

L-G VK Saxena orders strict prohibition on use and sale of chemical fertilisers in Ladakh



long-term sustainability and resilience of its agricultural sector,” the order said. Farmers and agriculture units have been advised to use only on-farm/off-farm organic inputs for agricultural practices in the Union territory of Ladakh. The decision marks a major milestone in Ladakh's journey towards sustainable agriculture, reinforcing Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of promoting natural farming, environmental conservation, improving soil health and climate-resilient agriculture. The Hon'ble Prime Minister, during the recent NITI Aayog Governing Council Meeting in New Delhi, had also urged the states and the UTs to promote organic farming across the country. Taking a cue from the Hon'ble PM's call, the Ladakh Administration implemented the ban on the use of chemical fertilisers in the region. The move is aimed at safeguarding Ladakh's fragile Himalayan ecosystem, preserving soil and water resources, strengthening organic value chains, and establishing the Union Territory as a model organic region. "Ladakh has been blessed with a pristine environment, rich biodiversity, unique agro-ecological conditions and traditional farming practices that have remained largely free from excessive chemical intervention. The prohibition on chemical and synthetic fertilisers marks a transformative step towards making Ladakh a fully organic Union Territory. This initiative will protect our fragile Himalayan ecosystem, enhance the value of Ladakh's organic produce, improve farmers' incomes through premium markets and establish Ladakh as a global model of environmentally sustainable high-altitude agriculture," -- **Contd. on P2**

LT NEWS SERVICE

Leh, July 18: The Union Territory of Ladakh has taken a decisive leap towards becoming India's largest certified organic region by enforcing a complete ban on the use and sale of any chemical/synthetic fertiliser for agricultural practices in Ladakh. This landmark decision, aimed at transforming Ladakh into a fully organic region, comes at the direction of Lieutenant Governor, Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena. With the order coming into force, the procurement, distribution, sale, marketing and use of chemical/synthetic

fertilisers will be strictly prohibited with immediate effect, across the Union Territory. Any violation in this regard, will attract a minimum fine of Rs 10,000. "The Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh imposes prohibition on the procurement, distribution, sale, marketing and use of chemical/synthetic fertilizers for agricultural practices in the Union territory of Ladakh, with immediate effect, with the objective to safeguard organic certification, protect soil and water resources, promote sustainable agricultural practices and to establish Ladakh as a model organic region, thereby, ensuring the

Zero Tolerance Against Terrorism Is Not Merely Statement For India, But A Line Of Action: Rajnath



LT NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jul 18: Backed by a major boost in indigenous defence production, India is rapidly emerging as a credible global security partner, expanding its strategic footprint from the Indian Ocean to the Indo-Pacific, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Saturday. In an address at an event, Singh, sending a firm message to Pakistan, said New Delhi has clearly articulated its perspective on terrorism before the entire world and added that "zero tolerance against terrorism is not merely a statement for us, but a Line of Action". "We will strike against terrorism not just at the doorstep but by entering the house. The whole world saw this during Operation Sindoor," he noted. The defence minister also highlighted India's success in indigenous defence manufacturing.

Defence products made in India are being exported to nearly 100 countries and the total volume of the country's defence production has reached a record level of nearly Rs 1.78 lakh crore annually, he said. "Today, India is not just manufacturing defence equipment for itself. India is becoming a credible security partner for the world. From the Indian Ocean to the Indo-Pacific, India's role is continuously strengthening," he said in Hindi. The defence minister added that the nation is well-positioned to hit a Rs 3 lakh crore defence production milestone by 2029. "If a country depends on other countries for weapons, ammunition, navigation systems, missiles, radars and drones, then its strategic and military autonomy also becomes limited. We are working with the full intention of completely changing this," he said. Singh said the success of Operation Sindoor is a testament to the trust in India's industries.-- **Contd. on P2**

No Yatra Movement From Jammu On July 19 Due To Inclement Weather Forecast

LT NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, Jul 18: In view of the inclement weather forecast along the Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra route, it is hereby informed that no convoy, vehicle carrying Shri Amarnath ji yatra pilgrims will be allowed to proceed from Bhagwati Nagar, Jammu, towards the base camps of Baltal and Nunwan (Pahalgam) on July 19, 2026. The decision has been taken as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety and well-being of the pilgrims in view of the adverse weather conditions predicted along the Yatra route. "No fresh batch of pilgrims shall be permitted to move from Jammu on July 19, 2026 towards Kashmir in view of inclement weather advisory. Pilgrims are advised to remain at their designated accommodation centres in Jammu, Udhampur Ramban and await further instructions from the authorities, said Ramesh Kumar Divisional Commissioner Jammu. In view of the prevailing heatwave and adverse weather forecast, the Jammu and Kashmir Government has announced a three-day extension of the ongoing summer vacation for all government and recognized private schools across the Kashmir Division and Winter Zone of Jammu Division. City & Local Guides As per the decision, schools, which were earlier scheduled to reopen on July 20, will now remain closed till July 22, with classes set to resume on July 23, subject to any further government orders. The decision has been taken as a precautionary measure following the continuing spell of extreme heat and weather advisories -- **Contd. on P2**

After NC Dismissal, LAHDC Kargil CEC Stays Afloat With BJP Support



LT NEWS SERVICE

Srinagar: Days after the Ladakh Hill Development Council (LAHDC), Kargil Chief Executive Councillor (CEC) Dr Mohammad Jaffar Akhoo, who hails from the National Conference (NC) and tied up with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to steer the budget, the NC expelled him for six years. Jaffar, as reported exclusively by ETV Bharat, was served a show-cause notice for joining hands with the BJP to defeat Congress's boycott of the budget session of the council and violating the party's directives on handing power to Congress. After failing to give a satisfactory reply, NC General Secretary Ali Mohammad Sagar ordered the removal of Akhoo from the basic membership for a period of six years. "The action has been taken in view of his anti-party activities and for causing indiscipline within the party," said an official statement. Jaffar, however, defended his position, saying he will continue to lead LAHDC with "external support from BJP councillors". "I will continue to lead LAHDC. I have the support of the majority of NC councillors and outside support from the BJP as was clear in the recent Budget session," he added. The action against him, he said, was aimed at keeping the Congress in the "good books" due to growing friction between the coalition partners in Jammu and Kashmir.

"NC does not share a good equation with Congress, and they made me a scapegoat. I am for the development of Kargil and ready to sacrifice for my people," he told ETV Bharat. Barring one member, Congress's nine councillors boycotted the budget session called by the CEC due to a stalemate over the rotation of the top post. As per the alliance pact between NC and Congress, Akhoo refused to step down from the top post after completing the term of two-and-a-half years, triggering 16 NC and Congress councillors to file no confidence motion against him. The resolution submitted to the DC Kargil in May called for a special session for holding a floor test under section 27 (C) of the LAHDC Act. But the vote has not been carried out so far, with Ladakh Member of Parliament Hanifa Jan leading a delegation to Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena, pressing for the floor test. Amid this, CEC managed to secure support from NC and BJP councillors to pass a Rs 255 crore budget, which covers key sectors including education, health, road and building infrastructure development, and agriculture and horticulture, and was cleared by the 20 councillors in the 30-member autonomous body. In a fresh political development, the elected councillors of the National Conference (NC) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) joined hands to pass the annual budget of the Ladakh Hill Development Council, Kargil, even as the Congress boycotted the session. The Rs 255 crore budget, which covers key sectors including education, health, road and building infrastructure development, and agriculture and horticulture, was cleared by the 20 councillors in the 30-member autonomous body. The budget was passed with the support of 12 elected councillors -- **Contd. on P2**

'Goal To Transform J&K Into National Knowledge Hub': LG Sinha Attends Chinara Book Festival

LT NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, July 18: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha attended the third edition of the Chinara Book Festival here on Saturday, saying books are like living conversations that force us to think deeply, ask questions, challenge our beliefs, and inspire us to grow. Travel Guides & Travelogues He said this festival is more than just an event and it's a movement to build a vibrant community of readers, writers, and thinkers. "Our goal is to transform Jammu and Kashmir into a national hub for knowledge, culture, and creativity. I hope this book festival will inspire the youth to read every day, protect endangered languages, and use literature as a way to value and respect diversity," the Lieutenant Governor said. "Nothing matches the power of writing. Combined with a strong imagination, it becomes a lasting strength. A vibrant book festival creates such an environment and a welcoming space where literature becomes accessible, inspiring, and meaningful for everyone," he said. The Lieutenant Governor stated that in a very short time, the Chinara Book Festival has become a unique celebration of ideas, transforming into a vibrant intellectual movement across Jammu and Kashmir. "I believe writers and thinkers are like glowing lamps and blooming roses. In many ways, they mirror the



majestic Chinara tree. In Kashmir, the Chinara is a living symbol of patience, beauty, and endurance. Writers and their books share this same lasting spirit, guiding human civilisation through the ages. Together, we share the responsibility to restore Jammu Kashmir as a leading hub for education, literature, and youth empowerment," he said. Sinha said the Chinara Book Festival has become a strong national platform for ideas, debates and knowledge exchange. "During this festival, we have also witnessed an inspiring effort to revive a priceless treasure of our cultural heritage: the Sharada script. We have seen the spirit of 'Ek Bharat,

Shreshtha Bharat' take shape through initiatives such as Tamil-Kashmiri dialogues, and today this festival has become a strong bridge linking regions, languages and generations," he said. The Lieutenant Governor emphasised that sales figures should not dictate the success of a book festival. Kashmir news portal "I believe the true success of any book festival lies in the ideas and conversations it generates. If a discussion that begins at this festival reaches a college or university, then our goal is met. If a dialogue is held here and the ideas that emerged during the festival become the basis for future collaborations, then -- **Contd. on P2**

Jantar Mantar Protest Live: Wangchuk Remains Conscious And Haemodynamically Stable, Says Safdarjung Hospital

LT NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi: Activist Sonam Wangchuk was shifted to Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital on Saturday after completing 20 days of his indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar, prompting Delhi Police to begin clearing the protest site ahead of a proposed Parliament march on July 20. According to Delhi Police, Wangchuk was moved to the hospital following the Delhi High Court's directions and on the advice of doctors due to his deteriorating health. Police said he is currently under medical supervision and his vital parameters are stable. Deputy Commissioner of Police (New



Delhi) Sachin Sharma said the police acted in compliance with the High Court's order, adding that some protesters attempted to obstruct the exercise, leading to a brief commotion. He appealed to protesters to peacefully vacate the Jantar Mantar site. However, protesters alleged that Wangchuk was taken away against his will. Some claimed plainclothes police personnel entered the protest site posing as a medical team before shifting the activist. Abhijeet Dipke, Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder, alleged he was assaulted and detained by police, while other protesters claimed students formed a human chain to resist the removal of activists. Delhi Police has not re-

sponded to these allegations. On Thursday, the Delhi High Court directed authorities to monitor Wangchuk's health daily and provide any medical intervention recommended by government doctors, observing that "the life of every citizen is precious." Wangchuk, an engineer, education reformer and climate activist from Ladakh, has been on a hunger strike demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over alleged nationwide examination irregularities, including the NEET paper leak. He and his supporters had announced a march to Parliament on July 20 to press for their demands.-- **Contd. on P2**

www.ladakhtoday.com

LG

said L-G Shri Saxena. Notably, Ladakh has been actively promoting organic agriculture in view of its unique agro-ecological conditions and traditional farming practices for ages. In order to develop Ladakh as a certified organic region, organic certification activities have been undertaken, and so far, 207 revenue villages of Ladakh have already been brought under Organic Certification. The Agriculture Department has been designated as the nodal department for the implementation of the order. The Departments of Horticulture, Cooperatives and Rural Development & Panchayati Raj have been directed to facilitate the transition through awareness programmes, capacity building and improved availability of organic inputs. The enforcement agencies will ensure compliance, and strict penalties will be imposed for violations. Development of India's highest commercial Lilium cultivation field has commenced at Choglamsar in Leh, marking the beginning of a first-of-its-kind floriculture initiative of this scale in Ladakh, aimed at creating new avenues of livelihood through floriculture. Over the last three days, more than 50 thousand premium Lilium bulbs have already been planted at the flower field, with the first bloom expected around the first week of September this year. Spread over an area of 93,000 square metres, the Choglamsar Flower Field, on the banks of the River Sindhu, is being developed as one of the largest organised high-altitude floriculture parks in the country. At present, India's highest flower field is located at an altitude of 3200 meters at Mana in Uttarakhand, while the Choglamsar flower park sits at an altitude of nearly 3265 meters. The project is being implemented with scientific and technical support from the CSIR-Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (CSIR-IHBT), Palampur. L-G Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena had laid the foundation of the Choglamsar flower field on 22 June 2026. The project aims to produce premium Lilium flowers and buds that command high prices in national and international markets and thus, create a new, sustainable source of income for Ladakh's farming community, through self-help groups and cooperatives. This initiative is aligned with the Hon'ble Minister of Home Affairs and Cooperation, Shri Amit Shah's vision of "Sahkar se Samridhhi," which seeks to strengthen cooperatives to create sustainable local employment and enhance the income of local communities, particularly women and farmers, engaged in cooperatives. Conceived by LG, Shri Saxena, the project aims at positioning Ladakh as an emerging centre of premium floriculture, while opening access to high-value domestic and international flower markets. This flower field will also emerge as a new recreational destination for tourists. Under the project, the Agriculture department in the first year will develop the flower field and, at the time of bloom, transfer it to the selected Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and cooperative societies. The department will handhold the SHGs and the cooperatives in marketing flowers in national and international markets to maximise returns. Subsequently, from the next year, the cooperatives will themselves undertake commercial cultivation, harvesting and value addition of the Lilium flowers. For this, local farmers are being given structured training in scientific floriculture, modern cultivation practices, and establishing floriculture as a viable commercial enterprise. Ladakh offers ideal agro-climatic conditions for Lilium cultivation. The bulbs perform exceptionally well under cold climatic conditions – between minus 4 degrees and 4 degrees – making them naturally suited to the region's high-altitude environment. An important advantage of Lilium cultivation is that in three years, the bulbs begin to multiply naturally, significantly enhancing future production and increasing farmers' returns without any additional investment. "Ladakh's climate, which is often seen as a challenge, is in fact one of our greatest strengths. By introducing commercial cultivation of Lilium, we are opening a completely new avenue of income for our farmers, women and youth. Our vision is to transform Ladakh into a high-altitude floriculture hub, where scientific cultivation, value addition and market linkages generate sustainable livelihoods for local communities. This initiative will not only diversify agriculture but also empower Self-Help Groups, cooperatives and young entrepreneurs through high-value floriculture," said L-G Shri Saxena. Lilium is one of the world's most sought-after cut flowers because of its exceptional ornamental value and longer shelf life. The flowers are widely used in the floral industry and hospitality sector, with premium varieties priced between Rs 150 and Rs 200 per stick in domestic retail markets. In a landmark initiative that would transform Ladakh's horticulture sector and expand international market access for local farmers, Lieutenant Governor, Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena, today flagged off the first export consignment of 5 MT of Ladakh's premium apricots to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The initiative marks the beginning of Ladakh's largest-ever fresh apricot export programme and is expected to significantly enhance farmers' incomes while establishing Ladakh as a global supplier of premium-quality organic apricots. The export has been facilitated under an MoU signed in April 2026 between the Ladakh Administration and the UAE-based global retail conglomerate Lulu Retail through APEDA, which envisages the export of over 1,000 metric tonnes of fresh apricots during the current harvest season. This is a monumental leap from the mere 1,500 KG of apricots exported during the previous two years, making it one of the most significant milestones in Ladakh's horticultural history. Apricots, being fragile and perishable, require to be stored and transported in temperatures from zero degrees to 4 degrees. Keeping this in view, the Ladakh Administration, with support from CONCOR, ensured the shipment of Apricots from Ladakh using cold-chain transportation so as to maintain the freshness of the fruits.

