



Four tigers found dead in Karnataka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 ■ Bengaluru

In what has emerged as one of the most alarming wildlife incidents in recent years, four tigers—including an adult tigress and her four cubs—were found dead in a single day in Karnataka. The incident has sent shockwaves across conservation circles, wildlife departments, and policy forums, sparking calls for urgent action as well as introspection.

The carcasses were discovered in the Hoogly Range of the Male Mahadeshwara Hills Wildlife Division, ChamaraJanagar circle—a region long regarded as critical tiger habitat. Karnataka, home to 563 tigers according to the last All India Tiger Estimation, is often lauded as a flagship success story of Project Tiger. Yet this very success comes with its own complexities: as populations recover and densities rise, tigers inevitably move beyond



protected area boundaries into human-dominated landscapes, where the risks of conflict, poisoning, and electrocution are all heightened. Initial field assessments suggest that at least some of the deaths may have been caused by electrocution from illegal fencing or power lines, while others could be linked to deliberate poisoning. However, the precise causes will only be confirmed after detailed postmortem and forensic analysis.

Taking serious note of the

matter, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) issued an Office Memorandum dated June 26, 2025, constituting a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the circumstances comprehensively. The SIT comprises Harini V, Assistant Inspector General (NTCA), Regional Office Bengaluru, and Thenmozhi V, Additional Inspector General of Forests, Regional Deputy Director (South Region) of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau.

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Student raped by seniors in Kolkata law college

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Kolkata Police in the small hours of Friday arrested Manojit Mishra a Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad leader and a newly graduated lawyer on charges of raping one of his juniors inside the guard room of the South Calcutta Law College, barely 500 metres from the Kasba Police Station. Mishra is a student leader, allegedly serving as a link between the college and the TMC leadership. Apart from Manojit police arrested two of his associates Pratim Mukherjee and Jahid Ahmed, both third year students, who stood guard at, when Mishra committed the dastardly act.

They were on Friday pro-



In this combo of three pictures, the accused who were arrested in connection with the alleged 'gang-rape' of a first-year student of a law college in south Kolkata, being produced at a city court, in Kolkata

PTI

duced before the Alipore Police Court where they were remanded to four days' police custody.

The incident took place late on Wednesday evening, sources said. "She was called by her seniors in the college at

about 12 in the noon - all in the name of helping him in out on some issues," sources in the police quoting the victim said.

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Noida horror: Elderly locked up in dungeons

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 ■ New Delhi

In a shocking and deeply disturbing incident, at least 42 elderly people were rescued from an "illegal" old-age home after a police raid at the institution found living in inhuman and abusive conditions. Some women tied up and many of the residents holed up in "basement-like" rooms without clothes. While most of the elderly men were not wearing clothes, the women were given partial clothing. Many of them were found with urine-stained or feces-stained clothes.

A joint team of the Uttar Pradesh State Women Commission (UPSWC), Noida Police, the Social Welfare Department, and the District Probation Welfare Department carried out a surprise inspection,

found the old-age home was found in a deplorable condition and subsequently sealed the premises. The rescue operation was launched after a disturbing video surfaced on social media, showing an elderly woman tied up inside the facility.

A video of the poor state of the old-age home, which went viral, was also recently sent to the Social Welfare Department of Lucknow. The short clip showed an elderly woman kept in a room with her hands tied. Soon after, the State Women's Commission and the Noida police raided the home on Thursday and rescued 39 senior citizens.

When the officials reached the spot, they found many elderly people tied up in their clothes and locked in rooms. Meenakshi Bharala, a women's commission member, said the Anand Niketan Vridha Seva Ashram at

C-5, Sector 55, Noida was an illegal old-age home.

"During the raid, an elderly woman was found tied up while other elderly people were locked in basement-like rooms," she said. Some men were found locked in rooms resembling basements, many without clothes. Women were also found barely dressed. It felt like they were living in conditions worse than hell," Bharala said.

This old age home is completely illegal. There were 42 elderly people living in the ashram, out of which three elderly people will be shifted to an old-age home run by the social welfare department on Friday and the rest will be shifted to other Government-approved old-age homes in the next five days, she added. Bharala said the old-age home will be sealed with the help of the

administration.

Additionally, officials found there was no proper staff to take care of the senior citizens.

During the inspection, it was revealed that there were no qualified medical or caregiving staff on duty.

During interrogation, a woman who identified herself as a nurse confessed that she had only completed Class 12. The lack of hygiene and basic facilities further underscored the negligence. Several rescued elderly individuals belonged to well-off families, some from affluent areas in Noida.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the Ashram had taken a donation of Rs 2.5 lakh from the families of the elderly people. Additionally, they also took Rs 6,000 per month for their food and accommodation.

The ByStander



High alert in J and K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

With the annual Amarnath Yatra set to commence on July 3, security forces in Jammu and Kashmir are on high alert, intensifying search operations in the Bihali area of Basantgarh, Udhampur district, to neutralise a group of Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terrorists.

One highly trained JeM terrorist, identified as Haider, alias Maulvi, from Pakistan, was killed in a fierce encounter with security forces on Thursday, while three of his associates remain trapped in the dense, forested terrain of the Basantgarh belt.

The dead body of the terrorist could not be retrieved from the encounter site on Thursday due to adverse weather conditions in the upper reaches.

Despite challenging weather conditions, including incessant rain and dense fog, which temporarily halted the operation late Thursday evening, the search operations resumed on Friday morning.

Security forces have deployed advanced drones, sniffer dogs, and additional reinforcements to tighten the cordon and eliminate the remaining three terrorists, who are believed to be heavily armed and trained in jungle warfare.

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India-China discuss de-escalation, border row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 ■ New Delhi/Qingdao (China)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has proposed that the lingering border dispute between India and China should be solved under a structured roadmap comprising steps to deescalate tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and rejuvenate the existing mechanism to demarcate the borders.

He mooted these suggestions to his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun during bilateral talks on the sidelines of the SCO Defence Ministers Meeting, in Qingdao.

Rajnath Singh said both the countries should solve the "complex issues" under a structured roadmap comprising steps to de-escalate tensions along the frontiers and rejuvenate the existing mechanism to demarcate the borders. He emphasised the need to create "good neighbourly conditions" to achieve the best mutual benefits and called for "taking action on



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during a meeting with Chinese Defence Minister Admiral Dong Jun on the sidelines of the SCO Defence Ministers Meeting, in Qingdao

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the ground" to bridge the "trust deficit" resulting from the 2020 eastern Ladakh border standoff, according to an Indian readout.

Rajnath Singh also briefed Dong on the Pahalgam terror attack targeting innocent civilians, and India's Operation Sindoor to dismantle the terrorist networks in Pakistan,

the defence ministry said in New Delhi.

The two ministers agreed to continue consultations at various levels to achieve progress on issues related to disengagement, de-escalation, border management and eventual delimitation through existing mechanisms, it said. The meeting came amid efforts

by both New Delhi and Beijing to reset their ties following an understanding last October to end the military standoff along the LAC in eastern Ladakh.

In a social media post, Rajnath Singh described the talks with Dong as "constructive". "We had a constructive and forward-looking exchange of views on issues pertaining to bilateral relations. Expressed my happiness on the restarting of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra after a gap of nearly six years," he said.

"It is incumbent on both sides to maintain this positive momentum and avoid adding new complexities in the bilateral relationship," he added.

The defence ministry said both the leaders held in-depth discussions on the need to maintain peace and tranquility along the Indo-China border.

It said Rajnath Singh acknowledged the work being undertaken by both sides to bring back a semblance of normalcy in the bilateral relations.

"He highlighted the necessity of solving the complex issues through a structured roadmap of permanent engagement and de-escalation," it said in the readout.

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FILE PHOTO

90-day mediation camps across India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 ■ New Delhi

To settle pending cases across the nation, National Legal Service Authority (NALSA) to start 90 day long pan India mediation campaign titled 'Mediation for the Nation. Mediations will start from July 1 and continue till September 30. The campaign has been conceptualised under the guidance of Chief Justice of India BR Gavai and Justice Surya Kant, who is also the Executive Chairman of the NALSA and Mediation and Conciliation Project Committee (MCPC).

"Mediation for Nation campaign is being launched across India to settle the pending

cases and make people believe that mediation as a mechanism for dispute resolution is peoples' friendly, cost effective and speedy with ability to save relationships, time and money", said NALSA and MCPC in a joint statement.

"This Special Pan India Mediation campaign begins on July 1 and it will continue till September 30. It is being organised with the objectives to settle suitable matters pending in the Courts right from the Taluka Courts to the High Courts of India and taking mediation to every nook and corner of the country as people's friendly mode of dispute resolution", said the statement.

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MP CM motorcade stranded at night over adulterated fuel

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

A motorcade arranged to take Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav to an industrial conclave in Ratlam, faced an unexpected and troubling setback late on Thursday night, 15 hours before the event was scheduled to begin.

The convoy, consisting of 19 SUVs, was stranded just meters from a petrol pump in Dosigaon after adulterated diesel, mixed with water, was filled into the vehicles. This caused widespread panic among the officials and raised serious concerns over the situation.

The convoy was part of the arrangements made to take CM Yadav, who was expected to arrive by air in Ratlam on

Friday for the much-anticipated industrial conclave. However, the vehicles ground to a halt shortly after refueling at Bharat Petrol Pump, rendering them immobile and unable to proceed further.

The convoy was part of the arrangements made to take CM Yadav, who was expected to arrive by air in Ratlam on Friday

The officials reached the spot confirmed that the vehicles had been filled with diesel mixed with water into the vehicles at Bharat Petrol Pump. As a result, the vehicles got stranded, and repairs were immediately initiated. A dri-

ver, Shubham Parmar, who was part of the convoy, expressed his shock, saying, "It's unprecedented to find water in diesel, and this caused an immediate breakdown of the vehicles."

Mechanics worked throughout the night, with fuel tanks being removed and emptied, and repairs were carried out under intense pressure to get the convoy operational again. Despite the technical setbacks, authorities quickly arranged alternative vehicles to ensure the Chief Minister's convoy could be transported from the airstrip to the industrial conclave venue in time.

However, questions have arisen regarding how such a situation occurred in the first place.

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No fuel, fines soon for overage vehicles in Capital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 ■ New Delhi

Bace yourself for long queues and chaos from July 1 at fuel stations. Beginning next month, fuel stations are prohibited from dispensing fuel to diesel vehicles older than ten years and petrol vehicles older than 15 years, regardless of their State of registration. This measure is aimed at reducing air pollution in the National Capital Region (NCR).

Given the challenge of implementing this strict measure, Delhi Transport Department, Delhi Police and Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Friday held a meeting to ensure smooth roll out.

Vehicle owners found violating the regulation will face strict penalties with a fine of ₹10,000 for four-wheelers and



Anti-smog gun is used to spray water droplets to curb air pollution

₹5,000 for two-wheelers, in addition to towing and parking charges. Additionally, owners will be required to sign an undertaking stating that the vehicle will no longer be used or parked in any public place in Delhi and will be removed

from the National Capital Territory. According to officials, End-of-life vehicles detected at fuel stations or found parked at public places will be impounded and a penalty of ₹10,000 imposed on four-wheeler owners and

₹5,000 on two-wheeler owners starting July 1.

As per the VAHAN database, Delhi alone has over 62 lakh End-of-Life vehicles, including 41 lakh two-wheelers and 18 lakh four-wheelers.

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CM reviews preps for Prez’s visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Gorakhpur

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Friday, extensively reviewed the preparations for President Droupadi Murmu’s upcoming visit to the state’s first AYUSH University, located in Pipri, Bhatnat.

President Murmu is scheduled to inaugurate the Mahayogi Guru Gorakhnath AYUSH University on July 1. Ahead of the inauguration, Chief Minister Yogi conducted an aerial survey, on-site inspection, and chaired a review meeting to assess the preparedness of the campus. After surveying the premises from a helicopter, the chief minister first headed to the main pandal area upon landing at the helipad. Senior officials and the vice-chancellor of the university briefed him about the preparations underway for the inauguration ceremony.

The chief minister inspected the arrangements along the President’s route within the AYUSH University campus, the site for the sapling plantation, the Swiss cottage/safe house, main stage and audience gallery. He issued important instruc-

tions regarding security, cleanliness and public convenience. He also directed the vice-chancellor and administrative officials to prepare a model of the AYUSH University for the President’s review, showcasing academic buildings, OPD, IPD, OT, Panchakarma centre, and other special features of the university.

Following the inspection, the chief minister chaired a review meeting at the university guest house to discuss the preparations related to the President’s visit. He emphasised that there should be absolutely no lapse in the security arrangements for the event. He called for strict attention to cleanliness across the entire premises, adding that any negligence in this regard would result in accountability. The chief minister also instructed officials to ensure top-notch arrangements for drinking water, sanitation and parking for attendees.

He suggested that a herbal plant be planted by the President as part of the programme. Additionally, he emphasised that since the university belongs to the entire state, “Uttar Pradesh” must be included in its official name.

Mastermind of fake notes racket arrested in Hapur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Lucknow

Sleuths of the Anti-Terrorists Squad (ATS) achieved success in trapping a mastermind of the Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) racket along with his associates and recovered fake Indian currency worth Rs 3.9 lakhs.

According to official communiqué, UP ATS had received an input that some people were printing fake Indian currency in a house at Dinesh Nagar Colony, Farid Nagar Road, Pilkhua, Hapur and later supplying it to various districts of Uttar Pradesh. The above intelligence was developed through various sources on the basis of which on Thursday, the mastermind of the fake Indian currency smuggling gang named Gajendra Yadav and his accomplice Siddharth Jha were arrested near Pilkhua, Farid Nagar, Bhojpur Road with fake Indian currency in their car.

Yadav revealed that he was going to give these notes to a party. On his information, fake currency along with paper having special features like watermark, thread etc., printer and other equipments used for printing fake currency were recovered from a rented flat in Dinesh Nagar, Pilkhua, Hapur.

The work of printing fake currency was being done by Yadav in this flat. On question-

ing, Yadav disclosed that special paper for printing fake currency was provided by Vijay Veer Chaudhari, a resident of village Rasulpur, police station Salempur, district Bulandshahr. On the basis of this information, the above mentioned Vijay Veer was arrested from Pilkhua, Hapur along with paper sheets (having watermark and thread), who claimed that the paper sheets were ordered from online company Alibaba.com.

Disclosing about the modus operandi, ATS claimed that the arrested accused Gajendra Yadav used to purchase paper having features like watermark, thread etc. for printing fake notes from Vijay Veer Chaudhary. From this paper, he used to print fake Indian currency with the help of a laptop, printer and other printing equipments along with his partner Siddharth Jha.

Gajendra Yadav used to supply the printed fake Indian currency to parties in different districts of Uttar Pradesh through his associates. This gang used to search for parties through social media and contact them to supply fake currency.

The cops recovered counterfeit currency worth Rs 3,90,000, five semi-manufactured notes of five hundred rupees value, six tape rolls, two security thread papers, two laptops with accompanying equipment, three printers with accompanying equip-

ment, one lamination machine, one cutter blade, one metal paper cutter, four ink bottles, one ink gold coat, three dyes, two sprays, 103 security sheets (for printing notes), five mobile phones, two pen drives and a car. In this regard, FIR No. 07/2025 under sections 178,179,180,181, 61(2) of the Indian Penal Code, 2023 has been registered at Police Station ATS, Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow. The arrested accused were produced before the court as per rules and further legal action is being taken.

STABBED TO DEATH

The Mahanagar police on Friday arrested an e-rickshaw driver for stabbing a fellow driver to death on Thursday night.

The accused arrested was identified as Shivakant Mishra of Bahraich. The police are interrogating him. DCP Lucknow (Central) Ashish Srivastava said the police was informed about a man’s body lying behind a school near Badshah Nagar metro station.

“On information a team reached the scene. The man was found lying in a pool of blood. His stomach was ripped and a knife was stuck in his back. On the basis of the e-rickshaw we contacted the owner Kalim of Thakurganj,” the DCP said. According to the DCP, Kalim told police that he had given the

e-rickshaw on rent to one Dinesh of Bhinga in Shrawasti district. Kamil was summoned to the spot and he identified the body to be of Dinesh of Shrawasti. Later, the police scanned the CCTV footages and zeroed in on accused Shivakant Mishra of Bahraich.

The DCP said Shivakant earlier worked in Panipat in Haryana. The officer lauded the efforts of the Mahanagar police for working out the blind murder case within six hours and said a reward of Rs 25,000 would be given to the Mahanagar police. He said a video grab evidently showed that Shivakant killed Dinesh during a brawl. “When the police checked the CCTV footage it surfaced that Shivakant also reached the scene where Dinesh was driving his e-rickshaw. Both were seen indulging into a verbal spat over some issue, probably on taking passengers from the route. Later Shivakant was seen fleeing the scene on his e-rickshaw,” the DCP said.

The autopsy report revealed that Dinesh had multiple injuries caused by stabbing with a knife stuck in his back when police reached the spot. It further surfaced that Dinesh bled to death at the spot. Police investigation revealed that Dinesh had an altercation with accused Shivakant Mishra over some issue and was killed.

Links with Akash’s kin draws Maya’s ire

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Lucknow

Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati has once again taken action against the close associates of nephew Akash Anand’s father-in-law Ashok Siddharth. Those who went to attend a recent wedding in Siddharth’s home and those who are still in contact with him have been shown the way out of the party.

BSP supremo Mayawati’s anger against nephew Akash Anand’s father-in-law Ashok Siddharth does not seem to be subsiding. The leaders who were in contact with him are being shown the way out of the party one by one.

After Agra division, the coordinators of Mirzapur and Prayagraj divisions have been punished. It is being said that action can be taken against some more leaders. BSP supremo has given a clear message to the party leaders that those who come in contact with anti-party people will not be spared. BSP supremo Mayawati is meeting officials of different divisions these days. While discussing expansion of the organisation, she is also taking feedback about who all went to attend a recent wedding function in Ashok Siddharth’s family and how many people are still in touch with him. Action is being taken on this basis. Mayawati’s anger can be gauged from the fact that even the old and veteran party leader Gore Lal Jatav was



expelled from the party in western Uttar Pradesh.

Apart from this, recently Raju Gautam of Prayagraj division and Mirzapur division coordinator Amarendra Bharti have been expelled from the party. Party sources say that preparations are on to show the way out to some more leaders. Sources say that the party leaders have been clearly told to work on expanding the organization and not focus on any other work. No statement will be issued arbitrarily.

The statement will be issued as per the party guidelines. Mayawati has also directed to make preparations for the Panchayat elections. The party coordinators have been asked to prepare for the panchayat elections and prepare the people of the organisation to contest the elections.

Having members from gram panchayats to zila panchayat will strengthen the party at the lower level, she said.

BJP MLA clarifies stand on Vande Bharat train incident

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Jhansi

BJP’s Babina MLA Rajeev Singh on Thursday clarified his stand on the May 19 incident aboard the Vande Bharat Express, stating that a “misunderstanding” with fellow passengers escalated unnecessarily and that the altercation by his supporters in Jhansi was “unfortunate and unintended”.

Addressing a press conference, the MLA said he was travelling with his wife and children from Delhi to Jhansi when he “politely requested” a passenger to swap seats so the family could sit together.

According to the MLA, the passenger and his companion responded rudely and threatened him. He claimed video evidence now supports his version of events.

The Uttar Pradesh unit of the BJP, on June 22, issued a show-cause notice to the party MLA in connection with the episode. The BJP had sought a reply from the legislator within seven days.

According to the Government Railway Police (GRP), the altercation occurred on June 19 on the Delhi-Bhopal Vande Bharat Express, alleged-

ly over changing seats and objectionable sitting posture inside the train.

The situation escalated at Jhansi station, where a passenger was allegedly assaulted by some individuals linked to the ruling party MLA.

On Thursday, Singh reiterated that he had filed a non-cognisable report (NCR) with the GRP that same evening after the encounter.

He added that during the train journey, he had also sought assistance via the Rail Madad helpline, citing safety concerns.

Later, when the train reached Jhansi, some of his local supporters, informed by his security personnel, allegedly assaulted one of the passengers. The MLA said this was done “in over-enthusiasm” and without his approval.

He stated that he later apologised to the passengers, who accepted his regret and acknowledged the misunderstanding. The incident has drawn political reactions, with some opposition leaders and a former IPS officer demanding action. However, the passenger involved has not filed a formal complaint, and the matter is currently under police investigation.

Govt gears up for Kanwar Yatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh Urban Development Department has launched an extensive plan to ensure cleanliness, lighting and drinking water arrangements across urban local bodies for the upcoming Shravan month’s Kanwar Yatra, Sawan Mela and other festivals.

Additionally, the state will implement the Communicable

Disease Control Campaign from July 1 to July 31 and the Dastak Campaign from July 11 to July 31.

A high-level video conference meeting, chaired by the principal secretary of UDD, was held to outline these preparations.

The principal secretary directed urban local bodies to conduct daily cleaning operations from 5 am to 8 am, emphasising the creation of micro-plans at the local level.

Illegal arms factory unearthed in city

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Lucknow

An illegal arms factory was unearthed in the Malihabad in the house of one Salahuddin, days before Moharram on Thursday night. Premier agencies like UP ATS have been updated with the findings of the investigation.

DCP, Lucknow (North) Gopal Chaudhary said the illegal factory manufacturing weapons was unearthed on an informer’s tip off.

