," the BCCI said in a statement.

Lawrence was diagnosed with the disease in 2024, a degenerative condition that affects the brain and nerves, leading to muscle wastage and there is no known cure to it.

He had also authored a book 'Syd's Voice' to create awareness about MND and was involved in charity to raise funds for other patients.

A Gloucestershire legend, Lawrence amassed 515 wickets from 185 First-Class matches and 155 wickets from 113 List A games.

A promising bowler with extreme pace of his time, Lawrence's international career ended when he suffered a serious kneecap injury while bowling against New Zealand at Wellington in 1992.



David Syd' Lawrence, the first British-born Black cricketer to play for England, has died. He was 61.

Lawrence's family made the announcement on Sunday with a statement through Gloucestershire, where Lawrence was the club president. He announced a year ago he had motor neurone disease.

"It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Dave Lawrence MBE following his brave battle with motor neurone disease," the family said. "'Syd' was an inspirational figure on and off the cricket field and no more so than to his family who were with him when he passed. "A proud Gloucestershire man, Syd took on every challenge with everything he could and his final contest with MND was no different. His willingness to encourage and think of others right up to the end was typical of the man he was." He played five tests for England from 1988-92, taking 18 wickets. His international career prematurely ended at 28 when he broke his knee cap after falling awkwardly when running in to bowl against New Zealand on the final day of a test in Wellington.

A strapping fast bowler who was renowned for being one of the quickest on the English county circuit, Lawrence was beginning to establish himself in tests and a five-for against the West Indies in 1991 helped England seal a series-levelling win at the Oval, with Viv Richards among his haul.

Lawrence also played a sole one-day international against the West Indies at Lord's in 1991, taking 4-67. For Gloucestershire, he grabbed 625 wickets in 280 matches. The England and India teams gave Lawrence a moment's silence on Sunday in Leeds before the third day's play in the first test. Lawrence became a competitive bodybuilder following his retirement and he was also a night-club owner in Bristol. After he detailed his experiences of racism during his playing career, Gloucestershire issued an unreserved apology in September 2021, and six months later he became the county's first Black president.

Only last week, Lawrence received an MBE in King Charles III's birthday honors for outstanding services to cricket. At the time, he said, "As a proud Gloucester man who achieved his dream to play for England on the cricket field, it means a great deal to me and to my family who have supported me with all their love during some difficult times." I have always put my heart and soul into any challenge I have faced and that is how I have approached things since my diagnosis with motor neurone disease. He was fundraising to fight MND as recently as Friday, when Gloucestershire honored him during a Twenty20 game. Lawrence was also recently named an honorary life vice president of the England and Wales Cricket Board, and chair Richard Thompson paid tribute.

"David Syd' Lawrence was a true trailblazer of English cricket and a man of immense courage, character, and compassion," Thompson said on Sunday. "His impact on the game extended far beyond the boundary ropes. As a fast bowler, he thrilled crowds with his pace and passion. As a leader and advocate, he broke barriers and inspired change, becoming a powerful voice for inclusion and representation in our sport.

"Even in the face of his illness, David showed extraordinary strength and dignity, continuing to uplift others with his resilience and spirit. He leaves behind a legacy that will endure in the hearts of all who love cricket. Our thoughts are with his family, friends, and the entire cricketing community at this time.

Minjee Lee has 1st bogey-free round at windy Women's PGA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Frisco (USA)

Minjee Lee knows how to play in windy conditions having growing up in Australia and now living in North Texas. She also has experience winning majors.

The two-time major champion is in position for another one after the first bogey-free round for anyone during the wind-swept KPMG Women's PGA Championship. Her 3-under 69 in the third round Saturday pushed her into the lead, four strokes ahead of Jeeno Thitikul. "I'm constantly practicing in windy conditions... It is windy, but not this windy, and it's really consistent as well," Lee said. "Yes, I can hit a knock-down shot, but you also have to play the wind. You have to play so much extra out here that you have to be a little more creative." Lee was at 6-under 210 after beginning the round three strokes behind Thitikul, the world's No. 2-ranked player who led alone at the end of each of the first two days. Lee went ahead to stay with a 2-foot par at the 405-yard 12th hole when Thitikul had her second consecutive bogey, and fourth of the day on way to a round of 76. "She played absolutely an `A' game for sure," Thitikul said. "I never saw her miss today at all." When Lee did miss, she was 7-for-7 scrambling.

Far from tree-lined Sahalee outside Seattle where the Women's PGA was last year, Fields Ranch East at PGA Frisco is much more open and exposed to the ever-present Texas wind that was the strongest it had been all week. There were gusts of more than 30 mph Saturday, with much the same forecast for Sunday. Temperatures were again in the mid-90s.

Nelly Korda, the world's top-ranked player, described the conditions as "just brutal" after her round of 72 that began with back-to-back bogeys. She finished with five birdies and five bogeys and is tied for sixth at 2-over 218. Lee and Thitikul, seeking her first major title, were the only players still under par and will play together again Sunday. Lexi Thompson (75), after a triple-bogey start, was tied for third at 1 over with Hye Jin Choi (72) and Miyu Yamashita (73).

Thitikul, from Thailand, had the only birdie Saturday among the 78 players on the 172-yard, par-3 eighth hole, which generally plays downwind and where only 29 per cent of the tee shots all week have stayed on the green. That 13-foot birdie was her first of the day and got her to 5 under, two strokes ahead of Lee. But Thitikul's lead was gone after back-to-back bogeys on the back side. She pushed a 4-foot par chance past the hole at the 383-yard 11th, her first miss inside 5 feet this week. Then her drive at the 417-yard 12th hole went way right into a penalty area.

Lee, who won the 2022 U.S. Women's Open and 2021 Evian Championship in France, was steady Saturday with eight consecutive pars before a 4-foot birdie at the 487-yard ninth hole. Her other birdies were an 18-footer at the 515-yard, par-5 14th and a 1 1/2-foot at the bunker-surrounded 236-yard par 4 15th hole. While acknowledging that a four-stroke lead "feels really big," Lee isn't taking anything for granted. "Obviously, major Sunday is a different story. This is round three, so I think, you know, I have to still dig deep and post a score, even with a four-shot lead," she said. "So I'm just going to put my head down and just work on the things that I can do and do it to the best of my ability."

Thitikul three-putt from 50 feet at No. 14 was her third bogey in a four-hole stretch. "Definitely frustrated about the result today a little bit, like not really making putts like the first two days," Thitikul said. "But like still on the positive side that, just two players making under par after three rounds, and I'm one."