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Jantar Mantar

Several Opposition leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal, Akhilesh Yadav, Supriya Sule and Aadiya Thackeray, had visited Wangchuk at Jantar Mantar on Friday to express solidarity and enquire about his health. According to a Health bulletin released by government officials, As on 9 PM, Sonam Wangchuk, who is admitted at VMMC & Safdarjung Hospital, "remains conscious and haemodynamically stable. His pulse, blood pressure and oxygen saturation are currently within normal limits. However, he is exhibiting clinical signs of dehydration, and in view of his prolonged fasting, his condition warrants immediate medical intervention to prevent further deterioration and potentially serious complications." Vishal Dadlani, Parvathy Thiruvothu And Others Criticise Sonam Wangchuk's Shift To Hospital Singer Vishal Dadlani and actor Parvathy Thiruvothu have expressed their disappointment over the way educationist Sonam Wangchuk was shifted to a hospital from the protest spot where he has been on an indefinite hunger strike. Dadlani shared a video on his Instagram handle on Saturday and said he is speechless. "Have you ever seen such a thing? Sonam ji was forcibly taken away. These people are ruining this country, this is... It breaks my heart," he is heard saying in the video. "People of my country, when will you wake up? If you don't wake up now, then when will you? I don't know what to say. I don't know what to think. I just wish I was there to help him somehow. He is getting tired of my anger right now," he added. Thiruvothu called the act an "abduction of our rights". "Abduction of our voices. When the protectors become the abusers , we better remind them that we will never let OUR India be run by crooks and liars. Solidarity and support to the brave citizens at Jantar Mantar and across the country," she wrote in an Instagram post. Hours after activist Sonam Wangchuk was whisked to a hospital here on Saturday, on the 21st day of his indefinite hunger strike in Delhi, former Chief Justice of India, Justice K G Balakrishnan said, "Let his life be saved". He made the brief comment on his condition during an interaction with PTI Videos on the sidelines of an event in Delhi. Wangchuk and the three activists from AISA have been on an indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar since June 28 in support of the Cockroach Janata Party-led protest over alleged irregularities in the NEET examination and the reported deaths of students linked to the controversy. Two individuals have been apprehended for allegedly defacing public property near the Jyoti Bishnu Auditorium in the Khanapara area, Guwahati police said. The police have registered two separate cases at two different police stations after the individuals allegedly painted murals of activist Sonam Wangchuk on public walls. The apprehended individuals have been identified as Nakul Mili of Dibrugarh and Gaurav Singha of Guwahati. In a post on X, Abhijeet Dipke urged everyone to join us for a night vigil at Jantar Mantar. He said: "Delhi Police is planning to crackdown on our protest during night or early hours of morning – silencing the voice of youth. We request everyone to join us for night vigil at Jantar Mantar, so that together we can march to Sansad on 20th." Jantar Mantar Live: Rahul Slams Wangchuk's 'Removal' From Jantar Mantar Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the removal of activist Sonam Wangchuk from Jantar Mantar while he was on a non-violent hunger strike is "wrong" and alleged that the core tenets of the government are "Asatya and Hinsa (falsehood and violence)". The party criticised the police action at Jantar Mantar, following which Wangchuk was shifted, describing it as a "blot" on the country's democracy and the Constitution. In a post on X, Gandhi said the core tenets of the Narendra Modi government are "Asatya and Hinsa". The Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) has issued a fresh call for its 'Chalo Sansad' march from Jantar Mantar to Parliament on July 20 at 9 am, urging students, parents and citizens to join what it described as a peaceful movement. Sharing a campaign poster on social media, the organisation declared, "No One Can Stop This Movement! No Attack, No Kidnapping, No Propaganda. Youth Of This Country Will Show Up On 20th July!" The poster also asks supporters to confirm their participation by giving a missed call on 701670115, as the party steps up mobilisation ahead of the proposed Parliament march. After 20 days of hunger strike, activist Sonam Wangchuk was shifted to Safdarjung Hospital, where he refused intravenous fluids, oral rehydration solution and all medication, despite clear signs of dehydration and metabolic imbalance. According to the hospital's health bulletin, Wangchuk was admitted with a stable pulse and blood pressure but showed compensated acidosis, low potassium, a blood sugar of 78 mg/dl and rising urinary ketones from 1+ to 3+ within hours. The hospital report states Wangchuk's potassium level has dropped to 2.9 from 4.3 just a day earlier. His wife, Gitanjali J Angmo, has raised concerns over lack of transparency, saying, "They are not allowing me to get a second opinion by taking him to another lab, nor are they giving me his blood sample in my presence to get tested elsewhere. I have been waiting for 3 hours, but they haven't obliged us yet. This lack of transparency is making us suspicious." She has demanded immediate discharge so Wangchuk can be moved to a hospital of their choice, adding, "We have been awaiting their response for the last 2 hours."

J&K

I will consider the festival and its objectives successful. If a young person finds a book at this festival that changes the course of their life, that will be the greatest achievement of the Chinar Book Festival," he said. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha reviewed the situation after a Shri Amarnathji Yatra convoy vehicle met with an accident near Jakhani in Udhampur earlier this morning. Travel Guides & Travelogues The Lieutenant Governor spoke with Deputy Commissioner Udhampur, Shri Minga Sherpa and medical officials, and directed for best possible medical care for the injured undergoing treatment at GMC Udhampur. In a post on X, the Lieutenant Governor has said: "Spoke with the Deputy Commissioner of Udhampur and medical officials and inquired about the health condition of Shri Amarnathji Yatra pilgrims injured in the unfortunate road accident near Jakhani, Udhampur earlier this morning. Five pilgrims from Uttar Pradesh and a driver from Ganderbal sustained injuries and are currently undergoing treatment at GMC Udhampur. Senior officials have been directed to ensure all necessary assistance and the best possible medical care is provided for their swift recovery. I pray to Baba Barfani for the safety, well-being and smooth journey of all devotees." Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha reviewed the situation after a Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra pilgrim bus from Rajasthan caught fire at Karol in Ramban due to tyre burst while returning from the holy cave. Hinduism The Lieutenant Governor spoke with the Deputy Commissioner Ramban, Shri Mohammad Alyas Khan and senior officials, and directed them to provide immediate assistance to the affected Yatris. In a post on X, the Lieutenant Governor has said: "I have reviewed the situation with senior officials and Deputy Commissioner, Ramban, after a Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra pilgrim bus from Rajasthan returning after Darshan caught fire at Karol due to a tyre burst. By Lord Shiva's grace, all pilgrims are safe. I have directed the Ramban district administration to provide immediate assistance to the Yatris and arrange for their safe travel back to Rajasthan."

NC

from the NC, six from the BJP, and one each from the Congress and an independent party. The move comes amid a deadlock over the rotation of the top post of chief executive councillor. In May, 16 councillors from both the NC and Congress had submitted a joint no-confidence motion against the incumbent Chief Executive Councillor (CEC) Jaffar Akhoon after he refused to step down as per the power-sharing pact. The councillors met and passed the budget for the erstwhile Kargil district on Wednesday, Akhoon confirmed . The erstwhile Kargil comprises the newly created Zaskar and Drass districts. "The Congress did not want to pass the budget and stayed away. They have a habit of doing this drama," Akhoon told ETV Bharat. "Indirectly, it was akin to the floor test. It is clear now; I have the support of the majority," he said. In the session, the LAHDC also nominated two executive councillors equivalent to deputy ministers from the National Conference to the Council. The chief executive councillor enjoys the rank of cabinet minister, while councillors are equivalent to a minister of state. In October 2023, the NC and Congress jointly swept LAHDC-Kargil elections, bagging 22 seats, with the National Conference emerging as the single largest party, winning 12 seats, followed by Congress, with 10 seats. As per understanding, NC and Congress agreed to hold the post of chief executive councillor, Kargil, in rotation. For the first two and a half years, the post was with NC, and for the remaining half Congress would take over. The term of the NC chairperson, according to the pact, expired in April, but Akhoon's refusal to step down prompted a no-confidence motion against him. Congress councillor Nasir Hussain Munshi explained that they boycotted the budget session because it was a mere formality to get their approval. "The session was stage-managed. We did not want to be part of the exercise where our democratic rights were infringed upon. The capex budget was readied by the UT administration, and the LAHDC only signed it. There was no discussion, and instead of a two-day session to discuss grants, it was passed within two to three hours," he said. LAHDC councillor and former LAHDC chief Feroz Ahmad Khan, who was one of the signatories to the resolution submitted to the district administration in May, defended his participation. He said that they joined the budget session in the interest of the people of Kargil, as works were pending. "We met the Lieutenant Governor and Chief Secretary to press for the floor test, but it has not been conducted so far," he said, saying they still support the resolution. The resolution submitted to the DC Kargil called for a special session for holding a floor test under section 27 (C) of the LAHDC Act. Taking note of the development, the National Conference has issued a show-cause notice asking Akhoon to explain his position within 24 hours for refusing to hand power to Congress and joining hands with the BJP. "Instead, you allegedly joined hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to form the Council and proceeded to facilitate the nomination of two Executive Councillors without the approval or consultation of the Party High Command or the District Unit, Kargil," said the notice, undersigned by NC general secretary Ali Mohammad Sagar.

Zero Tolerance

The defence minister said the "biggest step" the Modi government has taken towards strengthening India in the defence sector is to promote self-reliance in the defence industrial sector. "Our vision for empowering India in the defence sector is the one that trusts India's capabilities. But the perspective of previous governments was, somehow, doubtful about India's potential and capability. They perhaps did not have as much faith in India's capabilities as our government does," he said. "Operation Sindoor was, in itself, a splendid example of technological warfare. In this operation, along with advanced missile systems like Akashteer, Akash missile system, and BrahMos, numerous latest equipment were also utilised." Singh said it proved that India's armed forces not only understand change but are also employing it with confidence. "All of this is becoming possible because a new foundation has been laid over the past 12 years," he said. In the year 2013-14, India's defence exports stood at just Rs 686 crore, but now it surged to over 38,000 crore in 2025-26, he said.

NO Yatra

issued by the Meteorological Department. Authorities said the safety and well-being of students, teachers, and school staff remain the government's top priority. The extension comes amid soaring temperatures across the Valley over the past several days, while the IMD has also forecast a possibility of heavy rainfall and localized flash floods in parts of Jammu and Kashmir in the coming days. The School Education Department has advised parents, students, and school managements to follow official advisories and await further instructions regarding the reopening of educational institutions. Further orders, if required due to changing weather conditions, will be issued by the competent authority. The Shri Amarnathji Yatra will remain temporarily suspended from both Pahalgam and Baltal routes from July 19, 2026, in view of the inclement weather forecast issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD). City & Local Guides Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Anshul Garg said the decision has been taken as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety and well-being of the pilgrims. "In view of the forecast of inclement weather over the next few days and considering the safety and well-being of the pilgrims, Shri Amarnathji Yatra shall remain temporarily suspended from both Pahalgam and Baltal routes with effect from 19.07.2026," he said. Accordingly, no onward movement of pilgrims will be permitted from the Baltal and Nunwan/Chandanwari base camps from July 19. Officials said updates regarding the resumption of the Yatra will be issued after assessing route safety and weather conditions. So far, over 3.7 lakh pilgrims have paid obeisance at the Holy Cave Shrine during the ongoing Shri Amarnathji Yatra.



HELP LINE



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4	DC Nubra	Sh. Mukul Beniwal (IAS)	8800308665	01982-252049	–
5	DC Zaskar	Sh. Omkar Rajendra Gundage (IAS)	8668894331	–	dc-zaskar@ladakh.gov.in
6	DC Sham	Smt. Kunzes Angmo	9419179108	–	–
7	DC Drass	Sh. Imteez Kacho (JKAS)	–	–	–



These numbers are for public assistance and urgent communication only.

FOR ANY EMERGENCY, DIAL 112



Summer Training Programme 2026 Commences at DIET Kargil

Kargil, July 18, 2026: The Summer Training Programme 2026 for different Target groups commenced today at the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), Kargil. The programme began with a one-day capacity-building workshop on Pedagogical Leadership for Heads of Middle Schools. The inaugural session was graced by the DC/CEO, LAHDC Kargil, Shri Rakesh Kumar (IAS), who delivered the inaugural address. Sh. Rakesh Kumar highlighted key gaps identified in current school functioning and outlined a vision for the overall improvement of the region's education sector. He emphasized that the core administration and conduct at every level of education must remain strictly child-centric, keeping student learning and holistic development as the topmost priority. Interacting closely with the participants, the DC shared valuable insights on the pivotal role of school heads. While he highly appreciated the leaders working with exceptional dedication, he also stressed the need for fixing accountability for continuous defaulters. This summer, DIET Kargil, in collaboration with various knowledge partners, is conducting a series of professional development programmes covering diverse themes, including School Leadership, Holistic Progress Card (HPC), Balvatika, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), subject-specific pedagogies, STEM



Education, and Digital Pedagogy etc. These programmes are designed to strengthen teacher competencies and leadership capacities in alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Frameworks. Today's inaugural training on Pedagogical Leadership oriented 78 Heads of Middle Schools on key dimensions of leadership in Indian context, school transformation, Pedagogical leadership framework, annual Pedagogical plan and strategies for improving student learning outcomes. The technical sessions were facilitated by Dr. Willayat Ali, Senior Faculty, DIET Kargil, who shared practical perspectives and research-based approaches to strengthening pedagogical leadership in schools. The remaining training programmes under the Summer Training Cal

Board of Directors of Ladakh Legal Services Authority Approves Annual Expenditure for FY 2025–26

Leh, July 18, 2026: The Board of Directors of the Ladakh Legal Services Authority (LLSA) met today under the chairpersonship of Hon'ble Ms. Justice Sindhu Sharma, Judge, High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, and Executive Chairperson, LLSA, at the Conference Hall of the Ladakh Legal Services Authority, Melongthang, Leh. The meeting was attended in person by Sh. Tsewang Tharchin, IS & AS, Commissioner/Secretary, Finance Department, Administration of UT Ladakh, Sh. Baseer-ul-Haq Choudhary, IAS, Secretary, Department of Information and Public Relation and Sh. Gonbo Stobgyal, President, Bar Association, Leh. The following Members participated virtually; Sh. Tahir Majid Shamsi, Assistant Solicitor General, Srinagar Wing; Sh. Vishal Sharma, Assistant Solicitor General, Jammu Wing; Sh. Tariq Ahmad Qureshi, Secretary, Department of Law & Justice; Adv. Talib Hussain; and Adv. Zarina Bano. The Board considered the Annual Expenditure incurred by the Authority during the Financial Year 2025–26 from the Grants-in-Aid received from the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and the Administration of Union Territory Ladakh. During the meeting, Ms. Spalzes Angmo, Member Secretary, LLSA, informed the Board

that the Authority had received Grants-in-Aid from NALSA under the Legal Aid Programme (LAP) and the LADC Scheme. She further informed the Board that the Authority had also received Grants-in-Aid from the UT Administration of Ladakh during the Financial Year 2025–26. The Grants were utilized for implementing various statutory programmes and activities under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. The expenditure covered legal aid services, legal awareness and outreach programmes, Lok Adalats, victim compensation, the Legal Aid Defence Counsel System, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), capacity-building initiatives, and other statutory functions of the Authority. After detailed deliberations, the Board examined the Annual Accounts and Expenditure Statement, duly prepared and certified by the Chartered Accountant engaged by the Authority, and unanimously approved the Annual Expenditure for the Financial Year 2025–26. Addressing the meeting, Hon'ble Ms. Justice Sindhu Sharma, Judge, High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, and Executive Chairperson, LLSA, emphasized transparency, accountability, and prudent financial management in the implementation of legal services programmes.