He did not specify the motive behind manufacturing of weapons on such a large scale and said the police were probing the case on all possible angles.

He said three pistols of 32 bore, one country-made pistol 315 bore, two country-made pistols each 22 bore, one rifle 22 bore, seven airguns, 18 live

cartridges of 315 bore, 68 live cartridges of 22 bore, 40 empty cartridges of 22 bore, 30 cartridges each 12 bore, two live cartridges 32 bore, one cartridge 32 bore, Rs 2000 in cash, skin of prohibited animal (deer), knives and saw were recovered from the 68-year-old accused.

The cops did not reveal as to since when the accused was manufacturing weapons and how many weapons had been sold.

Apart from this, weapons manufacturing equipment was also found. Earlier, sources said that about a huge stock of cartridges and illegal weapons were stacked at Salahuddin’s house.

Late on Thursday evening, the police of Malihabad, Maal and Rahimabad police station raided the house of Salahuddin alias Lala (68), where an illegal arms factory was found run-

ning. The house is just 100 metres from the Malihabad police station.

At the time of raid, Salahuddin was found with his wife and daughter. A youth named Owais was also present there.

The DCP said accused Salahuddin alias Lala was being questioned after being taken into custody.

“His accomplices are being traced. People living nearby have said that they heard drill machines working even during night but they did not dare to inquire of the same as they feared him,” the police sources said.

Salahuddin, popularly known as Hakim, used to practice medicine at his shop. Police found a pamphlet that “consultation and medicines can be taken for 3 hours a day through the week except on Fridays”.

The accused Salahuddin

alias Lala’s wife is a teacher. He has two daughters — one in Norway and the other is doing B.Tech from Integral University in Lucknow.

The UP ATS became active in the case and inspected the scene. According to police sources, Salahuddin was supplying illegal arms all over UP for a long time. Since his house was next to the police station, no one ever suspected him. Even the police did not have any clues.

The neighbours of the accused said he used to befool people in guise of being a hakim. “He neither made unani or ayurved medicined nor was he a hakim. People with shady past used to visit him. His association was mostly with people of criminal type or mindset,” they said. Other neighbours said that people used to visit Salahuddin and stayed at his house which has several rooms.

Youth beaten up, succumbs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Lucknow

A sensational case has come to light in Deoria. In Rudrapur area of the district, a video of a youth being brutally beaten to death is going viral which also raised questions on the law and order in the district. Now the station in-charge has been suspended for negligence in this matter. The police have arrested the accused.

SP Deoria Vikrant Veer said that a heart-wrenching video surfaced on social media, in which two youths are seen brutally beating another youth. Later, the victim was identified as 22-year-old Haribhajan alias Bhola Nishad.

He said that this video of June 13 was recorded in Vitthalpur village of Rudrapur police station area. It also appears that a third person was making a video of the attack.

After the attack, Bhola Nishad was admitted to Deoria Medical College. Seeing the severity of his injuries, the doctors referred him to Gorakhpur Medical College, where he died on June

21. SP Vikrant Veer said that the police had initially registered a case and arrested accused Raj Nishad. After Bhola’s death, the police added murder charges and the accused was sent to judicial custody. While two other named in the case — accused Ratandeep Nishad and Sunny Nishad are still absconding and teams have been deployed to nab them.

Initial investigation has revealed negligence in handling the case on part of Rudrapur police station in-charge Ranjeet Singh Bhadoria. The SP said that the station in-charge has been suspended with immediate effect and departmental proceedings have been initiated against him.

Meanwhile, a 17-year-old boy was stabbed to death and two of his friends were injured in a late night attack in Ballia district following which villagers blocked the national highway for more than an hour on Friday morning, police said. Golu Yadav, from Tola Shivan Rai village, had gone to attend a post-funeral ritual with his three friends to Fakarurai Tola village.

While returning home around

I am on Friday, the group was ambushed near the Kali Sthan area, they said. According to police, the attackers assaulted the teenagers with knives, axes, and sticks. Golu died on the spot, while his friends Gahan and Chandan were injured. Enraged over the killing, villagers blocked the national highway on Friday morning. The blockade lasted for nearly 90 minutes and was lifted only after Baira Circle Officer (CO) Mohammad Faheem Qureshi assured the crowd of strict action against the accused. Ballia Superintendent of Police Omvir Singh and other senior police and administrative officers reached the scene to oversee the situation.

Based on a complaint lodged by the Golu’s brother, Dilip Yadav, an FIR has been registered against seven people — Devendra Singh, Pawan Singh, Aman Singh, and Sonu Shah of Tola Shivan Rai village, and Prakash Singh, Vikas Singh, and Dipanshu Paswan of Fakarurai Tola village.

The FIR has also been registered against five unidentified persons, a police officer said.

Campaign to encourage mushroom cultivation

Lucknow: In a bid to boost farmers’ income and promote sustainable agriculture, the Uttar Pradesh government has launched a special campaign to encourage mushroom cultivation across the state. This initiative is part of the government’s ongoing efforts to open new avenues for farmers’ prosperity and self-reliance.

Under this campaign, mushroom farming has rapidly gained popularity in eight districts, including state capital Lucknow. By connecting farmers to this profitable business, the government is not only generating employment but also guiding them towards scientific and technical farming practices. What is especially noteworthy is that mushroom cultivation is no longer limited to men – women are actively participating and succeeding in this field. Two such inspiring examples are Geeta Devi from Mathura and Sonali Sabharwal from Hardoi. Geeta Devi began mushroom farming two and a half years ago. With support from the government, she launched a project worth ₹1.61 crore, for which she received a loan of ₹70 lakh. Today, her mushroom produce is supplied not only in Mathura but also to cities like Agra and Delhi. Her success has translated into an annual income of ₹20 to ₹25 lakh, making her a role model for both local residents and women from other districts.

Similarly, Sonali Sabharwal from Hardoi has taken up mushroom farming as a mission, encouraging and training rural women to join this high-potential agribusiness. PNS

Meet to discuss ways to curb road accidents

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Lucknow

Motor Vehicle Inspectors (MVI) from across the country will gather in Lucknow on June 28 and 29 with an aim of curbing road accidents and making people aware about road safety.

All India Federation of Motor Vehicle Department

Technical Executive Officers Association and Transport Regional Inspectors Service Association are jointly organising a two-day programme at Indira Gandhi Pratishthan in Gomtinagar.

Motor Vehicle Inspector Prashant Kumar and Vishnu Kumar said that the purpose of the workshop is to improve road safety. Under this, RIs and MVIs

will arrive from across the country.

Methods being adopted to strengthen road safety in other states will be discussed. Transport Minister Dayashankar Singh will be the chief guest while Principal Secretary Transport Amit Gupta and Transport Commissioner Brajesh Narayan Singh will also attend the programme.



NOTICE

I have changed my name from AMIT MISRA To AMIT MISHRA, Amit Mishra S/o Rama Shankar Mishra R/o 117/806, M Block, Kakadeo Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

This is to inform all that in my marksheet and certificates, my father's name is wrongly mentioned as Ikrumulah Kamaal and my mother's name as Khurshida. I intend to correct my father's name to Ikrumulah and my mother's name to Khurshida Khatoon as per my Birth Certificate and Aadhaar Card. The correction is to be made in my 10th marksheet and pass certificate index no 1212757/031 and 12th marksheet and pass certificate index No. 2237857/016. Kholud, D/o Ikrumulah,R/o H.No. 529C/179, Paryatan Vihar, Kamla Nehru Nagar, Vikas Nagar, Lucknow.

NOTICE

I am KM SAGAR MATI YADAV W/O ANIL KUMAR Caste-Ahir, R/o- Village-Nonra, Post-Tikariya, Tehsil-Sadar, District-Sultanpur (U.P.) Pin Code-228001. My husband Amil Kumar whose Army No. is 16019669K, my name is recorded as KUMARI SAGAR MATI YADAV in the Army documents which is wrong. But my Aadhar card my name is recorded as KM SAGAR MATI YADAV which is true and correct. Therefore, in all the Army documents of my husband ANIL KUMAR, my name should be recorded as KM SAGAR MATI YADAV .

NOTICE

I, Nabab Singh S/o Late Ram Kumar, Resident of at H/No-29A, Jarauli Phase -I Barra, Kanpur Nagar, UP -208027 Have Changed My Name From NABAB SINGH To NAWAB SINGH And Declare DOB As 01/04/1983 Vide Affidavit No-IN-UP92655864127624X Dated 17 Jun 2025.

NOTICE

I, Padmati Devi W/o Late Devi Shankar Residing At 101, Lal Kurti Tophkana, Cantt, Kanpur Nagar-208004 Have Changed My Name From PADMATI DEVI To PADMAVATI DEVI And Declare DOB As 25/12/1947(For Army Record)

NOTICE

My minor son Harshit Srivastava S/o Tarun Srivastava this name in Aadhar card, School certificate name Ryan Srivastava in future this name is use in all places. Divya Srivastava W/o Tarun Srivastava D/o Late Giris Kumar R/o Shiv Vihar Colony Shivpur, Varanasi

NOTICE

I, SABIHA holder of Indian Passport No: T6491252 issued at DUBAI on 26/06/2019 and Permanent Resident of HOUSE NO.8 NEW MIG KDA COLONY JAUMA KANPUR NAGAR PIN 208010 UTTAR PRADESH INDIA and presently residing at BLDG NO.2337 FLAT NO.302 MUWAILAH SHARJAH do hereby change my name from SABIHA to SABIHA(Given name) DASTHAGIR AHMED(Surname) with immediate effect

NOTICE

I Lalit Kumar Thavnani S/o Dwarika Das 122/516 Sindhi Colony, Shastri Nagar, Kanpur 208005 have changed my name to Lalit Kumar for all future purposes.

NOTICE

I have changed my son's name from Priyansh Panjwani to Pranav Panjwani for all future proposes. Mukesh Kumar Panjwani R/o 127/1/49 W-1 Saket Nagar Kanpur.

NOTICE

I, Soniya Singh W/o of Mr Vijay Singh R/o G1 - 561 Armapur Estate Kanpur solemnly affirm that my son Himanshu Singh student of class 10th A in KV 1 Armapur Estate, in school record my name wrongly recorded as Sonia Singh while my correct name is Soniya Singh as per Aadhar .

NOTICE

I inform that my daughter's name ANUSHKA SRIVASTAVA and Father name ANUJ KUMAR are incorrect mentioned in the Aadhaar card, whereas my daughter's correct name is ANGEL SRIVASTAVA and Father correct name ANUJ KUMAR SRIVASTAVA are mentioned in her school records. Hence, my daughter's correct Name ANGEL SRIVASTAVA and her father's correct name ANUJ KUMAR SRIVASTAVA should be corrected in the Aadhaar card. Rashmi Srivastava W/o Late Anuj Kumar Srivastava R/o B-102, Plot No 48 Vimal Nagar, kamta, Chinhat, Lucknow-227105

NOTICE

This is to inform all that in my marksheet and certificates, my father's name is wrongly mentioned as Ikrumulah Kamal siddique and my mother's name as Khurshida. I intend to correct my father's name to Ikrumulah and my mother's name to Khurshida Khatoon as per my Birth Certificate and Aadhaar Card. The correction is to be made in my 10th marksheet and pass certificate index no 1185217/032 and 12th marksheet and pass certificate index No. /R220/54394/0061. Nameerah Kamaal, D/o Ikrumulah,R/o H.No. 529C/179, Paryatan Vihar, Kamla Nehru Nagar, Vikas Nagar, Lucknow.

NOTICE

I, Ramkishori devi w/o Vishambhar singh [retired havaldar army no.1297195 Indian military] declare that my adhar card dob is 02.06.1955 which is wrong. My correct dob is 28.05.1957. Ram kishori devi w/o Vishambhar Singh R/o Vajjupurwa mazra Gajjumaui tehsil Akbarpur, dist. Kanpur Dehat.

NOTICE

I, MOHD KAIF S/o BAHAL AHMAD Resident of 534/44 Tatarpur Aliganj Lucknow declare that I have changed my name from KAIF MOHD to MOHD KAIF for all records.

CM: Previous govts left youth struggling with identity crisis

CM launches key initiatives to promote entrepreneurship

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Friday, said that the previous governments were too busy fuelling caste-based conflicts, which left the youth of the state struggling with an identity crisis. He added that those governments not only ignored entrepreneurs but also encouraged caste-based divisions in society.

On the occasion of World MSME Day, the chief minister launched several key initiatives to promote entrepreneurship during a grand ceremony held at Lok Bhawan here.

In his address, the chief minister reaffirmed the commitment of the double-engine government to providing equal opportunities to youth from all communities by eliminating caste-based discrimination.

He inaugurated the 'Youth Adda' platform, launched the CM YUVA mobile app, and also unveiled ODOP Common Facility Centre projects worth Rs 18 crore in Bareilly and Moradabad.

During the event, Chief Minister Yogi mentioned that before 2017, Uttar Pradesh was known for riots, mafia gangs, and was one of the most unsafe states for daughters and traders. He accused previous governments of promoting caste-based conflicts and running the state based on family politics, where each district was controlled by a different mafia. As a result, people in the state faced an identity crisis, he added. He also pointed out that despite being established in 1950, Uttar Pradesh never celebrated its Foundation Day until January 24, 2018. "Earlier governments were too busy dividing society along caste lines and serving their own families instead of working for the state's development," he remarked. At the event, Chief Minister Yogi inaugurated the 'Youth Adda', an initiative by UPICON to promote innovation and entrepreneurship. This platform will allow youth from all castes and communities to share their business ideas, get help with bank loans, and receive guidance from experienced mentors.

Chief Minister Yogi emphasised that his government does not discriminate on the basis of caste, region or language. "We are committed to providing a platform to every talented youth," he said. He also launched the CM



Chief Minister Yogi presents toolkit to a beneficiary of One District One Product scheme during the curtain raiser ceremony of the third edition of the UP International Trade Show (UPTS) on the occasion of International MSME Day at Lok Bhavan in Lucknow on Friday. PTI

YUVA mobile app, a digital platform designed to connect youth with entrepreneurship opportunities. The app will provide access to training, loans and information about government schemes without any discrimination. The chief minister pointed out that the app will ensure that no young person needs to run from one government office to another, as everything will be available in one place digitally.

Chief Minister Yogi further inaugurated Common Facilitation Centre (CFC) projects worth Rs 18 crore in Bareilly and Moradabad under the ODOP scheme. He said, "ODOP has given each district's unique product a global platform. The scheme has provided equal opportunities to artisans and entrepreneurs from all castes and communities, helping products like Moradabad's brassware, Bhadohi's carpets, and Lucknow's chikan kari gain international recognition." The CM shared that UP now has over 96 lakh MSME units employing more than two crore people across all communities. He emphasised that the government has provided a financial safety net of Rs 5 lakh and social security to these units without any discrimination. With a 14 per cent share in the country's MSME sector, UP is now a leading state in this domain. Reflecting on the state's economic progress over the last eight years, Chief Minister Yogi pointed out that UP's exports have grown from ₹80,000 crore

in 2017 to over ₹2 lakh crore today. The per capita income has increased from ₹46,000 to ₹1.2 lakh, and the state's GDP (gross domestic product) has surged from ₹12,75 lakh crore to ₹31 lakh crore. He credited this remarkable growth to improved law and order and the government's commitment to providing equal opportunities to all communities. He shared that under the Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhiyan, 55,000 youth have been provided interest-free loans of ₹5 lakh each along with a 10 per cent government subsidy. He emphasised that selections were made purely based on talent, not on the basis of caste or region. The initiative has opened up opportunities in entrepreneurship for youth from all communities. Speaking about the Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana, Chief Minister Yogi stated that over one lakh traditional artisans have been given toolkits and access to affordable loans. These artisans come from various castes and communities, many of whom were previously neglected.

"We have given respect and opportunities to artisans from every village and town so they can take their skills to new heights," he added.

The chief minister also announced the third edition of the International Trade Show, scheduled to be held in Greater Noida from September 25 to 29 this year. He stated that the

event will serve as a global platform to showcase and promote Uttar Pradesh's MSME products to international buyers.

During the event, a short film related to the upcoming International Trade Show was also screened, giving a glimpse into what the showcase will offer. Highlighting the state's commitment to preserving traditional crafts, Chief Minister Yogi informed that 77 products from UP have received the GI tag, and work is underway on 75 new applications. A memorandum of understanding has been signed with the Human Welfare Association to support artisans from all communities in protecting and promoting their products, he added. "We will ensure that no one else can claim ownership of our cultural heritage," he asserted.

The CM laid special emphasis on his government's core objective to eliminate caste-based discrimination and provide equal opportunities to every youth and artisan. He added that through such initiatives, Uttar Pradesh is playing a vital role in building India's economy and realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a developed India. The event was attended by cabinet minister Rakesh Sachan, Agriculture Production Commissioner Deepak Kumar, Principal Secretary (MSME) Alok Kumar, SLVC Coordinator Shailendra Kumar Singh, and several senior officials and dignitaries from the MSME sector.

Tonsuring row: Tension in Etawah, stone pelting on cops, 20 detained

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Etawah/Lucknow

Days after the alleged caste-based tonsuring of a Bhagwat Katha preacher and his aide in Etawah's Dandarpur village, tensions escalated on Thursday as members of Yadav groups staged protests demanding the arrest of all accused and withdrawal of the case registered against the victims.

According to police, large crowds began gathering near the Agra-Kanpur highway and at the village in the Bakewar area in the afternoon.

Purported videos showed unidentified persons pelting police personnel with stones even as the latter brandished firearms in the air to warn the protesters on a narrow village road. In Lucknow, UP minister Jaiveer Singh accused Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav of giving the tonsuring incident a "caste spin" and blamed him for stoking the violence. Etawah Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Brijesh Kumar Srivastava said, "Information was received via social media that some groups were preparing to protest against the incident that occurred in Dandarpur village

three days ago. Accordingly, police deployment was made in the town, on the highway and in the village to ensure law and order."

"Around 1:30 pm, a sizeable crowd started gathering on the Agra-Kanpur highway. While most were convinced to disperse, a few tried to enter Dandarpur village forcibly, which created a situation that could have disrupted peace," he said. SSP Srivastava confirmed that 19 individuals were detained, and 13 vehicles were seized. "Necessary legal action is being taken under relevant sections. Law and order are under control, and the situation is normal," he added.

Earlier in the day, hundreds of members from Yadav groups reached Bakewar police station to gherao it in protest against alleged police action against the victims and to demand the arrest of the accused.

SP (Rural) Sreesh Chandra told reporters that police attempted to stop the advancing crowd, but a heated exchange followed. When protesters continued pushing forward, police used lathis to disperse them. The crowd reportedly retaliated by throwing stones at police personnel, damaging the wind-

shield of a police jeep. Some protesters fled towards the Agra-Kanpur highway.

The incident that triggered the unrest took place on the night of June 22-23 in the village. Two Bhagwat Katha preachers, Mukut Mani Yadav and his aide Sant Singh Yadav, were allegedly tonsured and humiliated by "upper-caste" men after it was found that they belonged to the Yadav caste.

A video of the incident, which went viral on social media and was also shared by the SP chief, showed the accused purportedly saying, "You are getting punished for coming to the village of Brahmins." The victims alleged they were interrogated about their caste, forced to show identification and subjected to humiliation. "I was tortured all night. My head was shaved, and they sprinkled urine on me, saying it was to purify me," said Sant Singh Yadav.

Following the video's circulation, four accused — Ashish Tiwari, Uttam Kumar Awasthi, Nikki Awasthi and Manu Dubey — all residents of the village, were arrested and booked. Akhilesh condemned the incident, calling it a gross violation of constitutional values and warned of a large-scale move-

ment if action was not taken within three days.

In response to Etawah violence, Singh in the evening emphasised the administration's swift response and affirmed the government's commitment to take strict measures moving forward.

Based on the initial probe, four individuals were arrested, followed by the detention of 15 more people involved in the violence perpetrated by local miscreants, the minister said.

"The incident appears to be the result of a well-planned conspiracy, and the government is determined to uncover the truth and take strict action against those responsible," Singh said. He assured that anyone taking the law into their own hands, regardless of caste or community, will not be spared.

Accusing Akhilesh of giving the incident a "casteist angle," the minister said the former UP CM, without verifying the facts, made reckless statements which incited violence. "It has always been the SP's strategy to divide society along caste and class lines for political gain. This is condemnable and unacceptable," Singh said. He added that the BJP respects Sanatan culture, not casteism.

KVP defends rights of all Hindus to recite, narrate Bhagavad Katha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Varanasi

In response to the recent incident in Etawah where a Non-Brahmin kathavachak (religious storyteller) was allegedly assaulted and tonsured, the Kashi Vidvat Parishad (KVP), a prestigious council of Sanskrit scholars and experts on Hindu scriptures, has issued a strong statement defending the rights of all Hindus to recite and narrate the Bhagavad Katha. Professor Ramnarayan Dwivedi, General Secretary of the Kashi Vidvat Parishad, said, "In Sanatan Dharma, the right to speak about Bhagavat — the divine stories of Lord Vishnu — belongs to every Hindu. No one has the authority to deny this." He added that Hindu tradition is replete with revered figures who were not Brahmins by birth but were honoured as sages due to their wisdom and conduct.

"From Maharishi Valmiki to Ved Vyasa and Sant Ravidas,

our tradition respects those with devotion, truthfulness, and knowledge — not merely birth," he said.

Kashi Vidvat Parishad is an authoritative religious council in Varanasi composed of leading Vedic and scriptural scholars. It is frequently consulted on theological and dharmic matters and its pronouncements hold great weight in the Hindu religious community.

Professor Dwivedi emphasised that the right to narrate religious texts should be based on one's understanding of scriptures and righteous conduct, not caste. "One who is learned and walks the path of dharma is truly a Brahmin or Pandit," he stated. Criticising attempts to politicise the issue, he said, "Some people want to incite internal conflict among Hindus for political gains. Hindus should recognise and resist such efforts." Commenting on the legal aspect of the Etawah incident, Dwivedi said, "If it is true that there was a violation of the law, the administration must ensure an impar-

tial investigation and proceed according to constitutional norms. Those found guilty must be held accountable." Vice Chancellor of Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Professor Bihari Lal Sharma, echoed the Parishad's views. "There is no restriction in the scriptures based on caste when it comes to narrating religious stories. Anyone who is qualified and knowledgeable may do so. Knowledge does not differentiate on the basis of caste; it treats everyone equally," he said. "God resides in everyone. Therefore, all are equal, and no one should be discriminated against. Those whose conduct is pure and who are learned in the scriptures are to be regarded as Brahmins," he added. Days after the alleged caste-based tonsuring of a Bhagwat Katha preacher and his aide in Etawah's Dandarpur village, tensions escalated on Thursday as members of Yadav groups staged protests demanding the arrest of all accused and withdrawal of the case registered against the victims. The

incident that triggered the unrest took place on the night of June 22-23 in the village. Two Bhagwat Katha preachers — Mukut Mani Yadav and his aide Sant Singh Yadav — were allegedly tonsured and humiliated by "upper-caste" men after it was found that they belonged to the Yadav caste. A video of the incident, which went viral on social media and was also shared by the SP chief, showed the accused purportedly saying, "You are getting punished for coming to the village of Brahmins." The victims alleged they were interrogated about their caste, forced to show identification and subjected to humiliation. "I was tortured all night. My head was shaved, and they sprinkled urine on me, saying it was to purify me," said Sant Singh Yadav. Following the video's circulation, four accused — Ashish Tiwari, Uttam Kumar Awasthi, Nikki Awasthi and Manu Dubey — all residents of the village, were arrested and booked.

Govt crackdown on negligent officers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Taking a tough stance on administrative negligence, the government has once again acted against careless officers.

This time, four project managers and three junior engineers of the Parti Bhoomi Vikas Vibhag under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana 2.0 have been issued adverse entries in their service records for dereliction of duty.

The government has also directed senior officials to closely monitor such cases and take stringent action if there is no improvement in the conduct of these officers even after disciplinary measures.

GS Naveen, Chief Executive Officer of the state-level nodal agency for the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana 2.0 under the Parti Bhoomi Vikas Vibhag, stated that regular

The government has also directed senior officials to closely monitor such cases and take stringent action if there is no improvement in the conduct of these officers even after disciplinary measures.

departmental reviews are being conducted to assess the progress of projects.

In a recent review meeting with project managers and junior engineers, officials were asked to provide details of the work carried out over the last five years in accordance with the detailed project reports (DPRs). However, four project managers and three junior engineers failed to present this information.

They were also unable to explain the work plan for the current financial year. Due to

this lack of preparation and a sluggish approach towards their responsibilities, concerns were raised about their work performance. The government took the matter seriously and ordered action against them. Subsequent senior officials were warned that if they fail to improve even after disciplinary action, stricter measures would be taken in the future.

Naveen further mentioned that following the government's directive, adverse entries have been made against four project managers — Surendra Pratap Singh (Prayagraj), Sanjay Kumar (Mahoba), Devendra Singh Niranjan (Chitrakoot Karwi-II) and Chaman Singh (Pratapgarh) — for negligence in their duties. Similarly, adverse entries were also given to three junior engineers — Vishwajeet Yadav (Prayagraj), Dinkar (Pratapgarh-I Land Conservation Office) and Ashish Kumar Yadav — for poor performance.

4 held for killing contractor

Lucknow: With the arrest of four miscreants, the Gudamba police on Friday said the contractor Uma Shankar Singh was murdered over monetary dispute during a party at his house in Gudamba. The accused were identified as Sanjay Kumar Chauhan and his brother Shiva Singh, both residents of Shivgarh in Sultanpur, Kavinandan and his brother Abhinandan, both residents of Ashapuri in Pratapgarh.

On their information, a bag was recovered from the bushes in Atrauli village. A blood-stained kurta and axe were recovered from the bag. The police said the accused did not want to refund the loan they had taken from Uma Shankar and they killed him to 'resolve' the loan refund issue forever. The accused confessed to their crime and said that Uma Shankar was killed as he used to abuse them. During interrogation, accused Sanjay Singh said that his brother Shiva Singh had borrowed ₹60 lakh from Uma Shankar for business a year ago. Initially, Uma Shankar's behavior

was good but later he started showing his true colors. Having lent money, he made both Sanjay and Shiva his servants and used to abuse both after he consumed alcohol. Sanjay further disclosed that Uma Shankar was flirtatious and he used to bring girls to the flat. On the day of the incident, his female friend Neha visited his flat. After spending time at the house, she left for her house. They disclosed that they took advantage of this and they murdered him at night soon after Neha left the house and fled the scene after locking the door from outside. They said they were sure that when Neha comes to Uma Shankar's house next, the police will suspect her.

The accused said they also knew that she had also taken a loan from Uma Shankar and in lieu of loan, he was sexually exploiting Neha. The accused further told police that they knew Neha's lover had also threatened Uma Shankar. The contractor Uma Shankar Singh (46) of Bharkhare in Sultanpur, lived in a rented house in Arjun Enclave in Gudamba police station area. *PNS*

Ensure autopsy within 4 hrs: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh government has directed medical staff that all post-mortem examinations in the state must be completed within a maximum of four hours, a move aimed at easing the burden on grieving families.

Acting on instructions of Deputy Chief Minister and Health Minister Brijesh Pathak, the state's health department has issued new guidelines to be implemented across all post-mortem examination houses in Uttar Pradesh, the statement said. The updated protocol mandates that post-mortem procedures should not be delayed beyond four hours after the arrival of the body at the facility.

In high caseload districts, chief medical officers (CMOs) have been instructed to form multiple teams of doctors to ensure timely completion of the process. "Families should not have to

endure a long wait during their moment of grief. These new guidelines are aimed at reducing their suffering and ensuring a more sensitive and efficient system," Pathak said.

According to the guidelines, post-mortems after sunset are generally discouraged, especially in cases of murder, suicide, sexual offences, severely mutilated bodies, and deaths under suspicious circumstances. However, exceptions can be made with written approval from the district magistrate or an authorised officer. For such night-time procedures, adequate lighting (minimum 1000-watt artificial lighting) and other necessary resources must be ensured.

The government has also clarified that no cost of videography is to be charged from the victim's family in sensitive cases such as custodial deaths, police encounters, or deaths of women within 10 years of marriage. Videography is mandatory in such cases as per existing government orders and

the cost is to be borne by the Rogi Kalyan Samiti or other available funds. Further, to streamline documentation, the state will begin issuing post-mortem reports online.

Pathak has ordered that each post-mortem facility must have one computer operator and two data entry operators appointed by the CMO. Additionally, each district is required to maintain at least two vehicles dedicated to transporting bodies from hospitals to post-mortem houses. In cases involving crime against women, rape, or death of a woman within the first 10 years of marriage, it will be mandatory to include at least one female doctor in the post-mortem panel. For unidentified bodies, DNA sampling must also be conducted to assist in identification. The state government believes these measures will not only make the system more humane but also enhance transparency and accountability in medico-legal processes, the statement said.

Govt to solemnise marriages of over 1L couples in 2025

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In a bid to empower daughters from economically weaker sections, the Uttar Pradesh government has strengthened the Mukhyamantri Samuhik Vivah Yojana, making it more transparent, efficient and people-centric. The government has set a target to solemnise the marriages of over one lakh couples under this scheme in 2025. A comprehensive strategy has been formulated to reach genuine beneficiaries through strict monitoring and integration with technological

tools. After doubling the financial assistance amount, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has now directed further strengthening of the scheme's oversight mechanisms. From the financial year 2025-26, the government will spend Rs 1 lakh per couple.

The chief minister has repeatedly stated that this scheme is not merely a marriage programme, but a meaningful step towards social dignity, transparency and empowering the underprivileged. Minister of State for Social Welfare (Independent Charge) Asim Arun stated that the scheme is being simplified,



streamlined and made more transparent through the use of technology to ensure that benefits reach genuine beneficiaries. Every stage of the process — from application to distribution of materials — is being brought under digital surveillance. He further informed that special arrangements are being made to ensure the qual-

ity and distribution of gifts. Firm selection will now be done at the directorate level rather than the district level to eliminate any possibility of irregularities. To ensure transparency and accountability in mass marriage programmes, the government has decided to appoint observers in districts. Under this system, the social welfare officer of one district will be sent as an observer to another district.

The presence of the divisional deputy director and the district social welfare officer will be mandatory at wedding events. Observers will report directly to the directorate or

the divisional deputy director for event monitoring. This will ensure that no irregularities go unnoticed.

Additionally, accountability will be fixed on officials in cases of negligence in Aadhaar verification of brides before online application. Biometric presence of both bride and groom at the wedding venue will now be mandatory to prevent fraud.

At the administrative level, clear instructions have been issued to district officials to promptly prepare lists of eligible beneficiaries and to run dedicated campaigns to ensure that all deserving individuals

benefit from the scheme. Authorities have been directed to verify applications transparently and accurately in all districts, with the help of local bodies, gram panchayats and anganwadi centres to identify eligible couples.

Deputy Director in-charge of the scheme, RP Singh, stated that the Social Welfare Department has set a target of conducting mass weddings for approximately one lakh couples this year. This is not only a form of social assistance but also an effort to promote collective cooperation, community spirit and respect for women.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that Building No. 120/496 Lajpat Nagar, Kanpur, which is Plot 588 Block-NP Scheme No. 1, Yojna Narayanpur Kanpur Nagar, was purchased by Gopal Narayan Srivastava from Sardar Sundar Singh, whose registration is registered in Sub Registrar Kanpur Nagar on 15.06.1978, Book No. 1 Volume 3212, Page 256 to 267, Original No. 6199, Musanna No. 6200 and 6201, dated 06.07.1978. After the death of Gopal Narayan Srivastava, Madan Gopal Srivastava, Jagdish Narayan Srivastava, Mohan Lal Srivastava, Hari Kishan Srivastava, Krishna Kumar Srivastava and Sohan Lal Srivastava become legal heirs. Hari Kishan Srivastava, Krishna Kumar Srivastava and Shri Sohan Lal Srivastava have also died. After the death of Hari Kishan Srivastava, Harshita Srivastava (daughter) is the legal heir of Late Hari Kishan Srivastava. After the death of Krishna Kumar Srivastava, Smt. Vimla Srivastava (wife), Jitendra Srivastava (son) are the legal heirs of Krishna Kumar Srivastava, and after the death of Sohan Lal Srivastava, Smt. Seema Srivastava (wife), Abhinav Srivastava (son) and Shubham Srivastava (son) are the legal heirs of late Sohan Lal. Mr. Madan Gopal Srivastava, Jagdish Narayan Srivastava, Mohan Lal Srivastava, Harshita Srivastava, Mrs. Vimla Srivastava, Jitendra Srivastava, Shubham Srivastava, Mrs. Seema Srivastava, Abhinav Srivastava are selling Building No. 120/496 Lajpat Nagar, Kanpur Nagar to Mrs. Kavita Devi Jasnani. Mrs. Kavita Devi Jasnani is purchasing Building No. 120/496 Lajpat Nagar, Kanpur Nagar by taking a home loan from IDFC First Bank. If any person has any objection in the sale of the said property, can register his objection on the below mentioned address within 7 days No objection will be valid after the expiry of the time period.
Date-27.06.2025
Mrinal Lalchandani Advocate
Chamber No.14 First Floor Moti Lal Bhawan Civil Court, Kanpur Nagar
Mobile No. 9919606060, Advocated By (IDFC First Bank Ltd.)

Chouhan for accelerating pace of tech transfer to farmers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Varanasi

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan emphasised that the Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan was not just a ritual, but a concerted effort by scientists to improve the condition of farmers. He was speaking at a review meeting with scientists of the Indian Institute of Vegetable Research (IIVR) here on Friday. The minister praised the success of the Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan, which has been launched across the country, and highlighted the need to improve the quality and reach of food production to farmers. He emphasised the importance of genome editing, seed treatment, organic farming and natural farming in increasing vegetable production. Chouhan also stressed the need to protect farmers from problems like fake fertilisers, substandard seeds and pesticides, and to develop a plan to address these issues. He appreciated the 'Lab to Land' programme, which enables research to be conducted according to the needs of farmers. The minister emphasised



Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan during a review meeting with IIVR scientists in Varanasi on Friday.

the need to increase the shelf life of tomatoes, develop crops that can be exported and used to make dry powder, collect data on scientific facts related to organic and traditional farming; expedite gene editing research and conduct research according to the needs of farmers under the Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan. He also emphasised the importance of promoting innovation by farmers to increase production and the need for better coordination between different departments, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and state agriculture departments. IIVR Director Dr Rajesh Kumar presented a

detailed report on the institute's achievements and work with farmers. In the review meeting, Dr Sudhakar Pandey, Assistant Director General, ICAR also briefed about the progress of the Institute. The minister directed that a plan be prepared for the upcoming Rabi season, taking into account the challenges posed by climate change and that the pace of technology transfer to farmers should be accelerated through effective coordination between agricultural science centres and research institutions. Meanwhile, addressing a press conference at Circuit House, Chouhan said that the

Constitution of India does not need the words 'secularism' and 'socialism'. Lashing out at the Congress, he said both these words should be removed. He said that they were added to the Constitution later for their own gain and were not needed as India's culture has nothing to do with them. Earlier, when the Union Minister landed at Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport, Babatpur, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers welcomed him under the leadership of party's regional (Kashi) president Dilip Patel. The workers welcomed the agriculture minister by garlanding him in the traditional style.

Later, Chouhan visited the three-day photo exhibition organised by the Information Department in Shaheed Park in front of the VMC on the themes of 'Dark chapter of Indian democracy' and 'Attack on the Constitution by immoral amendments'. A total of 57 photo kits have been displayed in this exhibition. Mayor Ashok Tiwari, MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma, BJP city president Pradeep Agrahari, Prem Prakash Kapoor and many corporators were also present.

ADRM conducts inspection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Varanasi

In view of safe and timely operation of trains, Additional Divisional Railway Manager (Operations) of Varanasi Division of North Eastern Railway (NER) Rajesh Kumar Singh conducted an inspection of Varanasi- Bhatni, Bhatni-Siwan and Siwan-Thawe rail sections from his



self-propelled inspection vehicle on Friday. He also conducted a thorough inspection of the guard / loco pilot running room of Thawe station.

On the occasion, Senior Divisional Safety Officer Balendra Pal, Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (Operations) Dharmendra Yadav, Divisional Electrical Engineer (General) Saurabh Rathore and senior observers were present with him.

Cong misused Constitution to save power: Maurya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Kanpur

Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Maurya, while addressing the gathering at the mock parliament being organised here at CSJM University auditorium on Friday regarding the Emergency imposed in the country during the Congress rule, said, "SP is not the real Samajwadi Party today, its chief Akhilesh Yadav is sitting in the lap of the Congress. Our democracy fighters never accepted subjugation, but Congress misused the Constitution to save power". He said in 1975, Indira Gandhi's election was declared illegal by the court, she was banned from contesting elections for six years.

The Congress responded to this by imposing emergency in the entire country. Civil rights were trampled, opposition leaders were put in jail and the soul of democracy was crushed. The Deputy CM said that Congress left the country behind. Emergency was the result of one family's lust for power, Maurya said.

He added that if the Gandhi family had not succeeded in



Deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya at the mock parliament being organised at CSJM University on Friday

dominating the country's politics, then today India would have become the number one country in the world. In the Constitution, every citizen has got the right to vote and India's democratic system was based on this. Today, elections are held every five years, the public forms the government, but the Congress had destroyed democracy to save power, he added. Youth and students selected from various districts of Kanpur region will participate in the role of the ruling party and the opposition. This mock parliament will not only give the youth practical experience of the parliamentary process, but will also expose the cruelty of the emergency imposed on June

25, 1975. In the closing session, UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Social Welfare, Scheduled Caste and Tribal Welfare, Asim Arun, will participate and will award the youth and students participating in the mock parliament. Regional president Prakash Pal also expressed his views.

MAP RESOLUTION DAY

A Map Resolution Day was held in the auditorium of the KDA on Thursday, following the instructions of the Housing and Urban Planning Department.

The event was attended by the vice-chairman, Secretary and other officers and staff of the authority.

MoU to open new avenues for religious tourism: MP DyCM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Varanasi

Deputy Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Rajendra Shukla stated that the MoU signed between MP and Uttar Pradesh (UP) is set to not only interconnect the sacred sites of Kashi Vishwanath, Mahakaleshwar and Omkareshwar, but also accelerate the development of the Buddhist Circuit, opening up new avenues for religious tourism and employment. He was speaking as the chief guest at a grand roadshow organised by Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board here on Friday. Shukla said that under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the leadership of Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav, MP has adopted an integrated approach to infrastructure development, preservation of traditional culture, and private sector participation in tourism. "These concerted efforts have positioned the state as a highly promising destination for both tourism and investment", he said, emphasising on MP's wealth of historical heritage, cultural legacy, the largest forest cover in India and rich biodiversity. With an aim to steer MP's tourism industry towards fresh growth and investment, the event saw enthusiastic partici-

pation from tourism stakeholders, tour operators, travel agents and hospitality professionals from both MP and UP. It also served as a key build up to the upcoming MP Travel Mart and Regional Tourism Conclave.

MLA from Varanasi Cantonment Saurabh Srivastava and Principal Secretary (Tourism, Culture, and Religious Trusts & Endowments Department), MP Government and Managing Director, MP Tourism Board Sheo Shekhar Shukla were also present.

Sheo Shekhar Shukla said MP stands as one of India's most diverse and culturally vibrant tourism destinations. "With deep religious and tourism linkages between MP and UP, including the presence of two Jyotirlingas — Baba Mahakal (Ujjain) and Baba Kashi Vishwanath (Varanasi)—the proposed Ganga-Narmada Tourism Corridor is expected to connect key destinations such as Prayagraj, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Omkareshwar and Mahakaleshwar", he said, adding that the corridor would promote bilateral cooperation between the two states and provide a rich and varied tourism experience for visitors, supporting religious, cultural, wellness and heritage tourism alike. He further said that MP's

natural landscapes, heritage structures, vibrant tribal arts and wildlife diversity offer a complete experiential journey. The state has gained notable recognition on the international tourism map. He stated that tourism is more than an economic contributor it is a bridge for cultural connection, social inclusion and community empowerment.

The event enabled constructive dialogue between travel and tourism stakeholders from UP and MP. Discussions explored regional tourism integration, investment potential and collaborative ventures—contributing not only to regional growth but also to India's national tourism economy. The roadshow spotlighted MP's rich natural, historical, spiritual and rural tourism assets. "In 2024, the state welcomed over 134.1 million tourists. Destinations such as Baba Mahakal (Ujjain), Omkareshwar, Chitrakoot, Maihar, and Amarkantak (origin of the Narmada river) continue to attract spiritual and leisure travellers alike", MP principal secretary said and added that MP was home to three UNESCO World Heritage sites — Khajuraho Group of Monuments, Bhimbetka Rock Shelters and Sanchi Stupa — and has 15 sites on the tentative list.

Rathyatra Mela begins in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Varanasi

The three-day Rathyatra Mela began here on Friday with the idols of Lord Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra, being placed on the traditional Rath (chariot) here on Friday which attracted a huge crowd of devotees. Lord Jagannath, adorned with yellow colour costume and flowers, was riding on an octagonal yellow colour chariot. The wooden chariot is based on 14 wheels which is placed near Rath Yatra crossing.

Lord Jagannath will stay on the chariot till the wee hours on Monday, prior to the return of idols to Jagannath temple at Assi. The idols were installed at the chaitra amidst chanting of traditional mantras by the priests. The idols were decorated



Devotees offering prayers to Lord Jagannath in Varanasi on Friday.

with yellow garments (Pitambar) and the entire chariot was decorated with flowers. The traditional dishes, including sweets and fruits, were offered.

The rush of the people visiting the fair started increasing in the evening and it continued till midnight hours when the people were seen purchasing Nankhatai, a hand-made biscuit and other items apart

from offering prayers to Lord Jagannath. The children enjoyed the swings. Elaborate security arrangements were made in the entire fair areas. No vehicles were allowed to move towards Rathyatra crossing from Sagra, Bhelupur, Luxa and Mahmooorganj side.