Contesting Candidates Declared Elected Unopposed in Zanskar Co-operative Society Elections

Zanskar, July 18, 2026: In Ladakh, the election process for the Executive Committees of the Primary Agriculture Co-operative Society (PACS), Sanl, and the Regional Consumer Co-operative Store, Padum, has been successfully completed in Zanskar. Following the completion of the nomination, scrutiny and withdrawal processes, the contesting candidates were declared elected unopposed by the Returning Officer and Tehsildar, Zanskar, Mohd Hassan. The unopposed candidates include the Presidents, Secretaries and other Executive Committee members of both co-operative societies. Election certificates were presented to the newly elected office bearers by the Returning Officer in the presence of the staff of the Assistant Registrar, Co-operative Department, Zanskar. Congratulating the newly elected representatives, Mohd Hassan expressed confidence that they would discharge their responsibilities with sincerity, transparency and dedication, and work for the strengthening of the co-operative movement and the welfare of the people. Meanwhile, the election process for the remaining Primary Agriculture Co-operative Societies, including Karsha, Rantaksha, Tungri and Icher, will be conducted as per the notified election schedule



MP Ladakh Chairs District Electricity Committee Meeting to Review RDSS and PMDP Works



Leh: The Hon'ble Member of Parliament, Ladakh, Haji Mohammad Haneefa Jan, chaired a meeting of the District Electricity Committee at the Conference Hall of the Deputy Commissioner, Leh, today to review the progress of works being implemented under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) and the Prime Minister's Development Package (PMDP) in Leh district. The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner, Leh, Romil Singh Donk (IAS); Additional Deputy Commissioner, Leh, Rigzin Spalgon (JKAS); Chief Planning Officer, Leh, Konchok Gyaltsen; Chief Engineer, Distribution Ladakh; Superintending Engineer, Distribution Ladakh; General Manager, NHPC Leh, along with officials of the Power

Development Department and representatives of the executing agencies. During the meeting, the Power Development Department gave a presentation highlighting the overall progress of RDSS and PMDP works, including the status of the 220 KV transmission line and GIS Sub-Station in Leh district, progress under various RDSS packages, development of the 66 KV network in Changthang and Nubra, and the implementation of Phase-I and Phase-II Smart Meter installations. Reviewing the progress, Hon'ble MP Haji Mohammad Haneefa Jan stressed the importance of ensuring 100 per cent completion of all works within the stipulated timeline. He emphasized the need to expedite the recruitment process

and strengthen manpower deployment to ensure timely execution of the projects without any delays. The Hon'ble MP also directed the Deputy Commissioner, Leh, to conduct regular review meetings to closely monitor the progress of the projects, address bottlenecks promptly, and ensure effective coordination among all concerned departments and executing agencies for the timely completion of the works. The meeting concluded with a commitment from all stakeholders to work in close coordination for the successful implementation of RDSS and PMDP projects, aimed at strengthening the power distribution infrastructure and ensuring reliable electricity supply across the district.

GDC Drass Organizes Menstrual Health and Hygiene Awareness Outreach Programme at Himababs Public School Bhimbet under PM-USA

Drass: As part of the ongoing PM-USA workshop programme on Menstrual Health and Hygiene being conducted at Government Degree College Drass, on its third consecutive day, an outreach programme was conducted at Himababs Public School, Drass. Students from Gulshan e Reza Public School and Model Public School Murad Bagh also participated in the workshop. The initiative sought to extend awareness on menstrual health and hygiene beyond the college campus by engaging adolescent students of Drass in meaningful discussions on menstrual well-being and healthy practices. The technical session was conducted by Ms. Ananya, Project Manager and resource persons from Charkha Development Communication Network, who delivered informative and interactive presentations on menstrual health, personal hygiene, nutrition, myths and misconceptions surrounding menstruation, and the importance of adopting safe menstrual hygiene practices. The speakers encouraged active participation from the students, addressing their questions and concerns in an open, fun, and supportive atmosphere. The students participated enthusiastically throughout the programme, engaging in discussions that enhanced their understanding of menstrual health and personal hygiene and overall well-being. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Ms. Archo Fatima, Assistant Professor, GDC Drass, who expressed her gratitude to the Principals, staff members, and students of Himababs, Gulshan e Reza and Model Public School for their cooperation and participation. She highlighted the importance of



creating awareness about menstrual health among adolescents and emphasized the need to foster an environment where menstruation can be discussed openly, free from stigma and misconceptions. The outreach programme form a part of GDC's continued commitment under PMUSA scheme to strengthen health awareness and empower young girl students through education and community engagement. Member of Parliament, UT Ladakh, today chaired a review meeting to discuss the effective implementation of the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS), the Prime Minister's Development Package (PMDP), and the progress of Smart Metering projects in Kargil. The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer, LAHDC Kargil, Rakesh Kumar, IAS; Chief Engineer, Distribution, Ladakh; Superintending Engineer, UT Ladakh; Executive Engineer, Power Development Department (PDD),

Kargil; General Manager, NHPC; besides engineers and technical officials from the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) and Ladakh Power Distribution Corporation Limited (LPDCL). During the meeting, the Member of Parliament reviewed the physical and financial progress of projects being implemented under RDSS and PMDP and assessed the status of smart metering works across the district. Officials briefed the Chair on the achievements made so far, ongoing works, project timelines and the challenges affecting implementation. The meeting also discussed measures to strengthen the power distribution network, improve electricity infrastructure, reduce transmission and distribution losses, and ensure reliable and uninterrupted power supply to consumers. Particular emphasis was laid on the timely installation of smart meters and the completion of infrastructure development under the RDSS.

ISRO targets 7 launches this fiscal; Next mission within two months, says Chairman Narayanan

SRIHARIKOTA, (Andhra Pradesh) July 18: ISRO is targeting seven launches during the current financial year, with the next mission scheduled to lift off within the next two months, ISRO Chairman V Narayanan announced on Saturday.

Speaking at a press conference following the historic maiden orbital launch of Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 rocket, Narayanan stated that two satellites are already fully built, while five to six others are in the final phase of integration.

"This financial year, we have targeted at least seven launches. We will start the launch within two months," Narayanan said.

The space agency's upcoming operational schedule includes the first uncrewed mission under the Gaganyaan human spaceflight program, alongside the slated satellite launches.

Hailing the successful flight of Vikram-1 by private startup Skyroot Aerospace as a milestone, the ISRO chief lauded the young team -- having an average age of 28 years -- for achieving a successful orbital mission in their very first attempt. He noted that the



breakthrough provides immense satisfaction to the domestic space community and contributes heavily to the "Bharat 2047" vision.

History

Incidentally, both the cofounders of Skyroot Aerospace, Pawan Kumar Chandana and Naga Bharat Daka, were former ISRO scientists.

Later, speaking to PTI Videos, Narayanan likened ISRO's feeling of pride to that of parents witnessing their children excel.

"We are just like parents who get excited and proud to see children studying well and getting first rank," he added.

Reflecting on the evolution of the domestic space ecosystem, the ISRO Chairman highlighted the impact of policy structural updates. "In 2020, the space sector reform was brought, and the startup companies and private sector were allowed to carry out the activities in the space area. Today, for the first time in the country, a private rocket successfully placed the satellite in orbit," he said, adding that the milestone will drive substantial economic growth and foster a strong scientific temper among the youth.

He pointed out that when the policy was put in

practice, there was only one startup. "Today, there are 400 startups," he added.

Responding to a question about India's infrastructure capacity to sustain high-frequency private and commercial launches, Narayanan disclosed that ISRO plans to commission its second launch complex at Kulasekarapattinam within the next six months.

He pointed out that while Sriharikota possesses comprehensive capabilities, deploying massive launch pads for small satellites in the 300 kg to 350 kg category is logistically sub-optimal.

"Initial launches will go from here. Then we are also building the second launch complex in Kulasekarapattinam. That is getting ready. Within this financial year, we are going to commission [it]," Narayanan stated, adding that the facility is currently in its final phase. Once active, launch tracking and distribution will be optimised between both spaceports depending on specific payload requirements, he added.

Centre for Green Skills, Applied AI inaugurated at LU

Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh's first Centre for Green Skills and Applied AI was formally inaugurated at Lucknow by Vice-Chancellor Prof Jai Prakash Saini on Friday.

The centre has been established by IM1B (One Million for One Billion) Foundation in strategic partnership with Microsoft, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) Startup Hub, and the Government of Uttar Pradesh.

The primary objective of the centre is to equip young people with applied artificial intelligence and green skills.

Through this initiative, students will be empowered to develop practical and technology-driven solutions to challenges related to climate change and sustainable development.

The centre will also prepare learners for future-ready careers in the rapidly expanding green economy.

The Lucknow centre is the third among five specialised centres being established across India by the IM1B Foundation and Microsoft in collaboration with the MeitY Startup Hub.

Following Bengaluru and Hyderabad, Lucknow now joins the network, while

similar centres are planned for Noida and Shillong in the next phase.

Collectively, these five centres aim to engage and train 1,00,000 young people by 2030, creating pathways to more than 50,000 direct jobs, internships, apprenticeships and entrepreneurial opportunities.

In the first year alone, 20,000 learners across the country will receive training, with 10,000 of them being connected to career opportunities. The Lucknow centre is expected to engage more than 5,000 local youth during its first year of operation.

LU Vice-Chancellor JP Saini said, "The establishment of Uttar Pradesh's first Centre for Green Skills & Applied AI at our main campus, in collaboration with IM1B and Microsoft, is a testament to Lucknow University's commitment to academic excellence."

He said this centre would take LU students beyond conventional education by providing hands-on experience in future-oriented fields such as AI and sustainability.

"In line with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), this innovative initiative will not only enhance the global employability of our students but also prepare them to become responsible citizens and technology innovators committed to society and the environment," he added.



Domestic help's daughter in Lko clears NEET

Lucknow

Two students from economically disadvantaged families in Uttar Pradesh have cleared the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET), overcoming personal and financial hardships to pursue careers in medicine.

In Lucknow, Neelu, the daughter of a domestic help, lost her father when she was in Class 8 as her family could not afford timely medical treatment.

"My father died because we couldn't afford proper medical treatment. That loss changed my life forever. I decided that I wanted to become a doctor so that no family has to lose a loved one simply because they are poor," she said.

Neelu began her education at Prerna Girls School, run by Study Hall Education Foundation (SHEF) for girls from marginalised communities, and later earned a scholarship to Study Hall School for Classes 11 and 12.

She scored 94 per cent in the CBSE Class 12 examinations this year while simultaneously preparing for NEET.

KnP Central-Naubasta metro corridor awaits inauguration

Kanpur

Kanpur Metro is awaiting the inauguration of the completed metro corridor from Kanpur Central to Naubasta.

After receiving approval from the Commissioner of Metro Railway Safety, the Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation has completed preparations for operations.

After IIT to Motijheel, the metro is now ready to run in another major part of the city. Construction of the new metro route from Kanpur Central railway station to Naubasta is 100 per cent complete. After a thorough inspection, the City residents are just waiting for the inauguration of this route, after which people will be able to travel directly from IIT to Naubasta by metro in minutes.

Preparations for the launch of passenger services on the new route are nearly complete at the UPMRC. Stations are being decorated, and final touches are underway. The

Metro administration wants Prime Minister Narendra Modi to inaugurate this important and major route. However, the official schedule and date for the prime minister's arrival in Kanpur have not yet been finalised, which is delaying the inauguration. The opening of this new route will revolutionise Kanpur's public transport system.

Currently, the metro operates from IIT to Motijheel, but the addition of the Central-to-Naubasta route will connect a significant commercial and residential area of the city. Passengers travelling to and from the railway station, as well as the millions of residents living in Naubasta and Kidwai Nagar, will experience significant relief from traffic jams.

Public Relations Officer Panchanan Mishra stated that all technical and civil work for the metro from Central to Naubasta has been completed. He stated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was expected to inaugurate this new route.



Crackdown on food adulteration in UP

Lucknow

In one of the largest food safety enforcement drives undertaken in Uttar Pradesh, the Food Safety and Drug Administration (FSDA) launched a statewide crackdown on food adulteration, resulting in the seizure of food products worth ₹11.66 crore, registration of six FIRs, and collection of 2,965 food samples for laboratory testing.

The drive against food adulteration was launched in line with the state government's commitment to ensuring safe, pure and quality food for consumers, following the pledge made on World Food Safety Day (June 7, 2026).

According to the FSDA, the special inter-district and district-level enforcement drive included 3,537 inspections

and 2,075 raids across the state.

During the operation, officials seized 2,929.86 quintals of food products valued at approximately ₹11.66 crore. In comparison, 551.71 quintals of unsafe and adulterated food, worth an estimated ₹63.17 lakh, were destroyed on the spot. FSDA Commissioner Dr Roshan Jacob said the campaign aimed at not only taking strict action against food adulterators but also strengthening consumer confidence in food safety and encouraging compliance with food safety standards among food business operators.

The enforcement drive covered a broad range of food products, including open and packaged spices, milk and dairy products, paneer, ghee, edible oils, packaged drinking water,

jams, jellies, sauces, mayonnaise, pickles and chutneys.

The spice-focused campaign alone resulted in the collection of 1,055 samples. Authorities seized 419.7 quintals of spices worth around Rs 67.78 lakh and destroyed 80.47 quintals of unfit spices valued at ₹15.17 lakh.

In the category of pickles, sauces, jams, jellies, mayonnaise and chutneys, officials collected 801 samples, seized 338.6 quintals of products worth ₹27.77 lakh, and destroyed 259.28 quintals of unsafe food valued at ₹17.56 lakh.

The largest operation targeted the dairy sector. During 572 raids, officials collected 885 samples, seized 1,876.66 quintals of milk and dairy products worth approximately ₹10.66 crore, and destroyed 211.96 quintals of adulterated products valued at ₹30.44

lakh, preventing them from reaching consumers.