The grandeur of this one of the 'lakha' melas (in which lakhs of people turn out) was seen during the fair which is

Devotion marks Rath Yatra



Artistes take part in a procession during the annual Rath Yatra festival in Prayagraj on Friday

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Prayagraj

The grand Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath was taken out here on Friday with traditional gaiety and religious pomp. The yatra was started from the main temple of the city, where after special worship, the chariot of Lord Jagannath, brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra was pulled by the devotees. The annual Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath began with traditional faith, reverence and devotion. On this auspicious occasion, thousands of devotees participated in it and made the atmosphere of the city devotional with the slogans of Jai Jagannath. The yatra

started from the Sri Jagannath temple of the city, where Uttar Pradesh Industrial Development Minister Nand Gopal Gupta 'Nandi' and former cabinet minister Narendra Singh Gaur started the 'yatra' by performing ritualistic worship. The idols of Lord Jagannath, brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra were seated in the chariot, which were pulled by the devotees with reverence. Nandi said that under the guidance of PM rime Minister Narendra Modi, Lord Jagannath's yatras are being taken out across the country, which are connecting Sanatan culture and tradition. He said, "This yatra spreads spiritual energy in the country and soci-

ety. I wish that Lord Jagannath fulfils everyone's wishes." The Rath Yatra which began from Shri Jagannath Temple and returned to the temple via Chowk, Sulem Sarai, Loknath, MG Road, Subhash Chowk, Alopibagh and Harshwardhan Chauraha. Tight security arrangements were made on the entire route. The traffic police had already decided alternative routes to keep the traffic system smooth. Bhajan kirtan, distribution of prasad and traditional cultural programs were organised at various places on the yatra route. Devotees felt proud to pull the chariot by walking barefoot. This yatra was not only a symbol of faith, but also a celebration of social and cultural unity.

Permanent dialogue mechanism meeting concludes



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Prayagraj

Two-day permanent dialogue mechanism meeting with North Central Railway Employees' Union (NCREU) concluded at the Divisional Railway Manager's office of Prayagraj Division here on Friday. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Divisional Railway Manager, Prayagraj Division, Rajneesh Aggarwal. Addressing the divisional railway manager appreciated the work done by all the officers and employees of Prayagraj Division during the Maha Kumbh Mela. He also praised the cooperation being given to the railway administration by NCREU. On the occasion, he informed that a total of 160 trade/selection tests were conducted from January 1, 2024, till now, through which 3,032 employees were promoted. At the same time, from April 1, 2024 till now, 682 employees have been given the benefit of

MACP. During the same period, 173 dependents were given compassionate appointment, while 135 dependents were paid the final payment. Also, a total of 1,439 appointment panels were issued from Railway Recruitment Board, Allahabad, on various posts like Train Manager, Station Master, CCTC, Clerk etc. Apart from this, the appointment process has been completed by verifying 1,863 candidates received from Railway Recruitment Cell.

Zonal General Secretary North Central Railway Employees' Union RP Singh first of all congratulated the entire divisional team for the successful organisation of Maha Kumbh. He said that Prayagraj division was a big division and the problems and their solutions here are a continuous process. During his address, he raised various points like night duty allowance, kilometre allowance, speeding up the works at the divisional level, improving the TT Rest House, giving consol-

idated travelling allowance to the ticket checking staff, providing better facilities to the running staff, improving the arrangements of the Central Hospital. The senior divisional personnel officer informed that e-office has been fully implemented in Prayagraj Division, where most of the files are being executed through digital medium. The physical service record (SR) of the employees appointed after May 01, 2023, has been discontinued and their e-SR is being prepared through HRMS On-Boarding Module, which the employees can view with their HRMS-ID. The data of 100 per cent of the employees of the division has been fed on the HRMS portal.

Divisional Railway Manager Rajneesh Aggarwal assured that all the issues raised will be reviewed seriously and concrete action will be taken towards their solution on priority basis.

BODY FOUND

The body of a 21-years-old youth was found hanging from a saree noose in a room in Kaula village under Karchana police station area here on Friday. When the family members saw the body, they informed the police. The Karchana police reached the spot, took down the body from the noose and sent it for post-mortem examination.

Casting of 2 crossovers near Baradevi metro stn successfully completed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
Kanpur

The casting of two crossovers near Baradevi Metro Station has been successfully completed. These crossovers have been constructed on both ends of the station along the mainline viaduct. They will enable trains to switch tracks or directions, thereby enhancing operational flexibility.

Following the successful extension of passenger services

from IIT to Kanpur Central under Corridor-1, the Kanpur Metro team is now working with full dedication to extend the line to Naubasta, the final station on this corridor. Track construction on both the up and down lines of the five-km Baradevi-Naubasta elevated section has reached an advanced stage, with approximately 4.5 km of track already constructed on each line. A total of four crossovers — two each near Baradevi and Naubasta stations — are planned for this section.

With Thursday's progress, the casting of both crossovers near Baradevi has been completed. Track and crossover construction work is currently underway on both lines of the Baradevi-Naubasta elevated section. A total of 1,150 rails, each 18 meters long and weighing around one ton, have been delivered to the viaduct using cranes. Flash butt welding, using a dedicated on-site plant, was carried out directly on the viaduct to join the rails. So far, 4.5 km of track has been constructed on both the up and down lines.

With the casting of the two crossovers near Baradevi station now complete, this section is steadily approaching operational readiness. Managing Director of Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation Limited (UPMRC) Sushil Kumar said, "Following the completion of track welding in the Baradevi-Naubasta section, we've now also completed the casting of two crossovers near Baradevi. The platform slabs and

PEB (pre-engineered building) structures—essentially the roofing work—have already been completed at all five stations along this section: Baradevi, Kidwai Nagar, Vasant Vihar, Buddhi Nagar, and Naubasta. In addition to track work, systems installation for signaling, telecom, and electrification is currently underway. I am pleased to see our team and contractors working with unwavering commitment and a well-coordinated strategy to achieve our project milestones."

Rajnath Singh talks upgrading Sukhoi with Russian counterpart

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Upgrading India's Sukhoi-30MKI fighter fleet, production of air-to-air missiles and expeditious supply of two batches of S-400 missile systems figured prominently in Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's talks with his Russian counterpart Andrey Belousov in the Chinese city of Qingdao.

The two defence ministers held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of a conclave of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) on Thursday. The Indian Air Force is operating around 260 Sukhoi 30-MKI jets and it is looking at upgrading the fleet under an ambitious plan.

The Russian-origin Sukhoi jets played a key role in Operation Sindoor last month.

Rajnath Singh and Belousov held in-depth discussions on a range of subjects covering current geopolitical situations, cross-border terrorism and Indo-Russian defence cooper-



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh meeting Kazakhstan Defence Minister Lieutenant General Dauren Kosanov on sidelines of the SCO Defence Ministers Meeting in Qingdao

ation, the Defence Ministry said on Friday.

The Russian Defence Minister highlighted the long-standing Indo-Russian relations and expressed solidarity with India on the horrendous and cowardly Pahalgam terrorist attack, it

said. "Supply of S-400 systems, Su-30 MKI upgrades and procurement of critical military hardware in expeditious timeframes were some of the key takeaways of the meeting," the ministry said in a statement. "It was one of the most

important recent meetings between the leaders of the two nations, being held in the backdrop of Operation Sindoor and the consequent necessity of augmenting defence production, especially in critical items such as air defence, air-to-air

missiles, modern capabilities and upgrades of air platforms," it said. In his talks with Belousov, Rajnath pressed for expediting the supply of two remaining units of S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile systems to India, it is learnt.

Russia has already supplied three units of the long-range missile systems to India under a \$5.5 billion deal. The missile systems were used extensively by the Indian Air Force during the May 7-10 military conflict with Pakistan.

Rajnath Singh also held separate bilateral talks with his counterparts from Belarus, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan on the margins of the SCO meet.

"In his interaction with the ministers, Raksha Mantri highlighted the importance of continued engagement in defence cooperation and exploring new opportunities for collaboration in areas of technical collaboration," the Defence Ministry said.

He highlighted the rapid advances made by India in the field of defence production.

India slams SCO statement; Jaishankar calls it unacceptable

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday said India wanted a reference to terrorism in the outcome document of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) defence ministers' meeting, but it was not acceptable to one member country, an oblique reference to Pakistan.

Jaishankar said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's view on the matter was right since the main purpose of SCO was to fight terrorism and without a reference on it (on India's concerns on terrorism), he would not accept the outcome document.

Rajnath Singh on Thursday refused to sign a joint communiqué of the SCO following the omission of the Pahalgam terror attack and not explicitly addressing India's concerns over Pakistan-backed cross-border terrorism.

At a conference of SCO, Singh demanded inclusion of the terror attack in the com-



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar addressing a press conference in New Delhi on Friday

muniqué while the Pakistani side pressed for having a paragraph on militant activities in Balochistan in an apparent attempt to blame New Delhi, top sources said.

The objective of SCO that runs through consensus was to fight terrorism, Jaishankar said in a press conference when asked about Singh's stand. "In the discussion on

outcome document of the defence ministers' meeting, one country — you can guess which one — said 'no we don't want reference to that,' he said.

The SCO runs by unanimity, Jaishankar said, but when one country said it will not accept any mention of terrorism, Singh communicated that the outcome document was not acceptable to India.

President, PM, extend greetings on Jagannath Rath Yatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday greeted citizens on the occasion of Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath.

During the annual yatra, chariots of Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Jagannath are pulled from Shri Jagannath temple to Shree Gundicha temple in Puri, Odisha. Lakhs of devotees gather there to be part of the grand festival. Similar yatras are also taken out in other parts of the country.

"On the occasion of the holy Rath Yatra, I extend my heartfelt best wishes to the devotees of Mahaprabhu Jagannath living in India and abroad," President Murmu said in a social media post.

Lakhs of devotees get divine experience by seeing Lord Balabhadra, Lord Jagannath, Devi Subhadra and Chakraraj Sudarshan seated on the chariot, she said.

"The human play of these divine forms is the specialty of Rath Yatra. On this auspicious occasion, it is my prayer to Mahaprabhu Shri Jagannath that there should be an atmosphere of peace, friendship and affection in the entire world," President Murmu said.

Prime Minister Modi greeted people on the occasion of Lord Jagannath's annual Rath Yatra and wished happiness, prosperity and good health to everyone on the auspicious occasion.

Bangladesh's proximity with Pakistan-China discussed at parliamentary meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Bangladesh's perceived growing proximity with Pakistan and China and implications of India's strained ties with its eastern neighbour were discussed at a parliamentary committee meeting on Friday amid suggestions by some experts on engagement with the country, sources said.

"Former foreign secretary and ex-National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon, Lt General Syed Ata Hasnain, former High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh Riva Ganguly Das and well-known academician Amitabh Mattoo appeared as experts and "gave us very good insights and excellent ideas," Standing Committee on External Affairs Chairman Shashi Tharoor said.

In reply to a question about infiltration from Bangladesh, he said one figure that has come up before

In reply to a question about infiltration from Bangladesh, Shashi Tharoor said one figure that has come up before the committee suggests that its number has gone down

the committee suggests that its number has gone down.

An MP said some members flagged concerns about the strain in ties with Bangladesh under the interim Government of Muhammad Yunus after Sheikh Hasina was deposed last year.

An expert said despite concerns about radicalisation of youths in the country its army is not extremist like Pakistan's.

That China is getting a foothold in the country which is strategically important for India was another issue for some MPs of the panel, sources said, noting

that Pakistan is also trying to strengthen its ties with Bangladesh.

BJP MP Kiran Choudhry, sources said, recalled India's role in liberating Bangladesh, noting that her father Brigadier Atma Singh of 17 Kumaon Regiment had played a heroic role in the 1971 war and had suffered bullet injuries. Singh was called the "founding father" of the regiment and his unit battle honours.

An MP asked if South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation can be revived to counter Chinese bid to grow its influence in the region and also floated the idea of exchange of journalists to boost people to people engagement with Bangladesh.

The law-maker flagged the implications of India-Bangladesh ties on West Bengal, which shares a long border with the country and has been at the received end of suspected large-scale infiltration.

BJP appoints State election officers to oversee organisational polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The BJP on Friday appointed 'State election officers' to oversee its organisational elections in Maharashtra, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

Union Ministers Kiren Rijiju and Harsh Malhotra and former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad have been assigned the task for the three States, respectively.

The three MPs will be the central leaders in charge of the

elections of presidents and national council members from these States, K Laxman, the national returning officer for organisational elections, said in a statement.

The appointment is likely to give a fresh push to complete the already drawn-out exercise for organisational polls in the party, which will culminate with the election of a new national president to replace incumbent JP Nadda, who is also a Union Minister.

A source said there is a possibility that the party may

Union Ministers Kiren Rijiju and Harsh Malhotra and former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad have been assigned the task for the three States, respectively

have a new national president next month.

He said the presidents of a few state units, including Andhra Pradesh and

Telangana, are likely to be elected next week and some others may follow suit soon after.

The ruling BJP has 37 organisational States in total and the electoral process must be completed in at least 19 of them before the official procedure to elect the national president begins. So far, the exercise is complete in 14 of them.

However, the BJP is yet to elect its presidents in a number of key States, including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and

Gujarat. It had appointed 'state election officers' for these states in January.

The exercise, in line with the party's constitution, had begun with a nationwide membership drive in September last year and was expected to end early this year.

The tenure of the national president is three years, and Nadda assumed the office in January 2020. His term was extended due to the Lok Sabha elections in 2024, and he will continue in office till the election of his replacement.



And, around 40,000 people in Israel who are Indian nationals," he had said. One Iranian woman, who is the wife of an Indian national has also been evacuated, he added. The MEA spokesperson had said, "In all, we mounted, 14 flights to bring back Indian nationals from Iran. These flights flew from Mashhad, as also from Yeravan in Armenia,

(June 26) from the Iranian city of Mashhad, Jaiswal had posted on X earlier. India on Wednesday evacuated 296 Indian citizens and four Nepalese nationals from Iran.

"As far as Israel is concerned, we have so far evacuated 818 Indian nationals in four flights. As you are aware the airspace in Israel was closed, so we had to take our people to bordering countries, i.e., Jordan and Egypt, and from both these countries they were put on special flights, and they came back home," he told reporters.

The MEA spokesperson said, "We are thankful to the government of Egypt and Jordan for their support." Indian embassies in Israel, Jordan and Egypt "collaborated very closely" with the MEA headquarters in Delhi, in mounting the evacuation operation.

"But, we would also like to thank Government of Iran, as you would know that we made our requests, they opened their airspace for us to evacuate, our nationals. We are grateful to the government of Iran for this special gesture," he said.

Man gets ₹5 lakh for jail delay in release



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Following Supreme Court's reprimand, the UP Government on Friday said a man, whose release from prison was delayed for about a month after getting bail, has been compensated with ₹5 lakh. The man, booked under the provisions of the state's anti-conversion law, was granted bail by the top court on April 29 but released from Ghaziabad district jail only on June 24 — indicating a delay of 28 days.

On June 25, the top court while pulling up the state authorities over the delay, ordered a ₹5 lakh compensation and asked UP Government to report on compliance. On Friday, the state's counsel informed a bench of Justices KV Viswanathan and N Kotiwar Singh that the state had complied with the direction and paid the compensation. The man's counsel confirmed having received the amount.

The top court granted bail to the accused on April 29 and subsequently on May 27, a trial court in Ghaziabad issued his release.

On June 25, when the top court was informed about

the man's release the previous day, it said liberty was a "very valuable and precious" right guaranteed under the Constitution.

The man, the top court said, had lost his liberty for at least 28 days due to a "trivial non-issue".

The bench also took strong exception over the delay on the ground that a sub-section of a provision of Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021 was not mentioned in the bail order.

It had passed the order on a plea by the accused seeking a modification of the April 29 order to specifically include clause (1) of section 5 of the 2021 Act. The bench then ordered an enquiry into the matter by the principal district and sessions judge, Ghaziabad.

The enquiry's focus was directed to be on the reason behind the delay. On June 25, the state's counsel said the trial court's May 27 order mentioned all details except Sub-Section (1) of Section 5 of the Act and, therefore, a plea for correction was filed by the jail authorities on May 28.

Since the application was not disposed of earlier, she said, the petitioner was not released.

India evacuates 4,400 Indian nationals from Iran, Israel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India has evacuated more than 4,400 Indian nationals from Iran and Israel so far in 19 special flights under Operation Sindhu launched on June 18 to bring home its citizens amid the ongoing conflict between the two countries, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

A fresh batch of 173 Indians evacuated from Iran reached Delhi late Thursday night in a flight from Armenian capital Yeravan, the MEA said in a post on X. At his weekly media briefing a day before, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, in response to queries on Operation Sindhu, said New Delhi was assessing the situation on the ground and a decision on the future course of action would be taken based on it.

Over 3,400 Indian nationals have been evacuated so far in 14 flights from Iran since the start of Operation Sindhu, according to data shared by him during the briefing.

Jaiswal later shared updated

evacuee figures in the post on X after the arrival of the flight from Yeravan. "A special evacuation flight from Yeravan, Armenia landed in New Delhi at 22:30 hrs on 26th June, bringing home 173 Indian nationals from Iran," he wrote.

"As part of #OperationSindhu, a total of 4415 Indian nationals (3597 from Iran and 818 from Israel) have been evacuated so far using 19 special evacuation flights including 3 IAF aircraft. 14 OCI card-holders, 9 Nepali nationals, 4 Sri Lankan nationals and 1 Iranian spouse of an Indian national were also evacuated from Iran," he added.

On June 24, India said while it remained "deeply concerned about the prospects for overall and sustained regional security and stability", it welcomed reports of a ceasefire between Iran and Israel.

Hours after US President Donald Trump's claims of an Iran-Israel ceasefire, the MEA in a statement had said "India stands ready to play its part" to resolve the situation and insisted on "dialogue and



diplomacy" as the way forward. Jaiswal on Thursday was asked if India would continue Operation Sindhu after the Iran-Israel ceasefire, and about the total number of India nationals evacuated from the two countries so far.

"We launched Operation Sindhu on June 18. We have around 10,000 people. Indian community members in Iran.

And, around 40,000 people in Israel who are Indian nationals," he had said.

One Iranian woman, who is the wife of an Indian national has also been evacuated, he added. The MEA spokesperson had said, "In all, we mounted, 14 flights to bring back Indian nationals from Iran. These flights flew from Mashhad, as also from Yeravan in Armenia,

**Editor's
TAKE**

India refuses to sign SCO joint declaration

India's strong stand at SCO underlines its approach to terrorism signalling its assertive foreign policy posture

There has been a paradigm shift in India's approach to foreign policy post Pahalgam massacre. The country has taken and rightly so, a zero tolerance policy towards terrorism. It is unflinching in its approach to condemn terrorism on all international fora. It was once again at display in China. At the recently concluded Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers' Meeting held in Qingdao, China on June 26, 2025, India refused to sign the joint declaration — a move that underscores its principled stance on terrorism and regional security. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, representing India, chose not to endorse the final communiqué, citing the deliberate exclusion of India's terrorism-related concerns from the draft; an issue India considers critical to regional peace and stability. This lack of consensus made it impossible for the declaration to be adopted unanimously. The SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting brought together representatives from major regional powers, including China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and several Central Asian nations.

It was expected to culminate in a joint declaration reinforcing collective commitment to peace, security, and cooperation in the region. However, the talks stumbled when India pressed for strong language condemning terrorism, particularly cross-border terrorism and the threat of non-state actors accessing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). One member state's opposition to these inclusions — especially the reference to the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir, which killed several tourists — led to a diplomatic impasse.

In his address, Rajnath Singh made India's position clear. He called for accountability for "perpetrators, organisers, financiers, and sponsors" of terrorism and insisted that no compromise should be made when it comes to combating this menace. He warned about the risks of WMDs falling into the hands of terrorist organisations, stressing the urgent need for collective, decisive action. India's objection also stemmed from what it considered a clear imbalance in the draft declaration.

While it allegedly included references to terror incidents in Pakistan, it omitted any mention of the Pahalgam attack in India. This, New Delhi argued, undermined the credibility of the statement. India maintained that a credible security declaration must address all instances of terrorism without exception or political convenience. The failure to do so prompted India to withhold its signature. India's refusal to toe the line reflects its increasingly assertive foreign policy. Rather than yielding for the sake of consensus, New Delhi chose to send a clear message: counter-terrorism cannot be diluted or selectively applied in regional diplomacy. While this move might strain relations with some member countries, particularly Pakistan and possibly China — the host of the event — it also positions India as a nation willing to take principled stands even on contentious multilateral platforms. As the SCO continues to grapple with internal divides and conflicting priorities among members, India's position may act as an catalyst, a much-needed conversation on the need for integrity and unanimity in confronting the global threat of terrorism.

Resurgent fundamentalism in Bangladesh

Fundamentalist groups in Bangladesh are positioning to enter Parliament through street mobilisation and polarising rhetoric — posing serious threat to the country's minority rights and secular governance

Militant fundamentalist Islamist parties and organisations are growing and becoming more strident in Bangladesh under the interim Government headed by Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus. They hold processions, demonstrations and mega rallies.

The Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh's massive gathering in Dhaka on May 3, 2025, is an example. They are gearing up to contest the country's 13th general elections which seem likely to be held in February. According to a report by Salman Tareque Sakil published in the *Dhaka Tribune* on June 25, 2025, under the heading "Five religious parties on path to electoral compromise," the Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB), Khilafat Majlis (KM), Bangladesh Khilafat Majlis (BKM), Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam (JUEI) and Nezam-e-Islam (NI), have formed a liaison committee to push unity among themselves in the context of the forthcoming elections. What form electoral cooperation among the five will take — whether the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) will be a part of it — remains undecided. The JUEI's secretary general, Maulana Manjurul Islam Afendi, told Sakil on June 24, 2025, "We have taken the initiative to make the five Islamic parties float one candidate and one ballot box. That initiative is ongoing. The entire process has not been officially finalised yet." He had added, "We have formed a liaison committee. There has been no clear decision on the election process. There are differences of opinion on how we will unite, where we will all go together, whether we will join a large alliance. This is where we are."

A number of things are not clear. According to the *Dhaka Tribune*'s report, the Jamaat, which opposed the Liberation War in 1971, has not been included in this probable electoral compromise.

Nor are the five parties ready to say definitively whether it will be part of it. But then the electoral impact of a successful alliance between the five Islamist parties and the Jamaat may not be earth-shaking. Even if one ignores the outcomes of the 2024, 2018 and 2014 elections which were allegedly rigged, the results of four preceding elections are revealing. The Jamaat won 18 of the 300 parliamentary seats and 12.13 per cent of the votes polled in 1991. The corresponding figures for the elections in 1996, 2001 and 2008 are three seats and 8.6 per cent, 17 seats and 4.28 per cent, and two seats and 4.70 per cent. It had an alliance with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in 2001 and 2008. The figures for the Islami Oikya Jote were: one seat and 0.79 per cent in 1991, one seat and 1.09 per cent in 1996 and one seat and 0.68 per cent in 2001. It did not get a single seat in 2008 and received 0.15 per cent of the votes. Even



if the Islamist parties do significantly better in the next elections, they can only hope to get a toehold as a junior partner in a coalition Government to be formed.

The danger lies in their trying to impose their agenda through intimidation and violence, as the Jamaat had done when it was a part of a coalition Government with the BNP from 2001 to 2006. The question arises: what is the agenda of the Islamist parties? An AFP report published in the *Dhaka Tribune* of May 3, 2025, under the heading "Influential Islamists promise sharia as they ready for polls," quotes Muhammad Mamunul Haque, BKM's ameer, as saying, "We will implement sharia," and adding, "Everything will be guided by the Koran." A look at what Islamist parties and organisations are doing in Bangladesh now gives an idea of what will happen under their rule. The AFP report states, "Islamists have demanded an end to a swath of activities, including cultural events deemed 'anti-Islamic' — from music to theatre festivals, women's football matches and kite-flying celebrations." A report by



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Mujib Mashal and Saif Hasnat, dated April 1, 2025, and published in *The New York Times*, states, "As Bangladesh tries to rebuild its democracy and chart a new future for its 175 million people, a streak of Islamist extremism that had long lurked beneath the country's secular facade is bubbling to the surface." It added, "In interviews, representatives of several Islamist parties and organisations — some of which had previously been

banned — made clear that they were working to push Bangladesh in a more fundamentalist direction, a shift that has been little noticed outside the country."

Women's rights are among the main targets. Islamist fundamentalists have viciously attacked forward-looking recommendations of the Women Affairs Reforms Commission, such as recognising forced sex within marriage as rape under the criminal code and ensuring the labour rights and dignity of sex workers by amending the country's labour laws. A report bylined *Tribune Report* and published in the *Dhaka Tribune* of April 30, 2025, under the heading "Islamic parties reject proposals of the Women Reform Commission" quoted Mamunul Haque, KM's secretary-general as saying, "We make a clear appeal: grant women their just rights. Do not push them into prostitution or turn mothers into symbols of disgrace." Dr Shafiqur Rahaman, Jamaat's ameer, said, "We reject the commission outright as it stands against the values and laws of Allah and the thoughts and beliefs of the nation."

There is resistance from a section of the civil society and the media. An editorial in the *Dhaka Tribune* of February 22, 2025, stated, "Time and again, the interim Government has proven itself utterly incapable when it comes to reining in extremists who now feel emboldened to carry out their intolerant and regressive agendas — not only has the void in comprehensive law enforcement paved the way to a sharp rise in crime, but it now appears the threat of agitating extremists is also an element that must be dealt with." The same paper had said in another editorial on March 20, 2025, "While the overwhelming majority of Bangladesh still subscribes to communal harmony, the void in law enforcement

has certainly resulted in fringe right-wing groups trying to make their presence known." It added, "The onus, then, lands squarely on the interim Government to call a spade a spade and brand such groups for what they are: Extremists." Six women, including three leaders of the National Citizen Committee sent, through their lawyer, a legal notice on May 5, 2025, demanding an explanation within seven days from the Hefazat for using abusive language against members of the Women Affairs Reform Commission.

There have been civil society protests on a number of other issues as well. And the interim Government? If it has taken any action against Islamist fundamentalists for their relentless persecution of Hindus and the destruction of their temples, homes and businesses, it is of a special kind whose results are not visible.

The same applies in the case of those disrupting sporting events and cultural performances. Rather, it is doing other things. According to a BSS report published on February 28, 2025, in the *Dhaka Tribune* under the heading "Khalid: Govt takes diverse initiatives to promote Islamic culture, values," the Religious Affairs Adviser, Dr AFM Khalid Hossain, said while speaking as a chief guest at an event in Dhaka, that the Government was undertaking various initiatives to promote and develop Islamic culture and values. The Religious Affairs Adviser is a Naye-e-Ameer of Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh and an advisor to Islami Andolan Bangladesh. Can one expect the Muhammad Yunus-led Interim Government to act resolutely against fundamentalist Islamist violence?

(The writer is a Consulting Editor at *The Pioneer*. Views are personal)

PIG TALK



A glimpse of traditional fishing practices in Manipur, where sustainable methods continue to thrive.

PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR

Mental health and the power of identity

SECOND Opinion

In today's hyper-connected, fast-paced world — where social media, societal expectations, and external achievements often dictate how we see ourselves — the quest for inner peace and authentic mental well-being can feel like navigating a noisy, confusing maze. Amid this clutter, one overlooked yet profoundly transformative principle offers a clear path forward: the Law of Identification. At its core, this law states that we become what we most consistently and deeply identify with. Our thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and eventually, our life outcomes are shaped by the version of ourselves we believe in. When this principle is applied with conscious intention, it becomes more than an abstract idea — it becomes a potent tool for mental and emotional transformation.

The Law of Identification is rooted not just in philosophy but in psychology. It suggests that our sense of self is not rigid or permanent, but formed through repeated patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour linked to how we see ourselves. If you constantly think of yourself as anxious, broken, or not enough, your behaviours and habits will often reinforce that identity. But if you begin to see yourself — even tentatively — as calm, strong, and evolving, your actions start aligning with that vision. Over time, a new mental blueprint takes shape. Mental health struggles are real, serious, and

deserve compassion, support, and often professional treatment. But there's a subtle danger in fully fusing our identity with our struggles. Phrases like "I am depressed" or "I am anxious" may feel like honest descriptions, but repeated often enough, they hardwire the brain to see those states not as experiences, but as truths. The key lies in shifting from fixed identity language to growth-oriented statements — like "I'm learning to manage my anxiety" or "I'm healing from emotional wounds."

These reframes don't deny reality; they open up possibility. This principle finds resonance in the science of neuroplasticity — the brain's proven ability to change and adapt based on repeated patterns. In a time of widespread stress, emotional fatigue, and digital overload, the Law of Identification offers a timely counterforce. Many, especially younger generations, are overwhelmed by curated social media personas and societal ideals, internalising harmful beliefs about who they are or should be. The pandemic years further disoriented our sense of self. Locked in survival mode, many lost touch with deeper aspects of their identity. In such a climate, choosing to identify with your ideal self — one that is resilient, balanced, and capable — is no longer just a motivational idea; it becomes a survival skill. When the outside world feels uncertain, the internal world becomes the one place

where transformation is still possible. This law also plays a critical role in the current mental health discourse. As conversations around mental well-being become more open and des-



SAKSHI SETHI

tigmatised, the Law of Identification offers a next step. It bridges the gap between awareness and active change. It urges people not just to name their struggles, but to begin imagining who they want to become. In a world quick to highlight what's broken, choosing to identify with what's possible becomes a revolutionary act of healing. Language is a powerful lever in this process. How we speak about ourselves becomes the scaffolding for how we think and feel. Saying "I'm terrible with stress" repeatedly wires the brain to accept that limitation. But saying "I'm learning to stay calm" or "I'm becoming more mindful" sends the brain a different message — one of growth and renewal. These are not empty affirmations; they are mental instructions. Identity is shaped not just internally, but by the people and media we surround ourselves with. Immersing yourself in content, conversations, and relationships that reinforce your desired identity — ones that affirm peace, confidence, and resilience — can radically shift your mental and emotional baseline. Books, podcasts, and communities that support this identity are not luxuries; they are lifelines. The Law of Identification isn't magic, nor is it a replacement for therapy. It reminds us that while we may not control everything about our circumstances, we do have agency over the identity we choose to strengthen. And from that chosen identity, a new life can begin to take shape. Even when setbacks occur, a grounded self-image becomes an anchor — holding us steady, reminding us who we are becoming, and guiding us back to our truest self.

(The writer is an educator and councillor. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

ECI delisting 345 unreconised parties

The Election Commission of India on Thursday, June 26, said it has started proceedings for delisting of 345 registered unrecognised political parties (RUPPs) which have failed to fulfil the essential condition of contesting even a single election in the last six years since 2019.

The offices of these parties could also not be physically located anywhere, the ECI claimed. These RUPPs are from different states and UTs across the country. The Supreme Court had earlier barred EC from "deregognising" political parties noting that it was not prescribed under law. However, the EC has found a way to "delist parties". Parties delisted can be listed again by the poll authority without getting into the process of giving them fresh recognition, a former EC functionary pointed out.

Apart from over 2,800 RUPPs, there are six national and 67 state-recognised political parties in the country. The move comes ahead of Bihar elections later this year. Parties delisted cannot field their candidates to contest elections. While the Supreme Court barred "deregognition," delisting offers an alternative.

Delisted parties cannot contest elections but may be re-listed without fresh recognition. The move precedes Bihar polls. It streamlines the political landscape, ensuring that only active and accountable parties feature in the democratic exercise.

BHAGWAN THADANI MUMBAI

National Insurance Awareness Day

Insurance is the foundational element of a sound financial strategy. It is about protecting your health, income, property, and loved ones against the financial consequences arising from unexpected and often costly events.

While no one can predict the future, the right insurance policies can help reduce the financial impact of accidents, natural disasters, illness, or other claims. Insurance can help individuals rebuild after loss, and allow families to maintain financial security during difficult times. Without adequate insurance coverage, a single event — like a car accident, house fire, or medical emergency — can have devastating financial consequences.

To bring awareness about the importance of insurance in an individual's life, "National Insurance Awareness Day" is observed annually on June 28. Different types of insurance are: health, life, homeowners, auto, flood, vehicle, property, and many more other insurances.

National Insurance Awareness Day is a great occasion to help families navigate life's uncertainties with great grace and confidence. Whether you're an individual seeking peace of mind, a parent securing your family's well-being, or a business owner looking to safeguard your livelihood, insurance can be a proactive and important risk management tool to help ensure stability.

MADHUSUDHAN REDDY BURRA | KARIMNAGAR

A great moment of pride for India

India rejoices on being able to send its Air Force Fighter pilot — a Group Captain — onto the "International Space Station" to conduct experiments in microgravity. It's a moment of great achievement and pride for the country and Shubhanshu Shukla from Lucknow.

The results and takeaways of 60 experiments to be carried out in a span of 14 days by the team will enlighten and enrich space science in a big way. Experiments on whether human life can live and thrive in outer space will form part of their space odyssey. Whether human life can be transported to outer space, the living conditions which are required to sustain life there, and whether human beings in large numbers can be lifted off from Earth using gigantic spacecrafts is a curious quest which these astronauts will experiment with.

The science and technology related to this adventurous field of science learning and high-end experimentation should kindle school students to take up the study of space, albeit in their small way. The syllabus in science should include a lesson or two in space and its science at least from the 8th standard onwards.

This can ignite students to embark on taking up a future career in space science depending upon the inclination shown by them. Suitable lessons can be devised and introduced.

NR RAGHURAM | HYDERABAD

WHY THE LANGUAGE DEBATE IS A DANGEROUS DISTRACTION

The Union Home Minister is continuing his attack against foreign languages and his impulsive push for Hindi is visible in his message (news - 27 June 2025). Already in his over-enthusiastic speech he has mentioned that those who speak English will feel shame soon. This has been rightly answered by many from all over the country. Again, under the cover of glorifying native languages, he has spoken in favour of Hindi.

Actually, imposing Hindi is divisive, as seen in the sixties. It is also a fact that those who are proficient in a foreign language are equally good at their mother tongue also. Even those who are able to gain employment abroad mainly by virtue of their ability to communicate in the foreign language form forums of native languages in the countries they live, that display their love and affection for their mother tongue. The present set-up is going on smoothly and using English has not created any serious problems. Those who learn to communicate better in the foreign

language gain employment in our country and abroad, and those youth who can communicate only in their local tongues end up as migrant labourers. If speaking a foreign language is called a slavery mentality, what about seeking jobs and education in foreign countries? Many students studying automobile engineering prefer to learn German language, for which they need to be appreciated. The Home Minister repeatedly stirring the language issue under the guise of glorifying the native tongues seems to have some hidden agenda, like removing English and placing Hindi in its place as a link language in due course. If English has to be replaced, will Tamil be considered by virtue of it being the oldest living language with rich literature and being a native tongue? The Home Minister has many pressing issues like Manipur, Kashmir, Arunachal, etc., to focus attention on. The language issue is avoidable.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

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

Beyond the blackboards: Future-proofing skill education for the Gen next

The Central Government’s decision to introduce vocational education from Grade 6 under the ‘Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan’ signals a long-overdue shift towards skill-based learning. However, unless this reform is backed by robust infrastructure and industry collaboration its purpose may be defeated

FIRST
Column

The Union Government’s initiative to integrate vocational education starting from Grade 6 under the ‘Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan’ is a progressive step aimed at addressing the ongoing gap between academic learning and employability. As India strives to become a \$5 trillion economy, it is essential to equip its youth with skills early on. However, without a solid strategy, strong alignment with industry needs, and adequate infrastructure, this initiative risks becoming another well-intentioned yet poorly executed reform.

The Stark Skills Gap

The India Skills Report 2024 indicates that only 47.2 per cent of Indian youth are deemed employable, primarily due to a mismatch between the skills taught in educational institutions and those needed in the job market. A mere 4.1 per cent of individuals aged 15 to 59 have received any formal vocational training, compared to over 75 per cent in Germany and 50 per cent in China. This highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive overhaul of India’s vocational education system, from early integration in schools to the development of market-relevant skill training programs.

Learning from Global Leaders

India has the opportunity to learn valuable lessons from the German Dual System, which effectively combines classroom education with practical apprenticeships in various industries. Approximately 50 per cent of German students opt for vocational pathways after completing secondary school. Similarly, China boasts 11,300 vocational institutions and nearly 31 million enrolments, producing 10 million skilled graduates each year. These graduates support sectors ranging from services and manufacturing to artificial intelligence (AI). South Korea’s impressive 96 per cent employment rate among vocational graduates is a result of rigorous standardisation and quality assurance. These examples serve as replicable blueprints, particularly in terms of industry collaboration and co-creating curricula.

Patchy Progress Across States

West Bengal’s Utkarsh Bangla Scheme, which offers vocational courses in nearly 2,000 schools, is an ambitious model. Annually, over 600,000 students are trained across various sectors, including electronics, hospitality, information technology, and healthcare. However, limited engagement with industry partners diminishes job placement opportunities.

In contrast, states like Punjab, Haryana, and Tamil Nadu maintain close collaboration with industries and polytechnic institutes, facilitating smoother



transitions from school to work.

States such as Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have taken a step further by aligning their vocational courses with future-oriented fields, including renewable energy, AI, robotics, and wellness. This initiative aligns with the Skill India Digital Vision 2024.

Infrastructure and Implementation

The National Education Infrastructure Survey 2023 reveals that 38 per cent of Government secondary schools still lack essential laboratory and workshop facilities. In Punjab, urban areas generally perform better, while rural regions continue to struggle with faculty shortages and outdated equipment.

The poor effectiveness of previous initiatives, such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), highlighted that high enrollment numbers did not necessarily lead to employment, pri-

marily due to inadequate training quality. A phased implementation model — starting with urban centres and gradually expanding to rural districts — can ensure that infrastructure, faculty, and educational content develop in tandem.

marily due to inadequate training quality. A phased implementation model — starting with urban centres and gradually expanding to rural districts — can ensure that infrastructure, faculty, and educational content develop in tandem.

Bystander to Stakeholder

A 2023 survey by FICCI and EY reveals that 70 per cent of employers in India are facing skill shortages, yet only a small percentage are actively participating in vocational training programs. In Gujarat, effective Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) have successfully developed demand-driven courses and updated curricula.

Karnataka’s collaboration with major tech companies, such as Infosys, Wipro, and Bosch, to train high school students in coding, data analytics, and mechatronics serves as a scalable model for other states. On the other hand, West Bengal remains dependent on Government-led initiatives and needs to enhance industry collaboration, not only

for curriculum design but also for internships, apprenticeships, and certifications.

Quality Through Accountability

Since 2015, the Skill India Mission has certified over 1.3 crore individuals; however, only about 50 per cent of these individuals have secured employment. One of the main challenges is inconsistent quality. There is an urgent need for third-party audits, employer-validated certifications, and real-time tracking of placements to ensure transparency and accountability.

Singapore’s Workforce Skills Qualification (WSQ) system is considered a benchmark, as industry councils update training modules quarterly in response to labour market needs. India must invest in similar National Skill Registries and adaptive learning platforms aligned with the vision outlined in the National Education Policy.

A Five-Point Reform Agenda for the Future

1. Curriculum Modernisation: Shift the focus from traditional trades to high-growth sectors such as electric vehicle (EV) maintenance, renewable energy, robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), and healthcare technology.
2. Mandatory Industry Partnerships: Each school offering vocational courses must partner with an industry or sector skills council to co-design the curriculum and conduct evaluations.
3. Digital-First Infrastructure: Utilise the upcoming Skill India Digital Platform to provide virtual labs, remote mentorship, and modular learning opportunities, even in rural areas.
4. Quality Assurance Mechanisms: Establish a National Vocational Education Quality Council (NVEQC) to oversee standards, conduct audits, and implement employer feedback systems.
5. Incentivising Adoption: Offer tax benefits to companies that provide apprenticeships and performance-linked grants to schools based on their placement records.

Need for Deeper Reforms

India boasts one of the youngest populations globally. To transform this demographic dividend into a developmental advantage, practical skills must start early. Integrating vocational education from Grade 6 is a positive step; however, without significant reforms, it risks repeating past mistakes.

Vocational education should not be considered a fallback option for students who struggle academically. With the right policy initiatives, infrastructure improvements, and strong corporate partnerships, vocational education can lead India’s human capital revolution. It is time to move from intention to implementation, as skills will become the new currency in the future of work.

(The writer is Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a Training Partner with the NSDC. Views are personal)

Thailand on the brink: Border crisis with Cambodia fuels fears of imminent coup

While global attention remains riveted on the recently halted conflict between Israel and Iran-ignited by President Trump’s provocative assaults on purported nuclear sites — a far more seismic and overlooked upheaval is unfolding in Southeast Asia, heralding the spectres of Governmental disintegration, regional turmoil, and the re-emergence of virulent ultranationalist authoritarianism. At the heart of this crisis lies the embattled Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, caught between the unrelenting gears of royalist militarism and an inflammatory border dispute with Cambodia that has become less about territorial delineation and more a proxy war for the soul of Thai democracy. To view the Thailand-Cambodia border standoff merely through the lens of cartographic claims over temples and ancient ruins would be to profoundly underestimate its broader implications. The border is merely the stage.

The actors — the Thai military, the royalist aristocracy, the remnants of the Shinawatra political dynasty, and Cambodia’s enduring autocracy — are embroiled in a deeper conflict over legitimacy, memory, and geopolitics. The roots of the current impasse lie in the historical ambiguities left unresolved by the Franco-Siamese treaties of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The contentious zones surrounding the Ta Moan Thom, Ta Krabei, and the Preah Vihear temples have, for over a century, oscillated between national pride and imperial cartographic error. The 1962 International Court of Justice ruling, which awarded Preah Vihear to Cambodia, never fully settled the Thai military’s grievance — and in many ways, enshrined a mythos of loss that nationalists have continually resurrected to justify belligerent posturing.

Yet, what is occurring in 2025 cannot be explained merely by revisiting colonial maps. This is a crisis deliberately escalated — a choreography of confrontation designed to reinvigorate military influence within a faltering Thai polity. The fatal clash on May 28, which left a Cambodian soldier dead, may have been spontaneous in execution but was the predictable outcome of months of nationalist agitation, thinly veiled threats from mid-level Thai army commanders, and the re-militarisation of border provinces under the guise of sovereignty defence. Paetongtarn’s beleaguered premiership, marked by populist inexperience and elite antipathy, has provided the ideal vacuum for this crisis to metastasise. It is no coincidence that her leaked 17-minute phone call with former Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, now Senate President and once again donning military fatigues as the “Senior Logistics Officer”, has become the fulcrum of a political maelstrom.