The FSDA also intensified inspections of packaged drinking water manufacturing units. During 212 raids, officials collected 224 samples, issued improvement notices to 56 units, suspended the licenses of 41 units, sealed 57 facilities, and halted production at 37 units. Authorities seized 293 kilolitres of packaged drinking water worth around Rs 5.06 lakh.

In a broader inspection of 520 packaged drinking water and mineral water units, laboratory analysis of 397 samples found 119 samples unsafe and 194 substandard.

The department subsequently suspended licences and imposed temporary bans on several brands until corrective measures were implemented.

Earlier, action had been taken against 39 unsafe samples, leading to restrictions on 27 state-licensed and 12 centrally licensed brands.

To ensure the quality of edible oils, 58 inter-district teams inspected 64 manufacturing units, collected 210 samples, and seized 4,153 kilolitres of edible oil valued at nearly Rs 6.5 crore.

Following reports of unsafe or substandard products, the department imposed temporary restrictions on brands manufactured by 14 units until compliance is restored.

Similarly, laboratory findings against several ghee brands led to temporary bans on the manufacture, storage, distribution and sale of products from 11 brands belonging to five manufacturers outside Uttar Pradesh and six within the state.

Retired bureaucrats dominate applicants for Ram temple trust's CEO post

Ayodhya

Retired bureaucrats made up the bulk of practising "Ram Bhakts" who have applied for the post of the first chief executive officer of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, with the application process set to close on Saturday, sources associated with the selection exercise said.

The recruitment drive assumes significance as it comes in the wake of the alleged embezzlement of donations offered at the Ram temple.

A probe into the alleged theft prompted the Trust to create the CEO's post as part of a broader administrative overhaul aimed at strengthening financial oversight, improving institutional accountability and streamlining

the temple's day-to-day functioning. "There is certainly a huge response. Many applicants also forwarded their resumes directly to us, but we returned them, asking that they be sent to the expert panel, which alone is authorised to scrutinise applications before recommending names to the Trust," a senior member of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust told PTI.

According to a person familiar with the selection process, the three-member committee's mandate is limited to screening applications and preparing a shortlist, while the final appointment will be made entirely by the Trust. "The committee will evaluate the applications and recommend suitable names. The final appointment will be made

by the Trust," the source said, adding that the panel is unlikely to forward more than three names.

The expert panel, announced earlier this month, comprises retired Justice Pramod Kohli, retired Lieutenant General Vishnukant Chaturvedi and former NIT Raipur chairperson Suresh Haware.

The deadline for submission of applications is 4 pm on Saturday, following which the panel will begin scrutinising the applications. It has been given around a month from the deadline to complete the exercise.

Besides examining eligibility and experience, the panel may hold one-on-one interactions with shortlisted candidates before submitting its recommendations. The Trust may also

interact separately with the shortlisted candidates before selecting its first CEO, sources said.

The appointment is expected to be taken up after the Trust restores its full strength. It currently has 13 members after Krishna Mohan was appointed interim general secretary following the resignations of Champat Rai and trustee Anil Mishra, while trustee Vimlendra Mohan Pratap Mishra passed away last year. Vacancies are likely to be filled at the Trust's meeting scheduled for July 22, sources said.

The selection is being carried out independently by the Trust, which functions under the directions of the Supreme Court and is not controlled by the government, they added.

The Trust had on July 13 invited applications for the newly created post, prescribing that candidates should be between 50 and 70 years of age, possess at least 20 years of managerial experience in a large public organisation, institution, government department or company, and be "actively practising Hindus", with preference to devotees of Lord Ram belonging to the Vaishnavite tradition.

Applicants must hold at least a bachelor's degree, possess working knowledge of Hindi and English, and have experience in administration, finance, accounts, human resources, public relations, information technology, security and legal affairs. Preference will be given to candidates who have served as chief administrative officers or

managed a temple or Hindu religious institution. Serving government officers in the last two years of service, retired officers and eligible private-sector professionals are also eligible to apply.

According to the notification, the CEO will report to the Trust's general secretary and will initially be appointed for a three-year term, extendable on the basis of satisfactory performance. The salary and service conditions will be decided through mutual discussion.

Ram Temple Construction Committee chairman Nripendra Mishra earlier said the CEO's primary responsibility would be to "uphold the faith of devotees in the trust" while overseeing the temple's financial arrangements and ensuring adequate facilities

for pilgrims. "There will be no government interference in the functioning of either the trust or the CEO," Mishra said, adding that the officer would function "as an assistant of the trust" and remain accountable to it.

The notification further states that the CEO will be responsible for the Trust's statutory, administrative and financial affairs, while ensuring transparency and accountability in financial transactions, protecting the Trust's assets, strengthening institutional systems and overseeing security arrangements. The officer will also supervise the smooth conduct of religious rituals and festivals, improve facilities for pilgrims, coordinate with government agencies when required, and implement policies approved by the Board of Trustees.

Speaker Birla Approves Merger Of Rebel SS(UBT) With Shinde-Led Shiv Sena; Rebel TMC MPs To Sit Separately

NEW DELHI, July 18: Ahead of the Monsoon session, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Saturday approved the merger of six Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs with the Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and allowed separate seating for the 20 rebel TMC lawmakers, who have joined a little-known party, NCPI.

Official sources said that with the merger of the six MPs, the strength of the Shiv Sena has gone up to 13. The TMC rebel groups of 20 MPs will seat separately, away from the parent party, the sources said. No final decision has been taken on the demand of the rebel TMC MPs to be recognised as part of the Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI), and the matter is still under consideration, they said.

The TMC and Shiv Sena (UBT) had demanded the disqualification of the rebel MPs. The rebel TMC MPs are also likely to attend Sunday's all-party meeting.

The Lok Sabha Speaker had earlier met a TMC delegation headed by its leader Abhishek Banerjee as well as the party's breakaway group. A similar exercise was also carried out with regard to the Shiv Sena (UBT).



Consultations with legal and constitutional experts of Parliament were carried out and they provided their inputs to the Speaker to help him take the final decisions, sources said. The decisions came two days ahead of the monsoon session of Parliament, which will begin on July 20.

Past precedents, decisions taken by the former speakers of Lok Sabha and chairmen of Rajya Sabha in similar situations were also examined before taking the "informed and legally sound" decisions, the sources said, adding Constitutional and legal aspects were looked into. Besides the rebel groups of the TMC and Shiv Sena (UBT), the DMK also sought a separate seating arrangement, away from the Congress, after the principal opposition party broke its decades-old alliance with the Tamil Nadu party and joined hands with the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay's party TVK. Altogether, 29 MPs got elected to the Lok Sabha on TMC tickets in the 2024 general election. As many as 20 MPs broke away from the party and joined NCPI, a registered unrecognised political party headquartered in Howrah, West Bengal, and sought separate

seating arrangement.

The rebel group also expressed their allegiance to the Narendra Modi government and their desire to join the ruling NDA.

One TMC MP passed away some time ago and the seat remains vacant.

In case of Shiv Sena (UBT), a total of nine MPs got elected on party tickets, of which six have joined the rival Shiv Sena, headed by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

Both the TMC and Shiv Sena (UBT) argued before the Speaker that their rebel MPs should be disqualified as the defections fall under the anti-defection law.

The two parties argued that the anti-defection law may not be applicable only if two-thirds of the entire party walk away from its fold.

TMC general secretary and its Lok Sabha leader Abhishek Banerjee demanded before Birla that the rebels should be disqualified.

He also said the claims of the rebels that they 'merged' with the NCPI were not valid, and as per the law, two-thirds of the entire party must merge with another party, not just individual legislators.

TN CM Vijay conducts surprise inspection at social justice hostel in Chennai



Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay conducted a surprise inspection on Friday at the MC Raja Social Justice Hostel in Saidapet, where students presented a slew of grievances regarding substandard facilities, severe security lapses, and staff apathy.

During the interaction, students informed the Chief Minister that rigid hostel curfew timings are severely impacting residents who attend part-time jobs or competitive exam coaching, such as UPSC and TNPSC classes.

They reported that latecomers are routinely locked out of the premises, forcing them to sleep in public parks or outside the gates.

While locked out, students alleged they have faced harassment from local miscreants and instances of robbery.

Highlighting poor living conditions, the inmates complained of frequent water shortages, uncleaned and broken restrooms, and a lack of adequate drinking water.

Furthermore, students stated that the quality of food is persistently poor,

noting that catering staff do not adhere to basic hygiene protocols like wearing gloves or hairnets.

Security remains a primary concern, added the students, pointing out a severe shortage of CCTV surveillance.

Although there is a requirement for 64 cameras, the existing setup provides only two cameras per floor, which cover only the reading areas and leave residential corridors unmonitored. Students told the Chief Minister that this lack of oversight has led to frequent thefts, internal altercations, and incidents of senior-junior ragging.

The residents also flagged the abusive behaviour of hostel personnel. They alleged that watchmen and supervisors frequently use derogatory language, subjecting the students from economically weaker sections to significant mental distress.

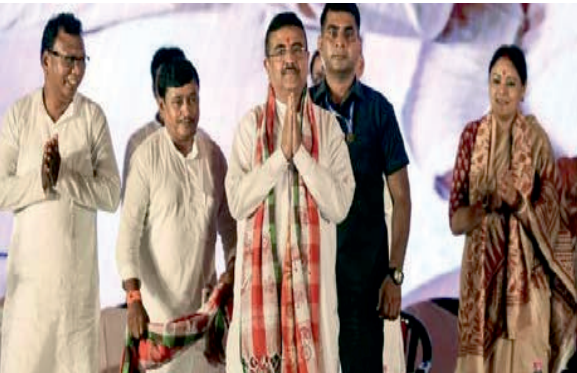
Additionally, students pointed out a general shortage of staff and stated that recreational facilities, including the volleyball court, have been kept locked and inaccessible for an extended period despite repeated requests.

West Bengal CM Adhikari lays foundation of ₹15,000 crore steel plant in Bankura

Kolkata

In yet another big ticket investment push Bengal Chief Minister Suvenud Adhikari on Friday laid the foundation stone of a ₹15,000 crore extension project of a steel plant at Mejia in Bankura district some 200 km from Kolkata.

The steel plant is owned by the Shyam Steel Group which is likely to invest ₹15,000 crore in phases. The industrial unit was likely to generate about 15-20 thousand jobs. Out of the total ₹15,000-crore ₹10,000 crore is likely to be invested in a new 2-million-tonne-per-annum (MTPA) integrated steel plant and the remaining ₹5,000 crore would be used for defense manufac-



turing, real estate, and infrastructure, inside source said.

"This plant promises massive job opportunities in the region and the surrounding areas of Purulia, West Bardhaman and West Midnapore, the Chief Minister said, "adding it was not enough to recall the migrant

erate revenue for the State.

Saying that the investors were returning to Bengal because of the political change of power that had taken place in the State after the recently concluded elections. "Had the change not taken place in Bengal the investments would have gone to Odisha ... in the coming days thousands of crores would be invested in Purulia, Bankura and Jangalmahal generating jobs for thousands of people who have been leaving Bengal as migrant workers," he said.

Speaking at the event, Adhikari promised an investor-friendly ecosystem, saying improved law and order, easier land availability, and employment-linked incentives would woo back the investors.



'NO DAMAGE TO TERMINAL IN US ATTACKS ON CHABAHAH PORT'

The Shahid Beheshti terminal at the Chabahar port in Iran has not faced any damage in US strikes on the key maritime gateway, India said on Friday. US officials had acknowledged that the US struck the Chabahar port this week as part of its renewed military campaign against Iran.

The Chabahar port is being developed by India and Iran to boost connectivity and trade ties. Both the countries are also strongly pitching for making Chabahar port an integral part of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The US waiver from its sanctions on Chabahar had come to an end in April. "There was a waiver which was given by America and that waiver got over some time back. Post that, we have been in discussion with relevant stakeholders as to how to take this particular issue forward," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

Ex-Japan minister accuses India over bullet train delays, Delhi hits back

New Delhi

A senior Japanese politician has triggered a diplomatic row by publicly blaming Indian authorities for the slow pace of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail corridor, India's ambitious first bullet train project.

Hideki Makihara, former justice Minister and a key figure in Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, described the delays as stemming from "sheer recklessness" on the Indian side, claiming broken commitments and inconsistent decision-making have hampered progress.

In strongly worded remarks, Makihara alleged that Indian negotiators fre-

quently reversed positions, prioritised domestic considerations, and failed to deliver on assurances related to the Shinkansen-based project. He singled out the handling by the concerned minister as particularly problematic, asserting that responsibility for the setbacks lay entirely with India.

The comments have drawn sharp attention as the project — funded substantially by Japan and touted as a symbol of bilateral friendship — has missed multiple deadlines since its foundation stone was laid in 2017.

India's Ministry of External Affairs responded swiftly, rejecting the criticism as one-sided.



Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal emphasised that the project continues to enjoy strong Japanese Government support, as reaffirmed in recent high-level summits.

Officials pointed to tangible advancements on the ground, including extensive viaduct work, bridge

completions, and progress on the undersea tunnel section near Mumbai.

Indian authorities have consistently attributed the timeline slippages to practical challenges such as land acquisition hurdles in Maharashtra, pandemic-related disruptions, environ-

mental clearances, and the technical complexities of integrating advanced systems. The National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd (NHSRCL) has achieved significant physical progress, with plans for initial operations on a Gujarat segment by August 2027.

Originally envisioned for completion in the early 2020s, the 508-km corridor has seen its cost rise due to inflation, revised engineering needs, and extended timelines. Japan is providing next-generation Shinkansen technology, while India is simultaneously developing indigenous high-speed train prototypes to boost self-reliance.

Both nations have expressed commitment to overcoming remaining issues through ongoing technical dialogue.

The project is viewed not only as a transport upgrade but as a cornerstone of broader Indo-Japanese cooperation in infrastructure, technology transfer, and regional connectivity.

While Makihara's outspoken views have sparked debate, diplomatic sources indicate that core bilateral ties remain robust. The Government has assured that safety standards, quality benchmarks, and timely delivery will not be compromised as the country moves closer to realising its high-speed rail ambitions.

India's 1st geothermal wells commissioned in Ladakh's Puga Valley

Jammu

India is gradually inching closer to realising its dream of establishing the first-ever Geothermal Power Plant in the cold desert region of Ladakh. Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Friday commissioned India's first and deepest two geothermal wells at Puga Valley in Ladakh, executed by ONGC Energy Centre.

The commissioning of the two 1000-meter-deep wells, at a high altitude of over 14,000 feet, would significantly advance Ladakh's journey towards becoming a clean energy hub, powered by renewable sources, as envisaged by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The two geothermal wells are critical for the successful implementation of the 1 MW pilot geothermal power project at Puga, which will be India's first demonstration-scale geothermal power project.

Speaking on the occasion, the LG termed the commissioning of the geothermal wells as a historic milestone in India's clean energy journey and a defining moment in Ladakh's transi-

tion towards a carbon-neutral future.

"This Geothermal Power project would act as a catalyst for Ladakh's holistic development. Beyond its scientific significance, this initiative will strengthen Ladakh's energy security, promote environmental sustainability and contribute to regional socio-economic development.