That conversation — intended as a gesture of diplomatic candour — was met not with gratitude, but with fury. Within Thailand, it was perceived

by the military and conservative establishment as an unforgivable trespass on hierarchical protocol, not least because Paetongtarn appeared to denounce a regional Thai commander and supplicate before a foreign autocrat. The fact that it was leaked by a Cambodian official only highlights the performative nature of this outrage: it served as both a domestic scandal and a geopolitical warning. The response from Bhumjaithai, a pivotal coalition partner, to exit the governing alliance under the pretext of defending Thai sovereignty is performative no less — a carefully calibrated manoeuvre designed to prelude a no-confidence motion and probable parliamentary collapse. Their claim that the Prime Minister’s leaked conversation compromised national security conveniently elides the fact that Thai military officers have themselves engaged in far more clandestine — and often destabilising — operations across the Cambodian border for decades, including support for anti-Vietnamese insurgents and alleged interference in Cambodian domestic affairs.

Paetongtarn’s position is now untenable. Her coalition is hemorrhaging credibility, the military has shuttered land borders under the guise of “national security”, and conservative senators have launched judicial petitions against her. The spectre of a constitutional court dismissal — Thailand’s now-traditional soft coup method — looms ever larger. Meanwhile, the military has revived its Cold War-era national security discourse, linking the border issue to broader narratives of sovereignty, moral decay, and the need for military stewardship. But history offers chilling parallels.

The October 1976 Thammasat massacre, followed by an immediate coup, was preceded by similar nationalist fervour and royalist mobilisation against student demonstrators accused of harbouring communist sympathies. The 2006 coup that deposed Thaksin Shinawatra, Paetongtarn’s father, was couched in identical rhetoric — the moral failings of a populist demagogue, the threat to the monarchy, and the need for intervention. Even the 2014 coup, conducted by then-General Prayuth Chan-ocha, was justified on the grounds of restoring order and “rebalancing” foreign relations.

Indeed, Thailand’s military has mastered the art of coup legitimisation, consistently invoking border crises, alleged threats to the monarchy, or judicial irregularities to sanctify its usurpation of power. The judiciary, long infiltrated by royalist ideologues, has become a reliable accomplice, dissolving political parties and annulling elections with antiseptic legalese. Paetongtarn’s potential

removal by either court or coup is not a question of “if” but “when.” In this complex interplay of power, Cambodia plays its part. Hun Sen’s re-entry into military affairs — symbolically announced in uniform from the frontlines — is less about logistics and more about symbolism. His historical disdain for Thai military adventurism, combined with a shrewd understanding of domestic optics, makes his posture politically advantageous. By invoking “an enemy that has invaded Cambodia,” he galvanises nationalist fervour at home while drawing Thailand deeper into a diplomatic quagmire. Cambodia’s filing of a case at The Hague over the disputed zones is not merely legal posturing but geopolitical provocation — an invitation for international adjudication that Thailand will likely reject, reinforcing Cambodia’s narrative of victimhood.

Beneath these tensions lie deeper regional anxieties. China’s increasing influence in Cambodia, through infrastructure projects and military agreements, unnerves Thai strategists who fear encirclement. Simultaneously, Thailand’s drift from democratic norms has strained its relations with Western allies, giving Beijing further room to manoeuvre. The border crisis, thus, becomes more than a bilateral squabble — it is a proxy terrain where great power interests intersect with local authoritarianism.

The bottom line is that what is at stake is not merely Paetongtarn’s premiership or the fate of a few kilometres of disputed land, but the broader architecture of Thai political life. The resurgence of military assertiveness, the weaponisation of nationalism, the suppression of civil society, and the systematic dismantling of electoral legitimacy represent a retreat from the democratic aspirations of the 1997 constitution — itself long dead in spirit if not in name.

Thailand teeters on the precipice of yet another putsch — an outcome both banal in its predictability and tragic in its implications. And yet the international community remains inert, transfixed by conflicts elsewhere, blind to the slow strangulation of Southeast Asia’s once-promising democracy. The coming coup, whether judicial, parliamentary or military, will not just remove a prime minister. It will reaffirm the militarised state as the ultimate arbiter of power in Thailand, further ossifying a regime where ballots are tolerated only when they yield the correct result.

And as the borders close, both physically and ideologically, the spectre of armed conflict with Cambodia offers the military not only an external adversary but the ultimate alibi — the eternal justification for suspending liberty in the name of order.

(The writer is Colombo based journalist. Views are personal)

Jammu and Kashmir cannot afford political uncertainty

Everything comes with an expiry date and so does my patience: Omar Abdullah, Chief Minister Jammu and Kashmir

Only police under me, development domain of the elected Government: Manoj Sinha, LG Jammu and Kashmir

These are the warring comments by Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Mr Omar Abdullah. They made the observations on separate occasions but with the same intent of one-upmanship in the fragile constitutional framework of Jammu and Kashmir. More so after August 5, 2019 when the special status of the Jammu and Kashmir was done away with, and made a powerless Union Territory with confusing lines of power-sharing between an elected Government and the Raj Bhawan. Is the eight-month-long truce between the self-effacing chief minister and all empowered Lt Governor, being the sole representative of the Centre, over? Is Mr Abdullah’s discomfiture manifested in his “expiry date” expression outcome of the increasing public pressure reminding him of his poll promise on reinstating statehood and subsequent restoration of Article 370 in its old form?

Jammu and Kashmir, particularly Kashmir, is not a static entity, both strategically and politically.

Are the observations made by the two constitutional authorities in Jammu and Kashmir, an indication of yet another political turmoil and the related uncertainty?

At a time when the Union Territory has been trying to come to terms with the fallout of the latest round of Indo-Pak armed confrontation in the aftermath of Pahalgam terrorist attack in which 26 innocent people were killed by the gun-toting terrorists, this is the last thing anyone not only in Jammu and Kashmir but the entire nation will expect. Jammu and Kashmir cannot afford yet another round of political uncertainty only to satisfy the urges of powerful groups in New Delhi and J and K. A realisation must dawn on all that such a situation is least in the national interest.

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir shares its status with Delhi and Puducherry. UTs with assembly, with limited powers to the elected Government. Realistically speaking, as the one who has witnessed developments in Delhi from a reporter’s prism, through close quarters since 1993 when it acquired its current constitutional status, this model is flawed and unworkable. This model was born more out of political expediency rather than the well-being of the people.

Nevertheless, all three cases should be viewed and reviewed differently by the powers that be. At least J&K with its strategic location and sensitivity did not deserve this treatment.

Unfortunately, the main stakeholders (the people) had no say when this model of UTs was formulated. This is entirely true of Jammu and Kashmir where a progressive state — the national parameters would bear this out despite three-decade-long terrorism and political instability from time to time to satisfy the whims and fancies of the political leaders in New Delhi and J and K, was unceremoniously divested of its status. Never ever the people were taken on board when this decision of far-reaching dimensions was taken.

It is a reality that Jammu and Kashmir is a Union Territory with a lame-duck elected Government and a powerful Raj Bhawan lording over it. Holding assembly elections, the first in five years after the UT status, was certainly a welcome move as it reflected the Centre’s will to bring people back into the democratic process and elect their representatives, which they did with utmost enthusiasm. This spirit needed to be taken forward through greater understanding between what Mr Abdullah has now described as “two power-centres” without introducing any political element to it.

Unfortunately, this spirit seemed to be beginning to lose steam and was in danger of getting evaporated. Carrying forward this spirit would entail exhibiting, more so on the part of the Centre and Raj Bhawan, a sense of adjustment and mutual trust while bearing in mind that pressure all the time will be on the elected Government being directly answerable to the people.

Jammu and Kashmir assembly in its present form is a well-balanced House. On one side is the National Conference-led ruling alliance with a strong majority and on the other hand there is a

strong opposition primarily the BJP. This balanced formulation, in terms of the number game, of the assembly was a perfect platform for the Centre — Raj Bhawan combo, to take the democratic processes forward with elected representatives of both ruling and opposition varieties becoming the show window.

Under the circumstances, Mr Abdullah citing the expiry date of his patience is but natural as he seems to be under growing pressure from not only the electorates but also his party. The situation would have eased or at least not reached a situation where the chasm between the Lt Governor and the CM threatens to become open, had the Centre engaged the UT Government on the issue of restoration of statehood. Barring an occasional observation from the BJP’s central leadership and the Centre that this would be done at an “appropriate time”, there is nothing to show intent and give people a ray of hope. And a face-saver to Mr Abdullah.

(The writer is political and national affairs analyst. Views are personal)



DINESH SOOD



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA



ANIL ANAND

Thailand starts banning sale of cannabis without prescription

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Bangkok

Thailand has started banning the sale of cannabis to those without a prescription, three years after becoming the first country in Asia to decriminalise the plant. The new order, signed by Health Minister Somsak Thepsutin earlier this week, came into effect Thursday after it was published in the Royal Gazette. It bans shops from selling cannabis to customers without a prescription and reclassifies cannabis buds as a controlled herb. A violation could result in a maximum one-year jail term and a 20,000-baht (\$614) fine, according to the order.

The Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine, in charge of enforcing regulations related to cannabis, held a meeting Friday with officials across the country to prepare them for the change. The move to decriminalise in 2022 had boosted Thailand's tourism and farming industries, and spawned thousands of shops. But the country has



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to prepare them for the change. The move to decriminalise in 2022 had boosted Thailand's

tourism and farming industries, and spawned thousands of shops. But the country has

faced public backlash over allegations that a lack of regulation made the drug available to children and caused addiction.

Treechada Srithada, spokesperson for the Health Ministry, said in a statement Thursday that cannabis use in Thailand would become "fully for medical purposes".

She said shops that violate the order will be closed and the ministry will also tighten requirements for approval of a new license in the future. She said there are currently 18,000 shops that hold a licence to sell cannabis. The ruling Pheu Thai Party previously promised to criminalise the drug again, but faced strong resistance from its former partner in the coalition government, the Bhumjaithai Party, which supported decriminalisation.

German lawmakers vote to suspend family reunions for migrants

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Berlin

German lawmakers voted Friday to suspend family reunions for many migrants, part of a drive by the new conservative-led government for a tougher approach to migration.

Parliament's lower house voted 444-135 to suspend the possibility of family reunions for two years for migrants who have "subsidiary protection", a status that falls short of asylum. At the end of March, more than 388,000 people living in Germany had the status, which was granted to many people fleeing Syria's civil war.

New Chancellor Friedrich Merz made tougher migration policy a central plank of his campaign for Germany's election in February. Just after he took office in early May, the

government stationed more police at the border and said some asylum-seekers trying to enter Europe's biggest economy would be turned away.

The bill approved Friday is the first legislation on migration since Merz took office. It will suspend rules dating to 2018 that allowed up to 1,000 close relatives per month to join the migrants granted limited protection, with authorities making case-by-case decisions on humanitarian grounds rather than granting an automatic right for reunions.

Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt told lawmakers that the change would result in 12,000 fewer people being able to come to Germany each year and "break a business model" for smugglers.

People often know they won't get full recognition as refugees, "but they set off for Germany because it is known

that, even without asylum recognition ... You can have your family follow", Dobrindt said. "That is a significant pull effect and we are removing this pull effect today," Dobrindt said "our country's capacity for integration simply has a limit".

Liberal opposition lawmakers decried the government's approach. Marcel Emmerich, of the Greens, described the legislation as "an attack on the core of every society, on a truly central value — the family".

Anyone who wants integration must bring families together, he said. The far-right, anti-migration Alternative for Germany described the move as a very small step in the right direction. German Governments have for years faced pressure to curb migration as shelters across the country filled up.

Bangladesh interim Government forms panel to probe over last three elections

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

The interim government of Bangladesh has formed a committee to investigate allegations of irregularities, corruption and administrative involvement in the 2014, 2018, and 2024 general elections and make recommendations on ensuring fair elections in the future, a notification said.

The five-member panel led by former high court justice Shamim Hasnain will submit a report by September 30 on allegations that the three elections were manipulated to secure victories for the then-ruling Awami League party by systematically depriving citizens of their voting rights, BD NEWS 24 quoted the cabinet division notification as saying on Thursday.

The notification said the rule of law, democracy, and fundamental human rights were reportedly undermined during the elections, which faced widespread criticism both domestically and internationally.

It said the committee would analyse reports from election observers, domestic and international monitoring bodies, civil society organisations, and media regarding the 2014, 2018, and 2024 elections and collect and review expert opinions on the overall integrity and acceptability of these elections.

The committee will also assess the role of the then-ruling party and associated entities in restricting political participation and obstructing the exercise of voting rights, evaluate the functions of the election commissions, their secretariats, and the administration

during those elections, and examine the roles played by law enforcement and intelligence agencies, it said.

Additionally, it will investigate financial irregularities reportedly committed by the respective election commissions and determine accountability for the irregularities observed in those elections, the notification said.

It will then provide recommendations regarding necessary reforms in laws, regulations, the role of the election commission, and administrative arrangements to ensure free, fair, and credible elections in the future.

The notification further said the committee may also summon documents from any office and interrogate relevant individuals, and if necessary, co-opt additional members to support the investigation.

Talks with US complicated by US strike: Iran's diplomat

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Dubai

Iran's top diplomat said the possibility of new negotiations with the United States on his country's nuclear programme has been "complicated" by the American attack on three of the sites, which he conceded caused "serious damage".

The US was one of the parties to the 2015 nuclear deal in which Iran agreed to limits on its uranium enrichment program in exchange for sanctions relief and other benefits.

That deal unravelled after US President Donald Trump pulled the US out unilaterally during his first term. Trump has suggested he is interested in new talks with Iran and said the two sides would meet next week.

In an interview on Iranian state television broadcast late Thursday, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi left open the possibility that his country would again enter talks on its nuclear program, but suggested it would not be anytime soon.

"No agreement has been made for



resuming the negotiations," he said. "No time has been set, no promise has been made, and we haven't even talked about restarting the talks."

The American decision to intervene militarily "made it more complicated and more difficult" for talks on Iran's nuclear program, Araghchi said.

In Friday prayers, many imams stressed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's message from the day

before that the war had been a victory for Iran.

Cleric Hamzeh Khalili, who also is the deputy chief justice of Iran, vowed during a prayer service in Tehran that the courts would prosecute people accused of spying for Israel "in a special way".

During the war with Israel, Iran hanged several people who it already had in custody on espionage charges,

sparking fears from activists that it could conduct a wave of executions after the conflict ended. Authorities reportedly have detained dozens in various cities on the charge of cooperation with Israel.

Israel attacked Iran on June 13, targeting its nuclear sites, defense systems, high-ranking military officials and atomic scientists in relentless attacks.

In 12 days of strikes, Israel said it killed some 30 Iranian commanders and 11 nuclear scientists, while hitting eight nuclear-related facilities and more than 720 military infrastructure sites. More than 1,000 people were killed, including at least 417 civilians, according to the Washington-based Human Rights Activists group.

Iran fired more than 550 ballistic missiles at Israel, most of which were intercepted but those that got through caused damage in many areas and killed 28 people.

Israeli military spokesperson Brig. Gen Effie Defrin told reporters Friday that in some areas it had exceeded its operational goals, but needed to remain vigilant.

Wildfire prompts evacuations near Athens as heat wave hits Greece



A firefighting airplane sprays water on a hill in Thymari, south of Athens on Thursday

PTI

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Athens (Greece)

A large wildfire broke out south of Athens on Thursday, triggering authorities to issue evacuation orders and shut down parts of the coastal road linking the Greek capital to Sounion, location of the ancient Temple of Poseidon, a major tourist attraction.

The fire came as temperatures approached 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in Greece's first heatwave of the summer.

"Right now, strong land and air forces are fighting a huge battle against the flames, mainly among homes," fire department spokesman Col. Vassilis Vathrakogiannis said during a press briefing Thursday afternoon.

Twelve water-dropping planes and 12 helicopters were providing air support to 130 firefighters, backed up by volunteer firefighters in the Palaia Fokaia seaside area south of Athens, Vathrakogiannis said. A coast guard firefighting vessel doused the flames from the sea. The fire, which reportedly broke out within a populated area, was fanned by strong winds that frequently changed

direction, sending plumes of smoke fanning out across the sky. Television footage showed at least one home burning.

Local mayor Dimitris Loukas said on Greece's state-run ERT television that several houses were believed to have been damaged by the blaze, but added that exact information on property destruction was not immediately available.

The coast guard said two patrol boats and nine private vessels were on standby in the Palaia Fokaia area in case an evacuation by sea became necessary. Ambulances were also on standby but had not been required by Thursday afternoon, authorities said.

"We're telling people to leave their homes," local town councilor Apostolos Papadakis said on Greece's state-run ERT television. Parts of the coastal road connecting Athens to Sounion were closed in both directions, with people urged to take alternate routes to leave the area.

Fire department spokesman Vassilis Vathrakogiannis said 40 people had been evacuated by police, while evacuation orders were issued for a total of five areas.

The cause of the fire was

not immediately known, but the fire department spokesman said that an arson investigation unit had been sent to the area.

The entire wider Athens area, as well as several Aegean islands, were on Level 4 of a 5-level scale for the danger of wildfires due to the weather conditions, with the heatwave expected to last until the weekend.

Earlier in the week, hundreds of firefighters took four days to bring a major wildfire under control on the eastern Aegean island of Chios. More than a dozen evacuation orders had been issued for Chios, where the flames devoured forest and farmland. The fire department said one woman had been arrested on suspicion of having contributed to that fire's start - reportedly by discarding a cigarette.

Wildfires are frequent in Greece during its hot, dry summers. In 2018, a massive fire swept through the seaside town of Mati, east of Athens, trapping people in their homes and on roads as they tried to flee. More than 100 died, including some who drowned trying to swim away from the flames.

Starmer waters down planned welfare cuts after revolt in Labour Party

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer gave way to political pressure on Friday, watering down planned welfare reforms to avoid defeat by his own party's lawmakers. It's the latest forced U-turn for a centre-left Government caught between conflicting goals of cutting spending and improving public services.

The government planned to bring a bill to Parliament next week that would tighten eligibility for a key disability benefit, removing the Personal Independence Payment from hundreds of thousands of people with long-term physical or mental health conditions. Another health-related benefit received by people on low

incomes would also be reduced under the plans.

The Government said the proposed changes would help people find jobs while preserving a safety net for those who can never work. It would also save an estimated 5 billion pounds (\$7 billion) a year from a welfare bill that has ballooned since the COVID-19 pandemic. But many Labour lawmakers balked at the changes, which the Institute for Fiscal Studies think tank estimated would cut the income of 3.2 million people by 2030.

More than 120 of the 403 Labour legislators signed a motion that would effectively kill the bill if it were to be passed. Defeat at the hands of his own party in the vote planned for Tuesday would have seriously damaged Starmer's authority.

To avoid that, the government said it would ensure no one who currently receives the PIP benefit will lose it.

Starmer was elected a year ago in a landslide victory, winning a commanding majority of seats in the House of Commons. Since then his popularity has plunged as a sluggish economy and stubbornly high inflation resist efforts to raise living standards and ease a cost-of-living squeeze.

Even as Starmer enjoyed success on the world stage — charming US President Donald Trump and securing a trade deal to exempt Britain from some US tariffs — Labour lawmakers have grown restive at the party's sagging poll ratings and the rise of the hard-right Reform UK party led by Nigel Farage.

Israel-Iran tensions wake-up call for Asia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Hanoi (Vietnam)

Asia's dependence on Middle East oil and gas — and its relatively slow shift to clean energy — make it vulnerable to disruptions in shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic weakness highlighted by the war between Israel and Iran.

Iran sits on the strait, which handles about 20 per cent of shipments of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, or LNG. Four countries — China, India, Japan and South Korea — account for 75 per cent of those imports.

Japan and South Korea face the highest risk, according to analysis by the research group Zero Carbon Analytics, followed by India and China. All have been slow to scale up use of renewable energy.

In 2023, renewables made up just nine per cent of South Korea's power mix — well below the 33 per cent average among other members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD. In

the same year, Japan relied more heavily on fossil fuels than any other country in the Group of Seven, or G7.

A truce in the 12-day Israel-Iran war appeared to be holding, reducing the potential for trouble for now. But experts say the only way to counter lingering uncertainty is to scale back reliance on imported fossil fuels and accelerate Asia's shift to clean, domestic energy sources.

"These are very real risks that countries should be alive to — and should be thinking about in terms of their energy and economic security," said Murray Worthy, a research analyst at Zero Carbon Analytics.

Japan and South Korea are vulnerable

China and India are the biggest buyers of oil and LNG passing through the potential chokepoint at the Strait of Hormuz, but Japan and South Korea are more vulnerable.

Japan depends on imported fossil fuels for 87 per cent of its total energy use and South Korea imports 81 per cent.

Pakistan records one more poliovirus case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Peshawar

Pakistani authorities on Friday confirmed one more case of poliovirus in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, taking the total nationwide tally to 13.

The case was detected in an 18-month-old child from the Union Council Amakhel in Tank district, the Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) said in a press release.

"With this latest detection, the total number of polio cases in Pakistan in 2025 has reached 13, including seven from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, four from Sindh, and one each from Punjab and Gilgit-

Baltistan," it said. Pakistan is one of the last two countries in the world, alongside Afghanistan, where polio remains endemic. Despite global efforts to eradicate the virus, challenges such as security issues, vaccine hesitancy, and misinformation have slowed progress.

This year, Pakistan has undertaken three nationwide polio campaigns so far — in February, April, and May. Polio eradication efforts in Pakistan routinely face security issues. The case comes only a week after Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, bordering Afghanistan, recorded its sixth case of the year in Bannu in a 33-month-old baby, while another two cases were recorded in the province last month.