What has been achieved in Puga Valley would serve as a blueprint for India's net-zero journey and significantly contribute towards making Ladakh a carbon-neutral and environmentally sustainable region," LG Saxena said.

LG VK Saxena lauded the ONGC engineers, saying the Indian engineers and technicians were among the best in the world, capable of achieving the most difficult engineering feats, and they truly symbolise India's growing stature in the field of global engineering.

He also appreciated every worker associated with the project, saying it was a true testament to their grit, determination and perseverance.

The project has been undertaken in one of the



world's most challenging operating environments, characterised by extreme weather conditions, rugged terrain and a limited annual working season.

The project also fulfils the PM's vision of Carbon-neutral Ladakh and the call to harness alternative, renewable energy sources for our future security.

Notably, the geothermal power project had suffered a major setback following the expiry of the earlier tri-

partite MoU between the Ladakh Administration, LAHDC Leh and ONGC Energy Centre, resulting in critical delays of several months in project execution.

Recognising the strategic importance of geothermal energy for India's energy security and clean energy transition, LG Saxena personally intervened to facilitate the renewal of the MoU for another five years, in June this year, following which

works resumed for the completion of the two geothermal wells.

Successful completion of the two wells would facilitate critical reservoir evaluation, power plant planning and the eventual commercial development of geothermal resources in Ladakh. Project Engineers informed that the maximum temperature of 135 degrees Celsius was recorded at a depth of 400 metres.

Further testing is on and the engineers are hopeful to achieve even higher temperatures for operation of the 1MW pilot geothermal power project and eventual commercial exploration of geothermal energy.

Despite encountering geothermal activities, complex sub-surface conditions and operational challenges, the first of the two wells was successfully drilled to its target depth of 1000 metres on 22 May 2026.

Subsequently, the other geothermal well was spudded on 03 June 2026, and in a record time of just over a month, it was successfully drilled and completed to 1000 metres depth on 08 July 2026.

RSS misunderstood despite century of service: Rajnath

New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been serving the country and society continuously for the last 100 years, but a large section of people remains either "uninformed" or "misinformed" about the organisation because of narratives built around it.

Addressing the release of the book 'RSS at 100: A Century of Service, Unity and Sacrifice' at the Vice President's Enclave here, Singh said the RSS has grown from a small voluntary organisation founded by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in 1925 into the world's largest and financially self-reliant voluntary organisation.

"The RSS has been serving the nation and society for 100 years. Yet, even today, a large section of society is either uninformed or misinformed about it," he said.

Referring to American scholars Walter Andersen and Shridhar D Damle's book



'The Brotherhood in Saffron', Singh said the authors observed that the RSS is "difficult to understand and easy to misunderstand".

"One major reason for this, in my view, is the relative lack of objective and impartial academic work on the organisation. I believe this book will go a long way in filling that gap," he said.

Rejecting allegations that the RSS had no role in the freedom movement, Singh said such a narrative has been promoted for years and asserted that the organisation actively participated in the struggle against British rule.

"Those who hold this view should read the fourth chapter of this book. It explains that RSS volunteers actively participated in the freedom struggle. Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar himself went to prison during the freedom movement. During the Quit India Movement, RSS volunteers provided shelter to several revolutionaries in their homes," he said.

He also referred to the role of RSS volunteers during Partition, saying they worked in violence-hit areas to protect people.

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EDITORIAL

Will Bhagwant Mann's 'Video' Row Become A Larger Punjab Battle?

These are not ordinary political expressions. They carry religious sanction, institutional memory and the weight of decades Punjab has spent trying to put behind it. When such words resurface in the confrontation now playing out between Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Sri Akal Takht Sahib and the Shiromani Akali Dal, the right question is not who wins this round. It is whether Punjab is watching a dispute over one contested video or the opening moves of a wider Panthic mobilisation ahead of the 2027 Assembly election. The clearest signal has come from Sukhbir Singh Badal, who has given the AAP government until July 19 to remove Mann, failing which he has threatened to launch a Dharam Yudh Morcha to force him out. Punjab has witnessed many Panthic morchas, but the title Dharam Yudh Morcha refers primarily to the movement formally launched by the Akali Dal on August 4, 1982. The phrase describes an organised struggle for what is considered a righteous cause, rather than literally meaning a "holy war". Its most consequential political use was during the Akali Dal movement under Harchand Singh Longowal, built around the Anandpur Sahib Resolution and other Punjab-related demands. The politics of 2026 shares little with that of 1982. But the phrase does not carry politics alone; it carries memory. Once invoked, it can turn a political disagreement into a moral confrontation that is much harder to resolve or step back from. Beyond Mann: Why June 29 could be a turning point The confrontation enters a sensitive phase on June 29. The Five Singh Sahibans have summoned Sikh ministers and MLAs from different parties to appear before Sri Akal Takht Sahib. Non-Sikh ministers have been asked for written explanations instead. The summons relates to the Jagat Jot Sri Gurm Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026, passed allegedly without proper consultation with Panthic institutions. Bhagwant Mann has not been included because Sri Akal Takht Sahib has already issued a separate and more serious directive against him. The stakes go well beyond one appearance. For AAP's Sikh ministers and MLAs, this creates a real conflict between staying loyal to their party, which passed the law, and respecting the Akal Takht, which many see as the Sikh

community's highest authority. If they appear, it may look like they accept religious scrutiny over their legislative work. If they refuse, they risk being seen as disrespecting the Takht. Defending the law in person could also raise hard questions about where religious authority ends and constitutional authority begins. It may also expose cracks within AAP, if Sikh legislators respond differently from their party's official line and making Mann look more isolated. June 29, in short, will show whether this stays a fight about one Chief Minister, or grows into a bigger clash between the Punjab government and Panthic authority. From video to institution What should concern close observers is how quickly the argument has moved beyond the viral video itself and become a contest over institutional credibility. Whose forensic process deserves public trust? Were the laboratories, methodology and complete findings made sufficiently transparent? Can an elected government question a religious finding without being seen as challenging the authority of Sri Akal Takht Sahib itself? The dangerous catch is that a government that remains silent may appear to concede the charge and a government that pushes back risks being portrayed as hostile to the Takht -- regardless of what it actually says. The Akali Dal's opening and its contradiction For the Akali Dal, this controversy is an opening to recover Panthic ground it has been losing for a decade. Repeated electoral defeats, the unresolved 2015 sacrilege incidents, the police firing at Kotkapura and Behbal Kalan, and persistent allegations that Sikh institutions were politically managed during the Badal years have all cost the party its claim to be the Panth's natural custodian. Could a morcha framed as a defence of Sri Akal Takht Sahib help the Akali Dal shift the debate from governance failures to Sikh identity, an arena where it still believes it has a natural advantage? But the strategy sits on a contradiction the party cannot easily resolve. It is tactics wearing religious language, and Punjab's voters can see through that. AAP is defending Mann. It says the Badals are using religion to bring their party back to life. This will appeal to voters who already distrust the Akali Dal.

El Nino Is Set To Further Disrupt India's \$300 Billion Farm Economy

David Fickling

You might think that the world's supply chains are returning to normal now that oil appears to be flowing unhindered from the Persian Gulf for the first time in four months. Watch out for what's happening on the far side of the Arabian Sea, though. The key input into another sort of value chain is misfiring just when it's needed most: India's monsoon rainfall. It might seem strange to liken the weather to a component of an industrial system, but that's the way it has worked in India for millennia. The arrival of the south-western monsoon during June is so weirdly regular that you can set a just-in-time agricultural calendar by it. Europeans had little warning of the heatwave currently bearing down on the continent until recently, but the near two-week delay in rains reaching Mumbai this week was enough to provoke nervous headlines. The concern is understandable. June is normally the key planting time for rainy-season kharif crops such as rice, cotton, and millet, but farmers need to wait for the first showers to pass before seeding their fields. With the month almost over, the lack of rainfall is disrupting India's \$300 billion farm economy as decisively as a chip shortage would upend an automotive factory. The super El Nino developing over the Pacific Ocean will make things even worse. The worst of the dry spell has hit in central India and the Deccan - an agricultural heartland stretching from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka states in the west, and through Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana further inland. The region accounts for about 90% of India's soybean and sugarcane crop, 80% of its cotton production and 70% of its peanuts and pulses, such as lentils and chickpeas. It's also vital for fruit and vegetables, giving it an outsized impact on the prices paid in markets across the country. Consider Nashik. The farming district northeast of Mumbai is the heart of India's onion country. It's a politically salient crop, because of the way onion price inflation can eat into household spending, and occasionally topple governments. Failures in the monsoon routinely lead to price spikes in August and September as the country runs short. Rainfall in Nashik this month has been running at just 16% of the long-term average. A few months ago, the main concern for India's farms was that the conflict in the Strait of Hormuz would interrupt supplies of urea - a fertilizer raw material that India largely obtains from Gulf natural gas. Those fears were overblown, as we said at the time, but rainfall is an even more important input into the farm economy - and the supply tightness there is, if anything, intensifying. The interaction between the numerous factors affecting the monsoon isn't fully understood, but it's unlikely that El Nino, first declared just a few weeks ago, is the key



driver of its late onset. As the year goes on, however, it's expected to drive the weakest monsoon in 11 years. Whatever crops have survived late sowing will take another blow from parched growing conditions. The effects will be felt well beyond India's farms. By hitting staple crops for cooking oil, sugar, cotton and cheap protein, current dry conditions will feed through into inflation, which is running at its highest levels since early 2025. The Reserve Bank of India has already flagged the abnormal weather conditions as a risk to its economic forecasts. Counteracting the impact will spread the pain even further. After the late onset of rains and early-season flooding in 2023, New Delhi steadied the domestic rice market by banning exports, cutting off a global trade that depends on India for about 40% of its supplies. Similar restrictions are now widely expected for sugar. India's economy is no longer as vulnerable to natural and

human-made disasters as it once was. Stockpiles of fertilizer helped it ride out the impact of the Iran war. The amount of rice in warehouses has grown by nearly half since the 2023 export ban, so that crucial crop is amply supplied. Wheat is in a similar situation. The spread of irrigation, crop science, and improved logistics mean the food system as a whole is far more resilient. All of those innovations, however, are racing to keep up with the widening damage from a climate that is inexorably worsening. Across South Asia, almost a quarter of the world's population has relied for centuries on the dependable annual pulse of monsoon rainfall. Global warming is making the arrival of that vital input less predictable, and more prone to devastating droughts and floods when it does arrive. As the coming super El Nino develops, we will all feel the impact.

Iran War: Has New Delhi Lost Out, And Has Pak Really Gained?

Shashi Tharoor

The recent conclusion of the hundred-and-seven-day conflict in West Asia, marked by a tenuous United States-Iran MoU that aims to be converted into a peace pact over the next 60 days, offers a case study in the shifting sands of modern geopolitics. While the global economy breathes a collective sigh of relief as oil flows slowly resume and Brent crude prices tumble from their wartime peaks back toward stability, the strategic ledger of this brief but devastating war reveals a complex tapestry of miscalculations, asymmetric survival, and diplomatic realignment. In parsing the structural outcomes of the conflict from New Delhi, our principal focus naturally falls on the overt participants - the frustration of Washington's futile bombardment and unachieved regime-change objectives, the resilience of Tehran's asymmetric chokehold on the Straits of Hormuz, and Israel's tactical degradation of regional proxies balanced against its failure to secure absolute Iranian capitulation. Yet, beneath these immediate strategic realities lies a subtler, equally consequential diplomatic theatre, where South Asian powers sought to navigate the crisis, resulting in a dramatic up-ending of traditional roles. India's West Asia Policy For decades, New Delhi's foreign policy in West Asia was defined by an elegant, calculated non-alignment, recently rephrased as multi-alignment. This strategy allowed it to cultivate deep civilisational, economic, and energy ties with Iran while simultaneously building robust, high-tech security partnerships with Israel and maintaining vital relationships with the Gulf monarchies. This strategic balancing act was not merely a passive moral stance; it was a pragmatic necessity dictated by geography and economic imperatives. However, the recent hostilities exposed an apparent vulnerability in this doctrine, as New Delhi seemed to compromise its historic equilibrium by leaning heavily toward the American-Israeli axis, exemplified by Prime Minister Modi's embrace of his Israeli counterpart in Tel Aviv days before the bombardment of Iran began. By abandoning its traditional position of studied neutrality during the peak of the crisis, the state risked being perceived as a partisan actor rather than an independent global power. This apparent diplomatic misstep carried immediate structural costs. In geopolitics, the vacuum left by a retreating potential mediator is instantly filled by a rival. By tying its rhetorical and diplomatic positioning so closely to one side of the conflict, New Delhi seemed to have compromised its credibility as an acceptable interlocutor to Tehran. Consequently, it is argued, India ceded the prestigious and influential "high table"



of West Asian diplomacy - specifically the peace deliberations in Geneva - to Islamabad. For a nation that has long prided itself on its strategic autonomy and its capacity to speak to all sides of a fractured global order, watching a historical adversary, whom we have long derided as a client of the US and a vassal of China, assume the mantle of regional peacemaker represents to many a significant diplomatic setback. It underscores the peril of short-term alignment over long-term geopolitical constancy, especially in a neighbourhood where the immutable realities of geography require enduring relations with near neighbours, regardless of the ideological or religious complexion of their governments. Mediator Or Messenger? Yet, the narrative of Islamabad's sudden ascension as an independent regional mediator requires a deeply sceptical re-examination. While the state eagerly claimed credit for facilitating the breakthrough and announcing the cessation of hostilities, its diplomatic conduct throughout the crisis tells a more complicated story. The hyper-visibility of its leadership, characterised by an almost unctuous flattery directed toward the American presidency, and the embarrassing episode of Pakistan releasing a statement evidently drafted in Washington (with the inadvertently-released headline

'Draft for Pakistan's PM' giving the game away) raises profound questions about the authenticity of its "neutrality". True mediation requires a degree of detachment and an equal distance from the core disputants. Islamabad's performative obsequiousness toward Washington strongly suggests that it was far from a disinterested, objective arbiter. Instead, its behaviour aligns perfectly with the classic definition of an agent of convenience - an actor with pre-existing loyalties, deeply invested in currying favour with its superpower benefactor to alleviate its own domestic economic and political fragilities. Therefore, under closer scrutiny, the assertion that Islamabad acted as a genuine, independent mediator holds little water. A real mediator possesses the independent leverage to alter the behaviour of both parties and shape the terms of the discourse. In this theatre, however, the state functioned less as an autonomous peacemaker and more as a convenient diplomatic surrogate - a conduit for conveying messages between two adversaries who lacked formal channels but needed a face-saving mechanism to de-escalate. Washington, trapped in an unpopular, economically destabilising, and legally dubious conflict initiated without domestic legislative consent, desperately required a back-channel to signal its

willingness to blink. Tehran, having demonstrated its capacity to disrupt global commerce through the weaponisation of the maritime chokepoint of Hormuz, but suffering immense internal strain from targeted assassinations and economic isolation, similarly needed a porch upon which to land. Why Pak Was Chosen In this context, Islamabad was selected not for its strategic weight or its moral authority, but for its utility as a reliable message-transmission belt. It was an instrument through which the United States could pass terms and receive responses without the domestic political fallout of direct, high-level engagement with a state it had spent months demonising. This arrangement allowed the Americans to manage an exit strategy while permitting its South Asian proxy to drape itself in the optics of global statesmanship. The performative praise lavished on the American executive was the transactional currency paid by a surrogate eager to validate its relevance to its patron, ensuring that its diplomatic service would be rewarded with much-needed economic or political capital down the road. Ultimately, the broader analysis of the West Asian crisis reveals that while the guns have fallen silent and a fragile sixty-day framework for nuclear negotiation has been established, the diplomatic landscape has been remapped. New Delhi's departure from its foundational neutrality served as a stark reminder that in the arena of great-power politics, perceived partisanship instantly erodes the leverage required to act as a global bridge. It sacrificed a long-standing reputational asset for an alignment that yielded little tangible strategic dividend. Conversely, Islamabad's moment in the diplomatic spotlight, while styled as a triumph of mediation, was fundamentally an exercise in proxy diplomacy. It demonstrated that a state can occupy a seat at the high table without possessing true strategic independence, serving instead as a sophisticated "front" for a superpower in retreat. It may be rewarded with enhanced military or financial aid by Washington, but not enough to be a game-changer in Pakistan's fortunes. As the international community transitions to the arduous task of hammering out the final details in Geneva, the true lesson of this conflict is that both the premature abandonment of neutrality and the eager adoption of a surrogate role carry profound long-term implications for strategic autonomy in South Asia. For India, the evident lesson is to return to genuine multi-alignment. For Pakistan, it will be to shed its illusions about its gains in global stature. There will certainly be some applause, when the final deal is clinched, for Pakistan, Qatar, Oman and other regional peacemakers. But to imagine a Nobel Peace for the terrorist-sponsoring Field Marshal Asim Munir may be a fantasy too far. The world sees clearly the difference between an autonomous actor and a message-carrying stool-pigeon.