Using TikTok could be making you more politically polarised: Study

THE CONVERSATION
■ United States

People on TikTok tend to follow accounts that align with their own political beliefs, meaning the platform is creating political echo chambers among its users.

These findings, from a study my collaborators, Yanlin Li and Homero Gil de Zúñiga, and I published in the academic journal New Media & Society, show that people mostly hear from voices they already agree with.

We analysed the structure of different political networks on TikTok and found that right-leaning communities are more isolated from other political groups and from mainstream news outlets. Looking at their internal structures, the right-leaning communities are more tightly connected than their left-leaning counterparts.

In other words, conservative TikTok users tend to stick together. They rarely follow accounts with opposing views or mainstream media



accounts. Liberal users, on the other hand, are more likely to follow a mix of accounts, including those they might disagree with.

Our study is based on a massive dataset of over 16 million TikTok videos from more than 160,000 public accounts between 2019 and 2023. We saw a spike of political TikTok videos during the 2020 US presidential election.

More importantly, people aren't just passively watching political content; they're actively creating political content themselves.

Some people are more outspoken about politics than

others. We found that users with stronger political leanings and those who get more likes and comments on their videos are more motivated to keep posting. This shows the power of partisanship, but also the power of TikTok's social rewards system. Engagement signals — likes, shares, comments — are like a fuel, encouraging users to create even more. Why it matters

People are turning to TikTok not just for a good laugh. A recent Pew Research Centre survey shows that almost 40 per cent of US adults under 30 regularly get news on TikTok.

Trump signs trade deal with China

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Bangkok

The US and China have signed an agreement on trade, President Donald Trump said, adding he expects to soon have a deal with India.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told Bloomberg TV that the deal was signed earlier this week. Neither Lutnick nor Trump provided any details about the agreement.

"We just signed with China the other day," Trump said late Thursday.

Lutnick said the deal was "signed and sealed" two days earlier.

It was unclear if the latest agreement was different from the one Trump announced two weeks earlier that he said would make it easier for American industries to obtain much-needed magnets and rare earth minerals. That pact cleared the way for the trade talks to continue,

while the US agreed to stop trying to revoke visas of Chinese nationals on US college campuses.

China's Commerce Ministry said Friday that the two sides had "further confirmed the details of the framework".

But its statement did not explicitly mention US access to rare earths, minerals used in high-tech applications that have been at the centre of the negotiations.

"China will approve the export applications of controlled items that meet the conditions in accordance with the law. The United States will cancel a series of restrictive measures taken against China accordingly. It is hoped that the United States and China will meet each other halfway," it said.

The agreement follows initial talks in Geneva in early May that led both sides to postpone massive tariff hikes that were threatening to freeze much trade between the two countries. Later



talks in London set a framework for negotiations and the deal mentioned by Trump appeared to formalise that agreement.

"The president likes to close these deals himself. He's the deal-maker. We're going to have deal

after deal," Lutnick said.

China has not announced any new agreements, but it announced earlier this week that it was speeding up approvals of exports of rare earths, materials used in high-tech products

such as electric vehicles. Beijing's limits on exports of rare earths have been a key point of contention.

The Chinese Commerce Ministry said Thursday that Beijing was accelerating review

of export license applications for rare earths and had approved "a certain number of compliant applications".

Export controls of the minerals apparently eclipsed tariffs in the latest round of trade negotiations between Beijing and Washington after China imposed permitting requirements on seven rare earth elements in April, threatening to disrupt production of cars, robots, wind turbines and other high-tech products in the US and around the world.

China also has taken steps recently on the fentanyl issue, announcing last week that it would designate two more substances as precursor chemicals for fentanyl, making them subject to production, transport and export regulations.

Trump has demanded that Beijing do more to stop the flow of such precursor ingredients to Mexican drug cartels, which use them to make fentanyl for sale in the US.

ESIC expands scheme to raise coverage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Friday announced renewal of a scheme to promote registration of employers and employees to expand Employees' State Insurance (ESI) coverage across India.

Originally introduced in 2016, SPREE (Scheme to Promote Registration of Employers/Employees) has facilitated the registration of over 88,000 employers and 1.02 crore employees.

The renewed SPREE will be open from July 1 to December 31, 2025, offering a one-time opportunity for unregistered employers and left-out workers, including contractual and temporary staff, to enrol under the ESI Act, a labour ministry statement said.

Under the scheme, employers registering during this period will be treated as covered from the date of registration or as declared by them, while newly registered employees will be covered from their respective dates of registration.

By focusing on voluntary compliance rather than penalisation, the scheme will seek to ease the litigation burden, encourage formal registration, and foster improved engagement and goodwill among stakeholders.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh on Friday.

The Corporation also approved Amnesty Scheme - 2025, a one-time dispute resolution window from October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026 aimed at reducing litigation and promoting compliance under the ESI Act.

For the first time, disputes along with cases involving damages and interest regarding coverage are included.

Regional Directors have been empowered to withdraw cases where contributions and interest have been

paid, and also to withdraw cases filed against insured persons over five years ago where no notices were issued.

The scheme aims to reduce the number of litigations by providing a mechanism for the resolution of disputes outside the court, offering employers an opportunity to come forward for a mutual settlement to promote ease of doing business, and earn the goodwill of all stakeholders.

ESIC also decided to simplify its damages framework by replacing the earlier framework of graded rates in favour

AYUSH Policy of ESIC was also approved, which focuses on integrating traditional medicines into the network

of straight forward fixed rate.

Further, the maximum rate of damage in the earlier framework was 25 per cent per annum, which has now been reduced to 1 per cent for every month on the amount payable by the employer.

This change will promote compliance, minimise disputes and foster a more conducive regulatory environment.

The Corporation also approved a proposal to delegate powers to the Director General, ESIC, to grant relaxation in submission of applications beyond the 12-month limit from the date of job loss under Rajiv Gandhi Shramik Kalyan Yojana (RGSKY) on case-to-case basis.

It also approved the revised AYUSH Policy of ESIC. This policy focuses on integrating traditional systems of medicine such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy into the ESIC healthcare network.

The Corporation has approved the engagement of Yoga therapists and P a n c h a k a r m a technicians/attendants in ESIC hospitals.

New portal to resolve payment delay cases concerning MSEs: President

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu said the online dispute resolution portal launched on Friday will help expedite hearings and decision-making in cases related to delayed payments to micro and small enterprises (MSEs).

Speaking on the occasion of World MSME Day, President Murmu outlined the key challenges faced by MSME, such as access to finance, competition with big corporations and delayed payments.

She said the number of registered MSMEs has grown rapidly as a result of the Government's efforts. "The online dispute resolution portal launched today (Friday) will prove significant in expeditious hearing and decision-making in cases related to delayed payments," the President said.

She appealed to young women to take advantage of Government schemes to establish businesses and become self-reliant. The President observed that the world today is grappling with challenges emanating from climate change and rapid-



ly evolving technology.

Asserting that India is committed to climate change and sustainability goals, she said promoting green technology in MSMEs was the need of the hour.

"This (green technology) will not only improve the sustainability of MSMEs and

their competitiveness but also help achieve the country's climate goals," Murmu said.

She emphasised that innovation is critical for sustainability of MSMEs, and shared that the Government was promoting a culture of innovation by startups in various ways.

Rupee rises to 85.48 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

The rupee rose 24 paise to close at 85.48 (provisional) against the greenback on Friday on the back of strong FII inflows and firm domestic equity markets.

Lower level of American currency index also favoured the Indian currency though an uptrend in crude oil prices capped its gain, forex traders said.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) purchased equities worth ₹12,594.38 crore on a net basis on Thursday, according to exchange data.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.50 against the dollar and traded in the range of 85.43-85.65 before settling at 85.48 (provisional), up 24 paise from its previous close.

The local unit rose 36 paise

to close at 85.72 against the US dollar on Thursday.

"FII inflows and falling dollar index allowed the rupee to move higher. The RBI is also buying the dips to liquidate its month-end positions," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said.

"The Trump tariff's date of July 9 is fast approaching and... Market remains gripped with uncertainty. Therefore, there is a chance of rupee hitting 86 next week," he said.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, inched up 0.10 per cent to 97.24 after declining earlier in the day.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, went up 0.72 per cent to USD 68.22 per barrel in futures trade after declining in the previous session.

Soon, find routes with least toll

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

NHAI's Rajmargyatra app will have a new feature from next month to inform motorists about the route attracting least amount of toll between two destinations, a senior Government official has said.

Rajmargyatra provides travellers with comprehensive information about national highways and also offers them an efficient grievance redressal mechanism.

Citing an example, Amrit Singh, Chief Product officer, Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) of Indian Highways Management Company (IHMCL) said there are three routes to travel to Lucknow from Delhi and the app will help commuter choose the best one.

"You can travel to Lucknow from Delhi via Yamuna Expressway, or travel by crossing Ghaziabad-Aligarh-

As per ATMS sample data, between June 21 and June 23, 1.73 lakh violations were recorded most were related to banned vehicles

Kanpur-Lucknow or Moradabad-Bareilly-Sitapur-Lucknow...The app will inform motorists about the route which will attract least amount of toll between Delhi and Lucknow," Singh said.

He rued that two and three-wheeler riders are illegally entering the access-controlled Delhi-Gurgaon and Dwarka Expressway, citing the data compiled by NHAI's Advanced Traffic Management System(ATMS).

As per the ATMS sample data, between June 21 and June 23, 1.73 lakh violations were recorded and more than one lakh of these were related to banned vehicles.

Singha said NHAI is likely to open a 67-km-long spur connecting Bandikui to Jaipur via the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, which will reduce travel time.

NHAI Rajasthan regional officer Pradeep Atri said this new four-lane access-controlled Bandikui-Jaipur stretch, built at a cost of ₹1,368 crore, is expected to open for traffic trials by mid-July.

According to Pushpendra Singh, NHAI Manager, this road was constructed in about 2.5 years, and is expected to shift a major chunk of traffic from the old Delhi-Jaipur highway.

Currently, it takes around 4 hours to drive from Delhi to Jaipur — 2.5 hours to reach Bandikui via the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway and another 1.5 hours to cover the last 67 km.

With the new spur, this journey could be completed in about 3 hours.

Hindustan Zinc reports growth in queer workforce

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Udaipur

Hindustan Zinc Limited, the country's largest zinc producer and part of the Vedanta Group, announced a significant 44 per cent year-on-year increase in its LGBTQIA+ workforce across operations, reinforcing its push toward inclusivity in the traditionally male-dominated metals and mining sector.

Coinciding with Pride Month, the company launched its #CallHZLYourHome campaign, aimed at celebrating diversity and reaffirming its commitment to creating a safe and inclusive workplace. The initiative highlights the organisation's industry-leading policies and efforts to normalise LGBTQIA+ inclusion in core business roles.

Hindustan Zinc currently employs 23 transgender individuals in various functions including finance, supply chain, marketing, and medical services-roles not commonly associated with LGBTQIA+ participation in the industrial sector. This integration has been enabled through the company's tech-first approach, utilising Industry 4.0, automation, and robotics to standardise operations and reduce labor-intensive tasks.

"Our aim is to make Hindustan Zinc a place where every employee, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, feels seen, valued, and respected," said Priya Agarwal Hebbbar, Chairperson of Hindustan Zinc and Non-Executive Director of Vedanta Ltd. "We are not just building careers here-we are creating a workplace that feels like home."

Being Human backs India's global vision as oxford forum 2025 sponsor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Being Human Clothing is proud to have served as the Headline Sponsor for the Oxford India Forum 2025, one of the most prestigious student-led conferences at the University of Oxford. Held at the University of Oxford, the forum brought together some of the brightest minds across disciplines to engage in meaningful dialogue on India's evolu-

ting global identity, placing purpose, compassion, and social impact at the heart of the conversation. This partnership highlighted the strong synergy between academia and philanthropy. Being Human, known for its commitment to education, healthcare, and empowerment, supported the forum's mission to inspire critical thought, inclusive dialogue, and cross-cultural engagement across themes like public policy, entrepreneurship, sustain-

ability, and the creative economy. Rooted in the values of Love, Care, Share, Hope, Help, and Joy, Being Human's involvement amplified the spirit of the event. With impactful sessions featuring global leaders, policy experts, and change-makers, the Oxford India Forum 2025 reinforced its role as a hub for thoughtful leadership and global collaboration—further elevated by its partnership with a purpose-driven brand.

Gold rates plunge by ₹930

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Gold prices plunged ₹930 to ₹97,670 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday as traders rushed to selling amid easing off Middle East tensions and favourable

reports about a trade deal between the US and China.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹98,600 per 10 grams on Thursday.

On Friday, gold of 99.5 per cent purity declined by ₹850 to

₹97,200 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes).

"Gold prices continue to correct as strong profit booking sets in, with safe-haven demand easing due to the lack of fresh geopolitical triggers," said Chintan Mehta, CEO, Abans Financial Services.

Working on rare earth magnets issues: Meity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Government, industry and academia are working to resolve the issues concerning rare earth magnets, which are used in the automobile sector and other devices, a senior Meity official said on Friday. The technology exists to make rare earth magnets but to produce them at a commercially competitive rate is a challenge, Ministry of Electronics and IT, Additional Secretary, Amitesh Sinha said.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Tec-Verse event showcasing PSU technology research, Sinha said that to solve the issues concerning rare earth, all three partners — Government, industry and academia — are doing their work.

"Technology is there, but we have to see how commercially we can do it at a competitive price. So that is the main challenge. The Government will surely work because these

Technology is there, but we have to see how commercially we can do it at a competitive price. So that is the main challenge. These things are becoming strategic — AMITESH SINHA, ADDITIONAL SECRETARY, MEITY

things are now becoming strategic and important," Sinha said.

The Centre for Materials for Electronics Technology (C-MET), a research unit under Meity, at the event signed a transfer of technology agreement with Ahmedabad-based firm Somal Magnets for the production of rare earth magnets.

Sinha said the work on the technology development has been going on for some years as the Government realises the importance of material technologies.

"It is an effort of the last few years. So they (C-MET) have

already been working on it, but suddenly the focus has come on this rare earth material. For such things, first we will have to develop a capability which, at the time of crisis, can be easily scaled. So that kind of infrastructure or capability we are aiming for now," Sinha said.

He, however, said Meity is not directly engaged in the production of rare earth magnets but only in some technologies that are important for their production.

In April 2024, China implemented strict export licensing on rare earth elements like terbium and dysprosium — key inputs for high-level performance NdFeB (Neodymium-Iron-Boron) magnets used in consumer electronics.

The country's oldest electronics industry body, Elcina, said that the move has disrupted global supply chains, hitting India's fast-growing hearables and wearables sector hard, and the device makers are switching to import fully assembled

speaker modules from China. Elcina estimates that the rare earth metal-based magnets account for around 5-7 per cent of the Bill of Materials, and India imports nearly 100 per cent of its NdFeB magnet requirement, with China accounting for 90 per cent of the total imports.

The industry body said prices of China-origin magnets have increased due to tightened supply and administrative bottlenecks, and alternate sources, such as Japan, the European Union and the US, are 2-3 times more expensive and also lack sufficient capacity to meet India's rising demand.

Rare earth magnets include neodymium-iron-boron (NdFeB). It is used for high-performance automotive applications such as traction motors in electric vehicles (two-wheelers and passenger vehicles) and power steering motors (in passenger vehicles) in both electric vehicles and internal combustion engine vehicles.

Markets extend winning run on fresh foreign fund inflows; Sensex gains

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty advanced for the fourth straight session on Friday, supported by buying in blue-chips ICICI Bank and Reliance Industries amid fresh foreign fund inflows.

A strengthening rupee against the US dollar and softening crude oil prices in international markets also boosted investor confidence, according to traders.

The BSE Sensex climbed 303.03 points or 0.36 per cent to reclaim the 84,000 level and settle at 84,058.90. During the day, it jumped 333.48 points or 0.39 per cent to 84,089.35.

On the similar lines, the 50-share NSE Nifty rose 88.80 points or 0.35 per cent to 25,637.80.

From the Sensex pack, Asian Paints, UltraTech Cement, Power Grid, ICICI Bank, Reliance Industries, Hindustan Unilever, Bharat Electronics and Sun Pharma were among the major gainers. In contrast, Trent, Eternal, Axis Bank

An article published in the Reserve Bank's June Bulletin stressed that the financial conditions remained conducive to facilitating an efficient transmission of rate cuts

and Titan were among the laggards.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹12,594.38 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Key catalysts like the ceasefire in the Middle East and optimism on easing trade tensions ahead of the deadline have cleared the clouds in the minds of investors. After consecutive days of selling, FIIs have turned into net buyers in the domestic market, contributing to improved market stability in the near term.

"Moreover, benign oil prices and a strengthening rupee influenced investors to focus on domestic growth themes,"

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index settled higher, while South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng ended lower.

European markets were trading in the green in afternoon trade. US markets ended in positive territory on Thursday.

Meanwhile, an RBI report has suggested that all banks should bring down their lending rates for speedy transmission of the policy rate, which was lowered by 50 basis points earlier this month.

An article published in the Reserve Bank's June Bulletin stressed that the financial conditions remained conducive to facilitating an efficient transmission of rate cuts.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.72 per cent to USD 68.20 a barrel.

On Thursday, the Sensex had jumped 1,000.36 points, or 1.21 per cent, to settle at 83,755.87. The Nifty rallied 304.25 points, or 1.21 per cent, to 25,549.

Inside the mind of...

Kay Kay Menon, Neeraj Pandey and Vinay Pathak on Stillness, Scripts and the nuanced challenge of truly surviving the camera's unblinking gaze, rather than just performing for it

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

In a quiet room away from the flashbulbs and high-security sets, the core team of **Special Ops 2**, gathered for a freewheeling conversation. If the series throws you into a world of cyber surveillance, coded messages and geopolitics, the conversation behind it was one of clarity, stillness and sharp personal memory. What happens when some of India's sharpest creative minds sit across from each other, not on a high-octane set, but in a quiet room, away from the lens and lights? The conversation takes on a life of its own. That's exactly what happened during an interaction with the trio behind **Special Ops 2**, Kay Kay Menon, Neeraj Pandey and Vinay Pathak. What was meant to be a quick interview turned into a masterclass in acting, writing and creative conviction.

FROM SCREEN TO SOUL: THE IMPACT

Kay Kay Menon returns with more grit, more restraint and even more shadows behind his eyes. Vinay Pathak reprises his beloved Abbas Sheikh with his signature blend of humour and steel. And Creator Neeraj Pandey remains the understated mastermind of it all, still insistent that "we're just telling the story, what you take away is up to you." **Special Ops 2** stars a powerhouse cast including

Karan Tacker, Shivam Nair and Tahir Raj Bhasin alongside Menon and Pathak. From regret over not killing a character to refusing to impress the camera, this was storytelling stripped of vanity. And that is perhaps what makes both **Special Ops 2** and this conversation worth coming back to. Streaming July 11. But the dialogue begins now.

The Unseen Depths

There's espionage, a world built not just on plot twists and shootouts, but on complex characters, silent stares and the weight of choices made in the shadows. If season one was about establishing the universe, season two pushes it into emotionally richer and technically sharper terrain. With returning favourites like Himmat Singh (Kay Kay Menon) and Abbas Sheikh (Vinay Pathak), along with new additions, the series explores the personal costs of operating in a world that thrives on deception. Neeraj Pandey, as always, remains committed to authenticity: "We don't customise any messaging for any audience. It's for you to take away. If it's a film or a series, it's up to you what you want to take away from it. I'm just telling the story. I'm just trying to speak what the characters are feeling, what they're going through."

From that space of lived experience came a conversation both intense and wildly entertaining. Neeraj Pandey, when asked about the most difficult scenes to shoot? "We can talk about some locations which were like a logistical nightmare. But still, the crew managed to hang in and complete those sequences."

Character Evolution

The interview began with the question of character evolution. "So how did it grow or challenge you as an actor?" Vinay responded in his trademark comic irony: "What I understood of the question is that you're saying that looking at me, it seems like everything is challenging that comes my way... I think you should ask this question to the creator who makes it challenging every time. Why can't he keep things simple?" He continued, drawing a comparison to real-life hierarchy, "So I know if you go higher in the rank, you will realise how things become a little more intense. But on my level, even though I'm on a two-wheeler, things are not as simple." On a deeper note, when I asked if there was one role that had changed his approach to acting, Vinay paused, reflected and said: "I don't think of it as a role. But I think of it as a story. Because that's what got me excited in the very beginning, to become the storyteller. So I think that's what, Theatre, I would say.. For me, it started there."

Leaving Characters Behind

It was actor Kay Kay Menon's candour that brought another level of gravity to the exchange. When asked what remains of his character Hemant Singh after filming, he replied with simplicity and honesty: "Nothing." Would any character follow

home?" That's dangerous, no? And on self-critique? "Before, initially, a long time ago, I did it like this. Now I can't do anything. So we accept our incompleteness." These actors do not just perform, they think about the craft, the process, the 'why'. Kay Kay recalled how one book, accidentally left behind in a green room, completely reoriented his understanding of camera performance. "The camera is like your girlfriend. It watches you very closely. Never ever try and impress the camera. That kind of opened it for me. That kind of opened it for me. And since then, I don't take an entry, I enter."

As we continued, Kay Kay offered something surprisingly tender: "To express real joy is very joyous... Even if you're not a method actor, it makes you joyous. So I find that very gratifying." It's the kind of insight that lets you see the actor as a person and makes you think twice about what it takes to create such nuanced characters.