A Fauji's Salute To India's Longest-Serving Prime Minister

Brijesh Chowta

The year was 2013. I had just returned to my ooru (village) after serving the Indian Army. Like many young Indians of my generation, I stood at a crossroads. I knew I wanted to continue serving the nation, but I was still searching for the path through which I could do so. The country too stood at a crossroads.

Across India, there was a growing feeling that our nation was capable of much more than what it had settled for. In villages, towns and cities, a different energy was beginning to take shape. People were speaking about aspiration, confidence and possibility. At the centre of that conversation stood Narendra Modi, then the Chief Minister of Gujarat, whose message resonated with millions of Indians who wanted to see a stronger, more self-confident Bharat.

And in June 2013, I was given the responsibility of the District General Secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha in Dakshina Kannada. The uniform changed, but the mission remained the same – Nation First.

We campaigned not merely for a party, but for an idea. An idea that India could be stronger, more confident, more self-reliant and more respected in the world.

A decade later, I had the privilege of taking oath as a Member of Parliament in the team led by the very leader who had inspired millions of young Indians to dream bigger.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi becomes India's longest-serving PM, I find myself reflecting not only on the transformation of the nation, but also on the extraordinary opportunities this period has created for ordinary Indians like me.

The last two years have been among the most consequential years in recent global history. The world continues to grapple with geopolitical conflicts, energy security concerns, economic uncertainty and the persistent threat of terrorism. As a Member of Parliament associated with discussions relating to energy and defence, I have had the opportunity to observe many of these developments from close quarters.

But what taught me a lot about India's place in the world were the two international assignments entrusted to me during my maiden term in Parliament.

The first came in May 2025. In the aftermath of 'Operation Sindoor', I was chosen as part of an all-party delegation tasked with carrying India's message of zero tolerance against terrorism to the world. Our engagements took us across Moscow, Madrid, Athens, Ljubljana, Riga. As a fauji, this assignment carried special significance.

For decades, India was often compelled to explain the reality of terrorism that it faced. During our interactions abroad, I witnessed a different reality. India's voice carried weight. India's stand of Zero tolerance against terror found global testimony.

More importantly, the delegation demonstrated something that I believe is fundamental to India's strength. Members from different political parties and ideological



backgrounds came together to represent a united national position.

Our message was clear. India may debate fiercely within its democratic framework, but when it comes to terrorism, national security and the protection of its citizens, Bharat speaks in one voice.

The delegation sent a powerful message to the world. It also sent a message to those who believe India's democratic diversity can somehow be exploited against its national interests. Our diversity is our strength. Our unity in matters of national interest is our greatest force.

For me personally though, the assignment meant much more. For it reminded me of my early days in the Fauj. It was just my second year as a young officer of the Indian Army's 8 Gorkha Rifles; but my Commanding Officer chose to entrust me with leading the Ghatak Platoon during counter-insurgency operations in Manipur.

And being chosen by PM Modi to be his voice as part of this delegation, even as a first time MP, I was reminded of that same feeling of trust and responsibility. Leadership leaves a lasting impression when responsibility is entrusted with an assurance that speaks in silence.

A few months later came my second international assignment. In October 2025, I travelled to New York as part of India's parliamentary delegation to the 80th United Nations General Assembly. The delegation was constituted to represent India's democratic values, engage with lawmakers and policymakers from across the world, strengthen diplomatic ties and carry the

voice of the world's largest democracy led by PM Modi to one of the world's most important multilateral forums.

For someone whose first foreign trip happened only after 2014, the experience was deeply moving. As I walked through the halls of the United Nations, I often found myself thinking not of New York, but of home. Standing there as part of India's delegation, I realised that the journey was larger than my own. It reflected the possibilities that millions of Indians had come to believe in over the last decade. What struck me most was the way India was viewed and discussed.

Everywhere we went, we encountered members of the Indian diaspora who spoke of Bharat with immense pride. Entrepreneurs, students, professionals, doctors, engineers and community leaders spoke not only about their own journeys, but also about India's growing stature in the world.

Today, the Indian diaspora, numbering more than 35 million people, is the largest diaspora community in the world. Their contributions extend far beyond remittances and economic engagement. They have become storytellers of modern India.

For decades, embassies told India's story to the world. Today, millions of Indians living abroad tell that story every day.

Prime Minister Modi recognised the strength of this community long before many others did. Wherever he travels, one witnesses an extraordinary connection between India and its diaspora. They see themselves not as distant observers, but as active participants in India's growth story.

Many of them spoke about the transformation they had witnessed in how India is perceived globally. They spoke about

a country that no longer appeared hesitant on the world stage. They spoke about a nation increasingly seen as a source of solutions, innovation and leadership.

That change is visible across multiple dimensions. India's cultural influence continues to expand through yoga, Ayurveda, traditional knowledge systems, cuisine, cinema, technology and innovation. International Yoga Day is celebrated across continents. India's digital public infrastructure is being studied by governments around the world. Indian professionals lead some of the world's largest corporations. Indian entrepreneurs are building globally recognised companies.

The respect accorded to Prime Minister Modi by world leaders reflects this larger transformation. Over the last decade, numerous countries have conferred upon him their highest civilian honours. His meetings with global leaders attract attention not merely because of protocol, but because India today occupies a far more significant place in global conversations than it once did.

As a veteran, I perhaps viewed these experiences through a slightly different lens.

Over the last decade, India has steadily strengthened both its capabilities and its confidence. India's defence budget, which stood at around Rs 2.27 lakh crore in 2014, has grown to nearly Rs 7.85 lakh crore today. Defence exports have risen dramatically. Indigenous platforms, missile systems and defence manufacturing capabilities have expanded significantly. India has moved from being largely dependent on imports towards becoming a nation increasingly capable of designing, developing and manufacturing critical defence systems.

The shift has not merely been one of numbers. It has been one of mindset.

The world increasingly sees an India that is willing to stand up for its interests, speak with clarity and act with confidence. Whether in matters of national security, diplomacy, technology, energy or economic growth, India today engages the world from a position of greater self-belief.

For those of us who have worn the uniform, these developments carry special meaning. National security is not built overnight. It requires patience. It requires investment. It requires institutions. Above all, it requires leadership that remains focused on long-term national interests.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi becomes India's longest-serving Prime Minister, he sets yet another benchmark. Not merely of electoral success, but of endurance. In public life, leadership is often measured through victories. In the armed forces, we learn that leadership is equally about endurance.

A difficult mission is not accomplished through moments of bravado alone. It requires discipline. It requires consistency. It requires the ability to hold one's ground through uncertainty, setbacks and adversity. Disarming an adversary requires courage. Outlasting one requires discipline, patience and resolve.

Twelve years in office is therefore more than a political milestone. It is a measure of sustained commitment. A form of public tapasya carried out under constant scrutiny and amidst rapidly changing national and global realities.

Why India Appointed A Non-Muslim Ambassador To Saudi Arabia, For First Time Ever

Naghma Sahar

The appointment of Mr Vipul as the new Indian ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a historic shift in India's diplomatic strategy. It breaks the established convention since 1948 of sending a Muslim ambassador to the country. In this regard, Vipul is the first non-Muslim Indian diplomat in Saudi Arabia. His appointment is significant not just from a geopolitical lens but also for the underlying signalling.

Geopolitically, Saudi Arabia matters to India for reasons that extend far beyond the traditional lens of oil and expatriate labour. Riyadh today occupies one of the most important positions in India's diplomatic landscape. It is a critical energy partner, a leading political actor in the Gulf, the custodian of Islam's two holiest sites, and an increasingly influential economic hub. Under its Vision 2030 transformation agenda, Saudi Arabia has emerged as a centre where investment, technology, infrastructure, culture, and geopolitics intersect, creating new opportunities and strategic considerations for countries such as India.

In this backdrop, the appointment of Mr Vipul is a wise choice. A career diplomat from the 1998 batch of the Indian Foreign Service, he brings extensive experience in the Gulf and the wider region, having served in Cairo, Colombo, Geneva, and Dubai, and most recently as India's ambassador to Qatar. His appointment reflects expertise, seniority, and familiarity with a strategically vital region rather than any departure from diplomatic meritocracy.

However, more than his professional credentials, it's the fact that he's the first non-Muslim diplomat to head the mission in Riyadh since diplomatic relations between the two countries were established that has gained more attention. In a highly polarised environment, the risk lies less in the appointment itself than in the narratives that may be constructed around it.

Since the late 1940s, New Delhi had exclusively selected senior Muslim diplomats for the ambassadorial role in Riyadh and the consul general position in Jeddah. This practice was primarily rooted in logistics; the Indian mission in Saudi Arabia plays a massive role in coordinating the annual Hajj pilgrimage, which sees hundreds of thousands of Indian Muslims travel to Islam's holiest sites. India sends the second-largest Hajj contingent to Saudi Arabia after Indonesia – 1,75,000 is the official Hajj quota. With such a huge number of Indians coming in for Hajj, the role of the consul general in Jeddah and the ambassador in Riyadh becomes crucial in terms of coordination with Saudi authorities. According to senior diplomats posted earlier in the region, the coordination and management of Hajj often requires the ambassador's presence in Mecca and Medina, Jamarat for coordination, as the Saudi management also shifts to these areas. Since a non-Muslim is not allowed in the area where the Hajj pilgrimage is performed, the management of the pilgrimage may be adversely affected if the ambassador cannot be in the area. An example is the fire tragedy in the tent city of Mina in 1997, in which hundreds of Indians died, and the then



ambassador, Hamid Ansari, rushed to the site of the tragedy for coordination with higher Saudi authorities.

However, in recent times, sources indicate that the pool of eligible Muslim candidates has shrunk considerably. This scarcity has occasionally forced the government to extend the tenures of sitting ambassadors or look outside the career diplomatic corps entirely – such as in 2016, when former Mumbai Police Commissioner Ahmad Javed was appointed for the role.

India has historically sent many Muslim envoys to Saudi Arabia, not because non-Muslims were incapable but because the combination of linguistic familiarity, cultural comfort and coordination of Hajj pilgrimage often made practical sense.

The incoming ambassador has his task cut out. He takes the helm at a complex time for Middle Eastern geopolitics. Beyond navigating broader regional security challenges and ongoing tensions involving Iran, Riyadh is increasingly entering into open economic and diplomatic competition with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – traditionally one of New Delhi's closest allies in the region.

Despite these shifting dynamics, Saudi Arabia remains a cornerstone of India's foreign policy, serving as a critical partner for energy security, bilateral trade, mega-investments, and the welfare of the millions of Indian expatriates living in the Kingdom.

The danger today, though, is that nuance is easily lost. One side may say this appointment proves that the 'new India' no longer needs old sensitivities. Another may say the government has deliberately discarded Muslim representation in a symbolic capital. Neither reading is completely fair. This appointment must be seen as an evolution in diplomatic practice and strategic engagement rather than just departing from a set convention. The phrase 'Banana Republic' has had a good run. And I am no longer sure we can use it to describe how the modern republic works, no matter how much decay you think it emotes. The genesis of the term itself no longer serves the outcome it sought to describe. Let me tell you why. The term, once coined by the American writer O. Henry in his 1904 book Cabbages and Kings, was used to describe a fictional Central American country, 'Anchuria', a "small, maritime banana republic"

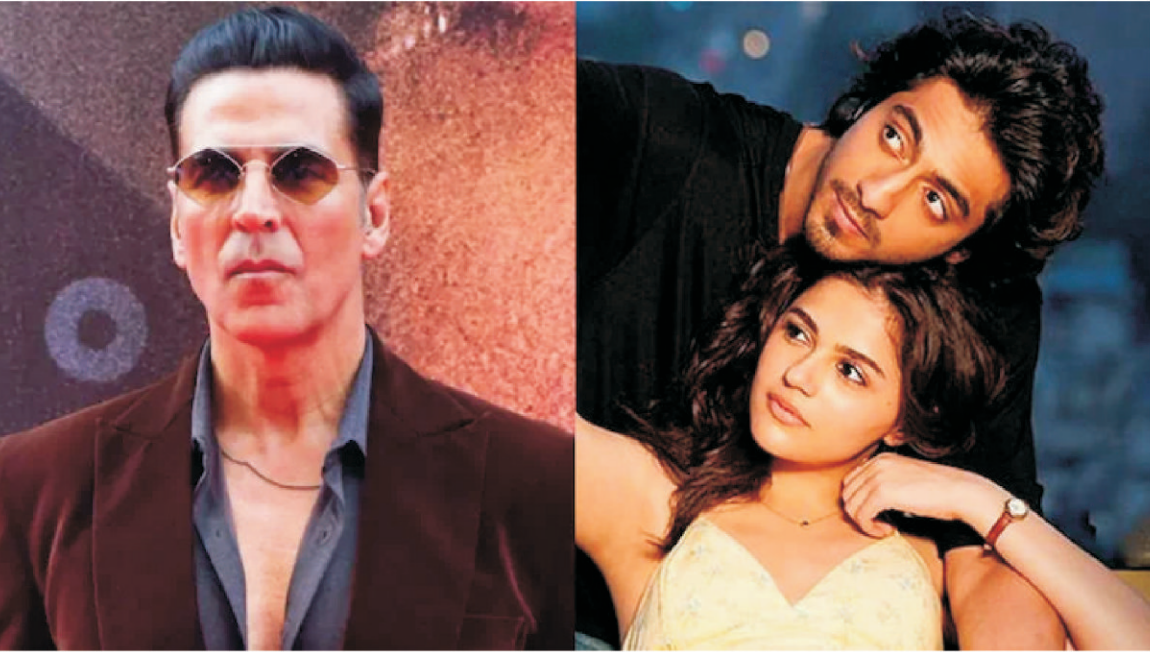
whose government bent to the interests of a powerful foreign corporation. Over time, the phrase escaped literature and entered political vocabulary as shorthand for a state where power was increasingly concentrated, institutions were weak, and the idea of democracy existed more on paper than in practice.

For more than a century, the term has faithfully served journalists, academics, and largely disappointed citizens. It was a useful phrase because everyone immediately knew what it meant. A Banana Republic was where institutions went to die, where narrative-building often became a government's most effective tool of governance. While we always imagined that we would know exactly the moment a republic began to lose its way – larger than life political figures, carefully choreographed displays of institutional strength, constitutions that served more as optional reading material and less as foundational documents – but maybe it is more subtle than we can hypothesise. The modern republic has developed subtler habits and has become increasingly difficult to detect.



ENTERTAINMENT

Akshay Kumar Explains Why Saiyaara Became A Blockbuster



Mumbai: Akshay Kumar believes that a film does not need to be eventful to succeed at the box office. Speaking exclusively to IANS, Akshay cited Saiyaara as an example, saying that the film did not have any major event associated with it, yet it performed tremendously well at the box office.

He added that the Aneet Padma and Ahaan Panday starrer resonated with audiences because of its music and romantic appeal.

The Airlift actor was asked, "There has been a lot of discussion about the kind of films that work in theatres. In fact, senior actors such as R Madhavan are also of the opinion that multi-starrers and larger-than-life films work best in cinemas. What do you have to say about it?"

Sharing his views, Akshay said, "If it is in the destiny of the film, it runs successfully one way or the other."

Referring to Saiyaara, he added, "Recently, a film came out with a new boy and a new girl. What was that film?"

As Welcome to the Jungle director Ahmed Khan reminded him of the film's name, Akshay continued, "Yes, Saiyaara. Which event did the film have? I want to ask, what event did the film have? There was no event. It's just that its songs worked, and the romance in the film worked. That caught on. The boy and the girl performed well, and they were lucky that the film took off."

Directed by Mohit Suri and produced by Yash Raj Films, Saiyaara became the third highest-grossing Hindi film of 2025 and the highest-grossing Indian romantic film of all time.

Akshay Kumar's Welcome To The Jungle continued its theatrical run with steady growth on its second day. Directed by Ahmed Khan and written by the late Neeraj Vohra, the comedy released in cinemas on Friday after paid previews on Thursday evening.

What's Happening

After collecting Rs 18.75 crore on its opening day, the film added another Rs 20 crore on Saturday, according to industry tracker Sacnilk. With this, its total India nett collection now stands at Rs 39 crore. The film has also earned Rs 57.50 crore worldwide so far.

On its second day, Welcome To The Jungle recorded an overall Hindi occupancy of 33%. Delhi-NCR registered the highest number of shows at 860 and reported an occupancy of 39.8%. Mumbai followed with 692 shows and an occupancy of 41%.

Background

Meanwhile, Akshay Kumar's reaction to the film's box office

performance has also caught attention online.

While interacting with reporters at the Mumbai airport, the actor was told that Welcome To The Jungle had "set the box office on fire" and was receiving an overwhelming response. Responding with his trademark humour, Akshay said, "Bhai ab tu mere kapde mat faad diyo."

Apart from Akshay Kumar, the film features an ensemble cast including Raveena Tandon, Suniel Shetty, Disha Patani, Jacqueline Fernandez, Arshad Warsi, Jackie Shroff, Paresh Rawal, Lara Dutta, Farida Jalal, Johnny Lever, Shreyas Talpade, Tusshar Kapoor, Rajpal Yadav, Krushna Abhishek, Kiku Sharda, Daler Mehndi, Aftab Shivdasani, Mukesh Tiwari, Yashpal Sharma, Kiran Kumar, Zakir Hussain, Vinu Dara Singh and Urvashi Rautela, among others.

Yes, for most people, having curd at night is completely fine. The idea that curd should never be eaten at night is more of a traditional belief than a rule supported by strong scientific evidence.

From a nutrition perspective, curd (yogurt) contains probiotics — beneficial bacterium such as Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium — which help maintain a healthy gut microbiome. Research on fermented dairy suggests that regular yogurt intake may support digestion, improve lactose tolerance, and positively influence gut bacteria.

Interestingly, the timing may not be as important as the overall pattern. Some studies on dairy protein show that consuming protein-rich foods like yogurt in the evening can support overnight muscle repair and recovery, because casein, the main protein in dairy, is digested slowly and provides a steady supply of amino acids.

However, there is a small catch: curd may not suit everyone at night. If someone already has acid reflux, bloating, excess mucus sensation, or lactose intolerance, they may feel uncomfortable after having dairy close to bedtime. Also, sweetened flavored yogurts are a different story – the added sugar can affect blood glucose levels.

A practical approach:

If you digest curd well having a small bowl of plain curd with dinner is absolutely okay.

Prefer fresh, unsweetened curd.

Avoid taking it right before lying down if you notice reflux or heaviness.

People prone to sinus congestion often report discomfort with cold foods at night, so they can choose room-temperature curd or skip it

A good night's sleep can do a world of good to the brain. Get

enough and you wake up feeling alert and refreshed. Get too little and you are likely to feel groggy, tired and unmotivated to tackle the day ahead.

This is why sleep is often described as the brain's reset button. A recent study shows how missing out on sleep can affect the connections that allow brain cells to communicate with one another.

Scientists at the Forschungszentrum Jülich Institute of Neuroscience and Medicine in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, studied what happens in the human brain after a sleepless night.

The findings, published in PLOS Biology, add support to the theory that sleep helps restore balance in the brain after a day of wakefulness.

Why we need to sleep

For decades, scientists have tried to understand why sleep is essential to both humans and animals.

One leading theory is that sleep helps maintain balance in the brain's synaptic connections. Synapses are the junctions through which brain cells communicate with one another. This increases the brain's energy demands and may lead to a buildup of proteins involved in synaptic activity.

One leading explanation for why we need sleep is the hypothesis of synaptic homeostasis. According to this theory, sleep provides the brain with an opportunity to restore balance after a day of activity. As we learn and interact with the world, connections between brain cells strengthen, increasing the brain's energy demands.

Sleep is thought to help scale back this heightened activity and return the brain to a more balanced state, known as homeostasis. Until now, most evidence supporting this theory has come from animal studies. This new study provides evidence that similar processes may also occur in humans.

A 28-hour experiment

To test this idea in humans, researchers studied 40 healthy adults. Half of them stayed awake for around 28 hours, while the other half followed a normal sleep schedule. The team used PET brain scans to measure a protein called synaptic vesicle glycoprotein 2A (SV2A), a marker of synapses.

The sleep-deprived group showed higher levels of SV2A in several brain regions, including:

Hippocampus: A 5.6 per cent increase in a region involved in memory and learning.

Thalamus: A 4.6 per cent increase in the brain's main information relay centre.

Parietal cortex: A 3.2 per cent increase in an area involved in processing sensory information.

"During sleep deprivation, the brain remains awake longer and continues to process stimuli and information," explains Dr David Elmenhorst, researcher at the Institute of Neuroscience and Medicine, Forschungszentrum Jülich, Germany. "Our study shows that after approximately 28.5 hours of wakefulness, a marker for synaptic density increases in several brain regions."

The sleep-deprived participants were then allowed a two-hour recovery nap. Researchers found that those with higher SV2A levels also showed more slow-wave activity during sleep, a hallmark of deep sleep. This suggests a biological link between the increase in synaptic connections during wakefulness and the body's drive to sleep.

A word of caution

The researchers stress that the observed changes were relatively small, ranging from about 3 to 6 per cent and should be viewed as a normal response to prolonged wakefulness rather than a sign of harm.

"A change of this magnitude after one night without sleep should not be interpreted as dangerous, but as a physiological response to prolonged wakefulness," says Dr Elmenhorst.

The team also cautions against interpreting the findings as evidence of harmful protein buildup in the brain as in the case of conditions such as Alzheimer's. SV2A is a normal protein found in synapses and is essential for everyday brain function.

Welcome To The Jungle Box Office Collection Day 2: Akshay Kumar's Film Crosses Rs 50 Crore Mark



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Meanwhile, Akshay Kumar's reaction to the film's box office performance has also caught attention online.

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features an ensemble cast including Raveena Tandon, Suniel Shetty, Disha Patani, Jacqueline Fernandez, Arshad Warsi, Jackie Shroff, Paresh Rawal, Lara Dutta, Farida Jalal, Johnny Lever, Shreyas Talpade, Tusshar Kapoor, Rajpal Yadav, Krushna Abhishek, Kiku Sharda, Daler Mehndi, Aftab Shivdasani, Mukesh Tiwari, Yashpal Sharma, Kiran Kumar, Zakir Hussain, Vinu Dara Singh and Urvashi Rautela, among others. Work hard during the entire week and relax on weekends—sleep more, eat more and may be exercise a little more. The idea may look quite promising. But experts say, one's weekend or weekday routine can actually impact one's health in many ways. For Bangalore-based data engineer, Sumanta Sahu, who works at a multinational investment company, his weekdays are perfectly set. "I usually start my day early and head out to my office at 8 am so that I can beat the traffic. This sets the tone for the rest of my day. As my day is planned around my work hours (9 am to 8 pm), my food timings are also set and I stick to this routine every day. This keeps me energized throughout the week," shares Sahu. Though Sahu's weekday routine is fixed, his weekends have a different story. "During my off days, I am not usually able to follow strict food timings.

Did Kriti Sanon And Kabir Bahia Call It Quits? Here's The Truth Behind The Viral Photo

Mumbai: Kriti Sanon and businessman Kabir Bahia have been making headlines for their rumoured relationship for quite some time now. While neither of them has ever confirmed or denied the dating rumours, they have often been spotted together, keeping fans curious. But over the past few days, a new picture of Kabir with another girl started doing the rounds on social media, leading many to wonder if the two had quietly broken up.

However, it turns out there is no truth to the breakup rumours. A source close to Kabir has now cleared the air and said the viral picture has been completely misunderstood.

"The image being circulated online of Kabir with a girl has been completely misconstrued. She's his family friend whom he considers like a sister. It's unfortunate how quickly people jump to conclusions and spread false narratives," the source said. The rumours picked up after the image first surfaced on Reddit before spreading across several other platforms. Soon, many users claimed that the actress and Kabir had called it quits.

Over the past year, Kriti Sanon and Kabir Bahia have often added fuel to dating rumours through their appearances together. They were seen holidaying in Greece for Kriti's birthday celebration. Kabir was also part of Kriti's sister Nupur Sanon's intimate wedding celebrations. They have also been spotted at dinner outings and family gatherings.

Meanwhile, on the work front, Kriti's latest film, Cocktail 2, is currently running in theatres. The film, directed by Homi Adajania, also features Shahid Kapoor and Rashmika Mandanna in lead roles. The project is a spiritual sequel to Cocktail (2012), starring Saif Ali Khan, Deepika Padukone and Diana Penry.

In an NDTV review, film critic Saibal Chatterjee gave Cocktail 2 2.5 out of 5 stars. He said, "Cocktail 2 is somewhat undermined by a hard-to-digest premise – a woman enlists a one-time hostel roomie to seduce her live-in partner in order to test his loyalty." Click here to read the full review.

Cosmetic makeovers using dermal fillers or Botox injections have been in trend for years, and their rare side effects too are not unknown. The recent news from the USA, however, has come as a shock to many. The US media on June 18, 2026, reported that Kendal Ascher (56), a senior executive and vice president with one of the top cosmetic brands — Estée Lauder — lost his life due to respiratory failure that occurred due to pulmonary embolism following a cosmetic dermal filler injection.

Ascher passed away in February 2026 following a cosmetic dermal filler treatment. The cause of the incident was disclosed only after the investigation report was made public, which



ruled out accidental death. Experts have warned that this case highlights the dangers associated with undergoing cosmetic procedures without valid medical reasons. Side effects of dermal fillers or skin filler injections are often overlooked due to the cosmetic makeover it gives to a person.

Vascular occlusion is said to be a rare complication or a side effect of dermal filler treatment. "This can happen when these fillers are accidentally injected into a blood vessel, blocking the blood flow, which slowly seeps to the pulmonary artery, leading to pulmonary embolism, which can prove fatal if not treated in time," explained Dr Gangi Reddy T K, senior interventional pulmonologist and sleep specialist, KIMS Hospitals, Mahadevapura, Bangalore.

While fatal outcomes from such treatments are extremely rare — estimated at one in 10,000 — Dr Deepali Bharadwaj, a senior dermatologist, noted that underlying medical conditions could increase risk factors.

What is pulmonary embolism?

Pulmonary embolism is a condition that leads to sudden blockage in an artery in the lungs, restricting the blood flow

and thereby causing fatalities. Clots generally form in one of the body parts and travel to the lungs, creating a sudden blockage. Since these clots block the blood flow, pulmonary embolism is often seen as a life-threatening condition and demands immediate medical intervention.

In Ascher's case, the clot was allegedly formed after he was injected with a dermal filler as part of a cosmetic treatment. Dr Reddy added that timely diagnosis and treatment play a significant role in such cases. "This situation is like someone experiencing a heart attack and demanding immediate medical intervention. Treatment includes pulmonary angiogram, blood thinner and anti-thrombotic medicines," said Dr Reddy.

Symptoms of pulmonary embolism:

- Unexplained breathlessness
- Mild to severe chest pain
- High heart rates

English cricketer took Botox to tackle an injury

Dr Debraj Shome, co-founder and director, The Aesthetics Clinics, New Delhi, said: "It is important not to speculate on any individual case without access to the complete medical and

clinical history. However, both Botox and dermal fillers are medical procedures and, like any medical intervention, they carry potential risks and side effects."

Botox treatment has been proven to be helpful for many. Joshua Tongue, or Josh Tongue, one of the most successful fast bowlers in England in the recent past, had a tough time with his concurrent shoulder injuries. Even after undergoing two major shoulder surgeries between 2021 and 2023, Tongue could not pursue cricket comfortably and had to be on the bench due to consistent shoulder pain.

Tongue almost decided to undergo a third surgery in early 2023 to alleviate his pain when Dr David Murray, an upper limb specialist, recommended trying Botox treatment. Tongue went with the advice and immediately started with Botox treatment and within two months, he was back to bowling. As reported by the BBC on May 31, 2023, Tongue has since had two Botox injections, but in the name of prevention rather than cure.