Wisdom for Younger Selves

In closing, the question turned philosophical, what would they say to their younger selves? Vinay, ever wry: "What should I say to him? I'll say, sorry... I keep telling him, I'll grow up. Give me two more days. Next year, I'll be a saner, much more serious guy." Kay Kay's reply mirrored that with calm acceptance: "Exactly the opposite, Not sorry." And Neeraj? "Nothing." Sometimes, silence really does speak volumes.

Cybersecurity and cyber threats are present-day reality. A lot of what you see this season is inspired by real interactions and insights from people in the intelligence world. That authenticity has always been at the heart of our storytelling.

— NEERAJ PANDEY

IMPACT ON HIS ACTORS

When asked what stands out about working with Neeraj Pandey, both actors didn't hold back in their admiration for his writing. "There's something very surrealistically wonderful about his writing which just falls into the right place," said Kay Kay. Vinay echoed this, calling the writing "authentic" and "precisely what makes the actor's job easier." Neeraj Pandey, modest as ever, refused to be drawn into compliments. "What people think of me is none of my business. What's more important is the work that we are doing, in order to make something which is of some resonance, something that can stand the test of time, you have to bring your best foot forward." And as for regrets? "I regret not killing a character... Originally, Abbas was supposed to die. In the seventh episode. But we took the right decision not to kill him." That creative restraint, knowing when to step back for the sake of the narrative's future.

Kay Kay Menon shared his admiration for the writing, saying, "All the actor needs to do is to follow and understand the subtext behind those lines and the way he is writing it. So, that makes my job easy."

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

Art's Emotional Resonance

Where colours question the soul and bronze breathes silence, a journey into the unseen self, says SAKSHI PRIYA

There's something meditative about standing in front of art that speaks in silences, contradictions, and layered whispers. **Atmanaveshana**, an evocative exhibition of paintings and sculptures, felt like that quiet conversation one has not with the world but with the self. The name, which translates to "Self-Exploration," was a fitting threshold to step through. The show brought together the emotionally resonant abstract works of Dr Amrit Kapoor and the contemplative bronzes of sculptor Suresh Kumar.

Walking into the gallery, the immediate impression was not of looking at art but of being looked at. Visitors stood stilled, some in front of colour-drenched canvases, others surrounding bronzed bulls, pointing gently and absorbing slowly. One older couple stood arm in arm before a painting from the *Dichotomy* series, exchanging glances, visibly moved. A young artist scribbled something into a sketchpad in front of a sculpture titled *Third Face*.

Kapoor's works require time. They yield meaning gradually. The word "harmony" is often associated with music, but in these works, it takes on a visual cadence. In contrast, Dichotomy offers more tension. Here, Kapoor explores the conflict between heart and mind, a philosophical premise that unfolds through dissonant brushwork and disrupted symmetry. Lines clash, colours argue. One canvas in particular had deep strokes of crimson colliding with pale turquoise, a metaphor perhaps for emotional entanglement. There is discomfort in some of the works, but not despair, an honest admission that the self is not always at peace with itself.

Her final collection, *Utopian World*, turns outward, imagining a space where soul, morality, and happiness



KAPOOR'S CANVASES AND KUMAR'S SCULPTURES FELT ORGANIC, THIS IS NOT ART THAT EXPLAINS ITSELF. IT ALLOWS SPACE FOR INTERPRETATION, EVEN FOR CONTRADICTION

find equilibrium. These paintings are lighter, less conflicted, but still thoughtful, like the pause after a long conversation, when all that remains is reflection. Across the room, Suresh Kumar's bronzes provided an earthier gravity. Kumar's sculptures feel grounded, tactile, and elemental. His *trilogy of bulls*, each cast in bronze, yet distinct in patina and energy, dominated the central floor space. Though static, there was nothing still about them. The posture, curvature and surface texture of each sculpture conveyed a subtle motion, as

if these beasts, emblematic of strength and resilience, had paused momentarily before resuming their journey.

In Indian culture, the bull holds layered meaning, symbolising both raw power and deep spiritual rootedness. Kumar's series embraces that duality. The largest bull had a matte, weathered texture, like it had emerged from centuries of earth. The smallest gleamed

with a smoother surface, youthful yet stoic. His piece *Life of Nature* echoed the same sentiment. Then came *Third Face*, a human visage sculpted in bronze, deeply meditative. Its expression was not mournful, but contemplative. This exhibition felt like the rare quiet room where one could hear their own thoughts.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

A Hundred Strings and One Soul

BY TEAM VIVA

The Santoor is an instrument of devotion, rooted in Kashmir's spiritual and cultural history. At the Chinmaya Mission Auditorium in New Delhi, the second edition of **World Santoor Day** was a heartfelt tribute to that rich tradition. Organised by SaMaPa, the evening honoured the birth anniversary of the legendary Pandit Bhajan Sopori, known as the Saint of Santoor and the King of Strings. A Santoor ensemble in Raga Charukeshi brought together disciples of Pandit Abhay Rustum Sopori including Daniel Aakash Brunner from Germany, Suman Patra from Finland, and Indian artists Anoushka Majumdar, Poushali Dutta, Nairanjana Radhika and Dheeraj Vaishnav.

They were accompanied by Chanchal Singh on Jodi Pakhawaj and Tabla. Their performance was precise and expressive, with each note arriving gently, as though aware of its place in a larger tradition.

THE 77TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREAT SANTOOR LEGEND PANDIT BHAJAN SOPORI JI. MUSICIANS FROM ACROSS THE WORLD HAVE GATHERED TO PAY THEIR MUSICAL TRIBUTE

Young Divyansh Srivastava from Delhi gave a compelling solo in Raga Megh, accompanied by Anand Mishra and Chanchal Singh. His performance showed both skill and sincerity. It was followed by a Santoor duet by Vidushi Shruti Adhikari and her son Ninad

Adhikari from Madhya Pradesh. Together, they presented Raga Madhukauns with Pt Durjay Bhaumik on Tabla, balancing control and grace in equal measure. The evening culminated with a special solo recital by Pandit Abhay Rustum Sopori, accompanied by Pt Ram Kumar Mishra on Tabla. His rendering of Raga Sohni carried the weight of memory and devotion. It was both personal and profound. Prof Aparna Sopori described the celebration as a cultural movement aimed at repositioning the Santoor as a symbol of India's spiritual and musical heritage. Pandit Abhay Sopori reflected on the growing global recognition of the instrument, with performances this year extending to Argentina, China, Colombia, and various parts of India.

The auditorium remained packed throughout. Listeners were part of a rare musical moment, where strings told stories, and silence sang between the notes.



Bumrah absence to rob control of Indian bowling unit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bengaluru

Jasprit Bumrah's possible absence from next week's second Test against England in Birmingham will rob India's bowling unit of control, not an ideal element to miss when the visitors are trying to go level at a ground where they have never won a red-ball match.

The passage between overs 65 and 82 of the first Test at Leeds, which England won by five wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series, will offer further validation to that grim fact.

England were 286 for four when India's pace talisman ended that spell with overall figures of 19-3-57-0, and he was not summoned for another over.

Perhaps, skipper Shubman Gill wanted to preserve him for the second new ball which was due in 15 overs and it also aligned with India's workload management plan for their premier pacer.

England were still 85 runs away from a win and some tight overs, probably dotted with a couple of wickets, would have set the stage perfectly for Bumrah's return in the 80th over. But by the time that mark arrived, England were 349 for five, rattling up 63 runs in 15 overs, in excess of four runs an over and a mere 22 runs separating them from an incredible victory.

It was beyond even Bumrah to salvage the situation. Now, India might just have to make peace with the reality of not having the 31-year-old in their ranks at Edgbaston.



Mohammed Siraj was distinctly unlucky in the second innings not to have a wicket despite hitting better lines, but his effort in the first essay left a lot to be desired when he

eased the pressure Bumrah built from the other end while giving away plenty of boundary balls.

Siraj has considerable Test experience to find some quick

remedy, but Prasidh Krishna and Shardul Thakur — India's third and fourth pacers — only have a combined experience of 16 Tests. They went over 6 and 5 runs per over

across the first Test and it reduced the impact of the wickets they took.

Prasidh, who had a five-wicket match haul at Headingley, was quite disappointing as he followed the hard lengths strategy that he adopted in Australia but England demanded much fuller lengths from him, and he could deliver the, only in periods. Can he challenge England batters more meaningfully in Birmingham?

Former India pacer Dodda Ganesh believes Prasidh can produce a heftier effort provided he makes some minor tweaks to his approach.

"Prasidh has always been a wicket-taker, but he needs to bowl with some consistency, and needs to focus on the areas he bowls. It will help him bowl more maidens especially

when the ball gets older. He can't bowl on both sides of the wickets," Ganesh said.

"In England, the ball swings around a bit because of the conditions. He just needs to watch Bumrah on how to bowl consistent lines, lengths. He just needs to concentrate more on the channel outside (off-stump), and he will be better," he added.

There is a growing clamour to bring Kuldeep Yadav in place of Shardul Thakur for the second Test, but the left-arm wrist spinner has just played one traditional format match in England.

Even in the last Test he played against New Zealand at Bengaluru in 2024, the 30-year-old had spells of 18.3-1-99-3 (Economy: 5.3) and 3-0-26-0 (Economy: 8.6), failing to make much impression in blustery

conditions, not very unlike England. In contrast, Ravindra Jadeja produced figures of 20-1-72-3 (3.6) and 7.4-1-28-0 (3.6) against the Kiwis, and if the left-arm spinner can rediscover that stifling length then Ben Duckett or Ben Stokes might just find it tough to play those unsettling reverse sweeps.

Ganesh feels that replacing Thakur, if that is indeed the plan, with Washington Sundar rather than Kuldeep would make more sense.

"Washington can also take the ball away from left-handers, and of course, he is a much better batsman too and can be slotted in various positions. He has that flexibility," he noted.

It's evident that this Indian attack, even without Bumrah, has oodles of quality in it, but can they refocus on their lengths?

Indian women look to snap six-match losing streak; avoid relegation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Berlin

The Indian women's hockey team would look to break its six-match losing streak and avoid relegation from the FIH Pro League with positive results against China, starting with the first match here on Saturday.



The Indian women are currently placed at the bottom of the nine-team table with 10 points from 14 games and are in danger of relegation to the second tier FIH Nations Cup in 2026.

It's not what Hockey India had in its mind when Harendra Singh was brought back on board as the head coach. After a relatively good outing at home leg earlier this year, the Indian women lost six consecutive matches against Australia, Argentina and Belgium (two matches against one opponent) in the European leg of the tournament.

India will be determined to sign off their Pro League campaign with valuable wins in back-to-back matches against fourth placed China on Saturday and Sunday here.

"It is a very crucial double header for us over the weekend. But we will draw inspiration from the Indian men's team who finished with an inspiring win against Belgium," said captain Salima Tete.

"This Pro League outing has been a learning experience with several grey areas that we need to work on as a team.

We will be introspecting on this performance when we go back home but for now our focus is on doing well against China," she said.

India will take confidence from their last outing against China where they beat them 3-0 in the pool stage and from a closely-fought final (1-0) to win the Asian Champions Trophy in Bihar in November last year. However, in the previous season of the Pro League, India had lost 1-2 in the double header.

"They are a known opponent to us, from our regular outings in the continental championships we are aware of their potential. They are a tough team to beat but we will play to our strengths," Tete said.

The Indians might have suffered six straight defeats, but

they played good, attacking hockey here. But their inability to utilise their chances upfront and convert penalty corners did them in.

There was too much pressure on Deepika to score from penalty corners and she fumbled under pressure on quite a few occasions.

The Indian midfield though impressed with the likes of Salima Tete, Lalremsiami, Sharmila Devi, Vaisnavi Vitthal Phalke and Neha creating enough chances for the forward line. Sunelita Toppo, in particular, was a live wire in the midfield, and threatened the opposition defence with her brilliant stick work and runs.

But the strikers let India down as the likes of Navneet, Deepika, Baljeet Kaur and others struggled to get the decisive

final touch.

The backbone comprising Sushila Chanu, Jyoti, Ishika Chaudhary, Jyoti Chatri and Suman Devi Toudam too were guilty of committing silly mistakes under pressure.

But with relegation looming, the Indian women can't afford to commit any mistakes in their last two matches.

Harendra too would be under immense pressure to help his wards to deliver for two complete performances this weekend.

Before the European leg, Harendra roped in Dutch great Taeke Taekema to work with the drag-flickers but that move hasn't translated into results.

The Indians have literally struggled to convert their chances besides being sloppy at the back.

AITA EC removes Dhupar; Sunder Iyer made interim Secretary General

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Executive Committee of the All India Tennis Association (AITA) on Friday removed Anil Dhupar as the Secretary General of the federation, saying his position has become untenable after attaining the age of 70 and that he has already completed his four-year term.

Attended by 17 of the 25 members, the EC passed a resolution by 3/4th majority to make joint secretary Sunder Iyer as interim secretary, empowering him to file a reply to the writ petition filed

in the Delhi High Court by Somdev Devvarman and Purav Raja, who challenged the validity of the elections conducted in September 2024.

Dhupar, 72, was elected for a four-year term in 2020. While he did not file his nomination for any office bearer's post in last year's polls, he was continuing in his position since the court did not declare the results of the elections.

"We passed a resolution today and removed Mr Dhupar as Secretary General. We have appointed Sunder Iyer as interim secretary. He will also look into (players') petition, till the results are

declared," AITA Vice President (Sports) Hironmoy Chatterjee said.

"The Executive Committee is supreme but the President and Secretary General are taking decisions without consulting the EC, which is the highest body. Mr. Dhupar has already crossed the age of 70 and he can't continue as per the Sports Code which bars continuation of office bearers beyond 70.

"The appointment of the lawyers in matters concerning AITA is a decision that needs to be taken by the EC. The President did not consult anyone before filing the reply. The

Federation can't run on someone's whims and fancies, it's a democratic institution."

When reminded that the AITA Constitution allows an office bearer to complete their term, if they are elected before the age of 70, Chatterjee said, "They made that change to continue in their positions. We have to follow the Sports Code. And he has completed his term of four years, so why is he continuing?"

Reacting to the development, Dhupar said that he remains the Secretary General of the Federation since the matter related to new elections is still sub-judice.

Twinkle Chaudhary suspended for doping

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Multiple National Games medal-winning middle distance runner Twinkle Chaudhary has been provisionally suspended by Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) after testing positive for a prohibited steroid.

The 28-year-old Chaudhary had clinched a gold in 4x400m women's relay competition at the Uttarakhand edition of the National Games earlier this year. She had also won a silver in the 800m race and a bronze in the 4x400m mixed relay.

Chaudhary tested positive for Methyltestosterone, a banned anabolic steroid.

In its update, the AIU stated that the runner has been



issued a "notice of allegation". The next step would be a hearing in which Chaudhary will get a chance to explain herself.

Chaudhary, who hails from Jalandhar, set a new meet record with a time of 2:00.71sec in the 800m event of the 28th National

Federation Senior Athletics Championships in Kochi in April. Earlier this month, she won an 800m silver medal at the Taiwan Open with a timing of 2:06.96s. In May, she had finished fourth in the same event during the Asian Athletics Championships in Gumi, South Korea.

The latest suspension continues to add to the woes for the country, which has a poor doping record internationally.

In May, quarter-miler Sneha Kolleri was suspended after testing positive for Stanazolol, also an anabolic steroid.

Kolleri was a member of the Indian contingent for the Asian Championship but had to be withdrawn after the failed dope test.

In the recently-released 2023 testing figures among countries which analysed 5,000 or more samples, India had the worst adverse findings rate of 3.8 per cent.

Globally, 204,809 tests were conducted by the World Anti-Doping Agency in 2023, of which 1,820 came positive for banned drugs.

Minimum seven-day stand-down for concussed players, rules ICC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

The ICC on Friday announced new playing conditions across formats including a minimum seven-day stand-down period for players diagnosed with concussion, trialling a new wide-ball rule in limited-overs cricket, besides changes with regards to boundary catches.

Cricket's global governing body said on its website that the new playing conditions for Tests were implemented with the start of the new World Test Championship cycle for 2025-2027 with Sri Lanka taking on Bangladesh in first Test at Galle from June 17-21.

The upcoming limited-overs series between the two countries will mark the start dates for new playing conditions for ODIs and T20Is.

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh will play a three-match ODI series from July 2 and then move on to a three-match T20I rubber from July 10.

In context of concussion protocols, the ICC said there are two changes.

Teams will now have to nominate designated concussion replacements for every match, which is being brought in to curb the home team's advantage of being able to



select from a larger group of players.

The ICC also announced a "minimum seven-day stand-down" period for any player diagnosed with concussion.

"A player diagnosed with a concussion during a match must observe a minimum stand-down period of a minimum of seven days before returning to play. This change has been recommended by the ICC Medical Advisory Committee to support players' safety and well-being," the ICC said.

The ICC said two new rules will be trialled by full members for a period of six months starting from October 2025. It includes a new wide-ball rule for ODIs and T20Is, and is being brought in to offer a degree of leniency to a bowler

who sees batter moving around "prior or during" a delivery.

"The position of the batter's legs at the point of delivery will now be used as the reference point for a wide, even if the batter subsequently moves across to the off side," the ICC said.

"The trial will see a ball that passes the popping crease between the leg stump and the protected area marker not being called a wide. To help with this, the protected area marker line will be extended to the popping crease and act as a guide for the umpires."

Former South Africa captain Shaun Pollock, the media representative of ICC's cricket committee, had said in January this year that the governing body is "working on something" to give bowlers "a bit more leeway on wides."

Cricket trailer to promote India-England women's series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ London

More than two decades after she made a girl 'bend' the rules to reach her goal in professional football, acclaimed British-Indian filmmaker Gurinder Chadha is now ready to rock with her work on cricket.

Chadha, who reshaped cultural conversations in the UK with her blockbuster 'Bend It Like Beckham' in 2002, has created a film trailer to promote England's series against the

visiting Indian women's team after agreeing to a collaboration with the host board (ECB). The series features five T20Is followed by three ODIs beginning Saturday.

The three-minute film celebrates the fierce rivalry and also the cultural unity between the two teams and their fans, as well as "spotlighting the evolution of women's cricket into the sporting spectacle" it is today, the ECB said in a press release.

On working with the ECB, director Chadha said: "I was delighted to be asked to work

Filmmaker Gurinder Chadha has created a film trailer to promote England's series against the visiting Indian women's team

on this project with England Women. I'm a huge fan of women in sport and I grew up with this tumultuous series as my dad was a huge cricket fan.

"So I was inspired by his love of the game to champion yet another women's sport that's so

important to me.

"The current England squad has a great energy, and I wish them the best of luck in the upcoming series against India - but India also has a great squad so I'm sure it will be fantastic moment for the game and fans whomever you support! I'll be there watching." The first T20 International will be played at Trent Bridge in Nottingham.

The film, which features English stars Danni Wyatt-Hodge, Heather Knight and Lauren Filer alongside fans, seeks to depict the on-field

rivalry and off-field camaraderie between the two great cricketing nations, and uses some legendary moments from past England-India matches across genders.

The trailer features the famous shirt-waving celebrations by Sourav Ganguly and Andrew Flintoff, as well as the much-discussed run-out during a match between India Women and England Women at Lord's, and makes subtle references to some of the iconic scenes in 'Bend It Like Beckham'.

Max Verstappen heads into Red Bull's home race

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Spielberg (Austria)

Max Verstappen at the Red Bull Ring is usually a recipe for success.

The defending Formula 1 champion has an upgraded car for his team's home race in Austria — where he's won five times — on the back of an encouraging second place in Canada, where his two McLaren rivals collided.

Zoom out, though, and the situation is much more uncertain.

Verstappen remains at risk of a one-race ban for too many penalty points, Red Bull teammate Yuki Tsunoda is usually too far adrift to help him, and Verstappen's own future is far from clear. "I don't think we need to talk about that," Verstappen said Thursday when asked to confirm whether he'll stay with the team for 2026. "It's not



really in my mind. It's just driving and trying to push the performance, you know. And then we focus on next year."

What are Verstappen's options?

Verstappen has a long-term contract through 2028, so in theory his Red Bull

seat should be one of the safest on the grid. However, the deal has performance-related clauses which could reportedly allow a move.

In that case, the most obvious option could be Mercedes, which has yet to confirm either driver for 2026. That would mean Verstappen teaming up with an old foe in Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff, who'd also have to choose to drop either George Russell and Kimi Antonelli.

Dramatic changes to how F1 cars look and perform are coming in 2026, and Red Bull has to adapt more than most. For the first time in nearly two decades, it heads into a new era of F1 rules without design guru Adrian Newey, who left last year and is now at Aston Martin.

The other leading teams are sticking with their current engine arrangements, but not Red Bull. The team has

an in-house engine developer, Red Bull Powertrains, but it's switching partners for 2026 from Honda to newcomer Ford.

The second seat

No team in F1 depends as much on one driver as Red Bull does on Verstappen. He's scored 155 of the team's 162 points this season. His teammates - first Liam Lawson, then Yuki Tsunoda - have struggled all season. That's helped to restore the reputation of Sergio Perez, who was dropped by Red Bull after scoring barely one-third of Verstappen's points last season.

"I know, deep down, they really regret it," Perez said on a podcast this week. "And I know that from a very reliable source. It's tough. I have very good friends there, and people might think I take pleasure in what happened, but no."

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