Difference between dermal fillers and Botox

Dermal fillers and botulinum toxin (Botox) are both popular cosmetic makeover treatments, especially to manage the effects of aging and require medical intervention. Dermal filler injections contain hyaluronic acid that provides fullness to the areas (mostly on the face) that have thinned due to aging. The effect of dermal fillers lasts for about 6–8 months. Botox, on the contrary, contains purified bacteria that contract the muscles by freezing them. Botox works best to control wrinkles and aging lines on the face; its effect lasts for about 3–4 months.

Takeaways

The recent passing of Kedan Ascher, an executive at Estée Lauder, following a dermal filler treatment that resulted in respiratory failure, has raised concerns about cosmetic procedures. Doctors said that while treatments like dermal fillers and Botox give cosmetic makeovers, one must opt for them only under the guidance of an expert medical practitioner. Doctors also advised that the person seeking such treatments must disclose their medical history to the experts before the treatment is initiated.

Known by acronyms that need no explanation, viruses like Covid, Sars and Ebola conjure up images of medics in protective suits and spark fear in populations worldwide.

Vaccines for individual viruses have provided some relief, but new strains pose a constant challenge.

Now, new AI-aided vaccine technology developed by scientists at Cambridge University offers potential immunity against whole families of viruses and could even prevent the next pandemic, according to researchers.



‘Master key’ vaccine technique may ‘prevent next pandemic’: researchers

Mumbai: Known by acronyms that need no explanation, viruses like Covid, Sars and Ebola conjure up images of medics in protective suits and spark fear in populations worldwide. Vaccines for individual viruses have provided some relief, but new strains pose a constant challenge. Now, new AI-aided vaccine technology developed by scientists at Cambridge University offers potential immunity against whole families of viruses and could even prevent the next pandemic, according to researchers. Professor Jonathan Heeney of Cambridge University likened the new technique to having the “master key” for an apartment block. The main problem with vaccines, he said, was that they were “all historic” so the strain you are vaccinated with might not be the one you end up being exposed to in six months’ time. Vaccines were “always chasing the virus”, the project lead researcher told AFP in an interview. “So we’re getting rid of that variability by making something that’s across the board recognizable by your immune system that should cover you from all these eventualities ... a real big paradigm change,” he said. Canadian Heeney, of the lab of viral zoonotics at Cambridge University’s Department of Veterinary Medicine, began work on the project after the 2013-16 Ebola outbreak in west Africa where he was then based. ‘Horse bolted’ Ebola had previously been seen in the central African Democratic Republic of Congo, not in west Africa and it was initially misidentified as lassa fever, gastroenteritis or cholera. The west African outbreak eventually claimed around 11,300 lives, according to the World Health Organization. But Heeney said three or four months were spent trying to discover what it was before work could even begin on a vaccine. “In that time, it spread from Guinea to Sierra Leone to Liberia, three different countries, quickly. The horse had bolted, the fire was raging,” he said, adding many health



workers were among the victims. Returning to Cambridge after the west African outbreak, Heeney said there was a determination that “we’ve got to change the way this works, we can’t go through it again”. Harnessing early AI, he said, his team used all the information they could get about various viruses and brought it together. This allowed them to look for the “similarities and the differences in the important parts of the virus that the immune system responds to”, recognizing not just one variant but all of them. The new technology was all the more vital given the frequency with which viruses are now emerging due to population growth, greater movement across borders

and human encroachment on animal habitats, he said. Viruses that had previously existed harmlessly, residing in animals that had grown resistant, were coming into contact with a new species, humans and “wow, there’s no immunity, no natural defences... and the virus goes crazy”, he said. ‘Change the future’ A trial involving 39 volunteers — sponsored by the University Hospital Southampton and published in the Journal of Infection — found “no significant safety concerns” with the universal Sarbeco coronavirus vaccine made using the AI-aided technology. The vaccine developed by the Cambridge scientists and biotechnology firm DIOSynVax will now move to larger tests. Plagues have existed throughout history, said

Heeney, from the Black Death of the Middle Ages to the 1918-20 influenza pandemic which killed an estimated 25-50 million globally. Heeney’s most pressing concern was a potential influenza outbreak, he said, describing it as one of the “trickier” viruses. But he was hopeful the new technology could help prevent another deadly pandemic. “Now, there’s a whole different layer of AI, and we have a team using the latest AI technology ... to build a real powerful platform so we can work even faster with more data,” he said. “This, I hope is the start of a whole new era of vaccine manufacturing ... From my point of view it’s about proving this technology to the world that it’s safe, that it’s more effective and actually jump on board. “I think this opens the door to a whole new kind of technology. Hopefully that can change the future,” he said. Actress Sonali Kulkarni has opened up about how she felt after losing the 1997 National Award for Best Actress to Tabu, who was honoured for the film Maachis. Sonali was nominated for her role in Daayra. Decades later, during an appearance on Screen Spotlight, Sonali recalled how she thought Tabu won only because she was Shabana Azmi’s niece. Sonali Kulkarni Opens Up About Losing National Award to Tabu The actress said, “I was jealous of everyone who was winning awards.” She continued, “Every year, my films were considered the best-chosen films in the final rounds of the National Awards. And every year after year, I was getting disappointed. And that was the time when I really wanted a National Award. I was winning others, but what you don’t get, you crave for that the most.” Recalling her thoughts on Tabu’s win, Sonali remembered telling herself, “She’s from the industry na!” The actress believed that Tabu won the award solely because she was the niece of five-time National Award-winning star Shabana Azmi.

CDSCO directs hair color manufacturers to label ingredients, report formula changes



Mumbai: The ever-increasing demand for hair dyes has sparked a debate over chemical safety as it often leads to allergies. To maintain clarity and transparency about the ingredients of these products, the Central Drug Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) has directed hair dye and hair color manufacturers, including importers, to demonstrate compliance with safety standards and carry appropriate warnings on their packages for consumers. In a circular dated June 10, 2026, the CDSCO mandated the companies manufacturing and importing hair color cosmetics to ensure compliance with the Cosmetics Rules, 2020 and the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. The hair color or dyes which are intended to alter grey hair, enhance or restore hair color, must print ingredients of their products, directions for use, mandatory caution/warning statements, patch test instructions and other labelling requirements on the packages. The companies are also directed to report any changes or revisions to the product labels, composition or quality specifications to the Central or State Licensing Authority. A welcome move Welcoming the circular, experts highlighted that transparency in labelling is essential to help users make informed choices and avoid potentially serious allergic reactions to these cosmetic products. “Hair dyes contain a variety of chemicals that may trigger allergies, skin irritation or other adverse reactions in sensitive individuals. Clear labelling enables users to identify ingredients they may be allergic to and helps dermatologists diagnose reactions more accurately,” said Dr Vijaya Gowri, consultant dermatologist, Apollo Hospital, Financial District, Hyderabad.

Most allergic hair color ingredients Among the various chemicals used in hair color products, Paraphenylenediamine (PPD) is considered the most common allergen. PPD is widely used in permanent dark-colored hair dyes due to its long-lasting color effect. Other potential allergens include: Ammonia Resorcinol Hydrogen Peroxide Fragrance Enhancers and Preservatives Dr Gowri explained that individuals who have previously experienced skin reactions to temporary black henna tattoos may also be at a higher risk of developing allergies to PPD-containing hair colors. Most common hair dye allergies Hair dyes or colors can cause mild or severe allergies. The symptoms include: Itching and burning sensation on the scalp Redness and skin rashes around the hairline Swelling of the face, eyelids, ears or neck Blistering or oozing skin Contact dermatitis Eye irritation and watering In rare cases, it can cause breathing difficulties that require immediate medical attention Patch test is a must Dermatologists advise a patch test at least 48 hours before using a hair color product, even if they have used the same product previously, as allergies can develop over time. “Reading the ingredients list and conducting a patch test are simple but effective steps that can prevent complications,” said Dr Gowri. Rules applicable for all marketplace sellers The CDSCO directives also include e-commerce sellers, marketplace or any other distributor registered in India to

comply with the new rules. The sellers attracting business from the social media platforms too have to comply with the labelling guidelines mandated by the Drug authorities. Takeaways With the ever increasing demand for hair dyes and hair colors in India, the authorities have made it mandatory for all the companies manufacturing and importing these products to print the ingredients and other instructions on the packages and alert the users. The directives are important due to substantial prevalence of hair color allergies amongst the users. Salman Khan has received approval to construct a new six-storey residential building in Mumbai’s Bandra, paving the way for a new home for the Khan family. What’s Happening However, there is no official confirmation yet that the actor will be moving out of his long-time residence, Galaxy Apartments. The Maharashtra Coastal Zone Management Authority (MCZMA) approved the proposal on June 16. The new building will come up in Bandra’s Chimbai area, a short distance from Galaxy Apartments, where Salman Khan has lived since 1974. According to MCZMA sources, the plot on which the building will be constructed is registered in the name of Salman’s mother, Salma Khan. A two-storey house, which had been standing on the property since before 1956, was demolished after it became structurally unsafe. The approved project includes a ground floor, still parking and six upper floors. The proposed building will have a total built-up area of around 1,014 square metres and will be developed by Sach Developers.

Shy but stellar: The surprising health benefits of the touch-me-not plant



New Delhi: Actor Rhea Chakraborty has spoken about her personal life, revealing that she is currently single while also reflecting on the emotional scars left by the events that followed the death of her late boyfriend and actor Sushant Singh Rajput in 2020. What’s Happening Appearing on Neha Dhupia and Angad Bedi’s YouTube channel along with her brother Showik Chakraborty, Rhea spoke about relationships, marriage, and the lasting trauma that she says both siblings continue to deal with. When asked if she was looking for a partner, Rhea shared that she is not actively wishing for anything at the moment but would appreciate companionship in the future. She said, “I don’t really have a wish at the moment. But companionship would be nice at some point. I think... evolved. If I had to pick one word, it would be ‘evolved.’” The conversation also turned to marriage, where Rhea said she wanted her younger brother to marry before she did. She said, “I can’t marry before him. He is my younger brother.” Responding to her, Showik said, “Shaadi kara ke karunga na (I’ll get married after she is married).” Background During the interview, Rhea also reflected on the difficult period that followed Sushant Singh Rajput’s death. Rhea and Showik were arrested by the Narcotics Control Bureau during its investigation into a drug-related case linked to the actor’s death. Speaking about that chapter of her life, Rhea said the trauma has not completely faded. “It’s not something that you can truly get over. It’s trauma. It stays in your body, if not in your mind,” she said. Showik also recalled how drastically life changed for him after 2020. He said that before the incident, he had been focused on his studies and future plans. “Then everything went south. No one can predict these things. Life just takes you completely by surprise,” he said, adding that it took them nearly four to five years to rebuild their lives. “Even now, there are

some days when you think, ‘This happened to me’,” he added. The siblings also shared that they continue to live with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Describing how certain moments still trigger painful memories, Showik said, “I still have PTSD. Sometimes a random doorbell rings and it takes me back. There was so much chaos at that time that every doorbell made us feel like someone was coming after us.” Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu has confirmed that she is expecting her first child. The actor shared the happy news during the success meet of her recently released film, Maa Inti Bangaaram, putting an end to the speculation surrounding her pregnancy. Speaking to the media at the event, Samantha revealed that she plans to take a break from acting after completing her current commitments. "After Maa Inti Bangaaram, I will have to take a small break, given my condition. I'll have to take maternity leave. After that, I'll be back with another film for my fans," Samantha said. Rumours about Samantha's pregnancy had been doing the rounds online for several days. The speculation began after videos from the success celebrations of Maa Inti Bangaaram surfaced on social media, with many fans noticing what appeared to be a baby bump. About Samantha And Raj Samantha and Raj married on December 1, 2025, in an intimate ceremony at Sadhguru's Isha Foundation in Coimbatore. She shared a few wedding pictures on Instagram on the same day. The pair had earlier collaborated on the popular web series The Family Man 2. Rumours about their relationship began when Samantha shared photos from the World Pickleball League on Instagram, where she was seen supporting the Chennai Super Champs with Raj by her side. Maa Inti Bangaaram is a family action-comedy directed by Nandini Reddy, marking her reunion with Samantha after their successful collaboration on Oh! Baby in 2019.

BUSINESS

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Shri Dinesh Cranes deploys India's first 250 MT diesel-electric hybrid all-terrain crane

THANE, July 18: Infrastructure services firm Shri Dinesh Cranes Ltd (SDCL) on Saturday said it has deployed the country's first 250 MT diesel-electric hybrid all-terrain crane, and plans to expand its ecofriendly fleet in the near future.

Senior BJP leader Om Prakash Sharma launched the crane and said, "This will go a long way in fulfilling the nation's growth."

The hybrid machine, designed to operate on both electric and diesel power, takes 2 hours and 50 minutes to fully charge its battery.

According to operational data, the technology has the potential to save approximately 93,600 litres of diesel and eliminate nearly 250 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually compared to conventional lifting equipment.

"The deployment represents an important step towards the electrification of heavy lifting equipment in India. We remain committed to investing in technologies that enhance safety, productivity, and sustainability," said Sumit Mahesh Joshi, Managing Director of SDCL.

The company noted that its cranes are actively deployed in marquee national projects, including the National High Speed Rail Corporation's (NHSRCL) bullet train project, the Samruddhi Mahamarg highway, and the Atal Setu sea link.

Moreover, the 250 MT diesel-electric hybrid all-terrain crane has already become operational at Hindustan Zinc's smelter facilities in Rajasthan.

The company announced plans to expand its ecofriendly fleet, with intentions to add more hybrid cranes and acquire 100 trailers in the near future.



Mahesh Joshi, a senior member of the family-owned Shri Dinesh Group, gave a brief overview of the firm's four-decade journey, tracing its evolution from basic transport services to advanced cranes and integrated logistics.

Globally, the group has footprints in the Maldives, Mauritius, Liberia, and Ghana, and is currently developing a major industrial park at Kasne in Bhiwandi in association with logistics major Prologis.

Newly appointed Hindustan Copper Ltd (HCL)

Chairman and Managing Director Anupam Mishra on Saturday said the company was working at a fast pace to double the annual production capacity of its Malanjkhanda Copper Project (MCP) in Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district from 2.5 million tonnes to 5 million tonnes by 2030.

In his first visit to the project after taking charge as HCL's CMD earlier this month, Mishra told PTI that the Miniratna Category-I public sector undertaking had also planned phased capital expenditure to raise

its overall production capacity to 12.2 million tonnes by 2030. "Our focus will be on completing the capital expenditure (capex) plan to achieve the production target of 12.2 million tonnes by 2030. Engineering in-charges and corporate teams will closely monitor every project and its key milestones so that any bottlenecks can be removed in time," he said.

HCL's current mine ore production capacity stands at around four million tonnes per annum.

Referring to global demand for copper outstripping supply, Mishra said HCL was working in mission mode on industrial development and technological advancement to ensure that mineral shortages did not hamper India's goal of becoming a developed nation.

He said the Malanjkhanda Copper Project, with an annual production capacity of 2.5 million tonnes, contributed nearly 70 per cent of HCL's total output.

"The company is implementing a plan to increase the project's capacity from 2.5 million tonnes to 5 million tonnes by 2030. Work on different expansion projects is progressing satisfactorily. These include new production and service shafts, winders, a concentrator plant and a paste-fill plant," he said.

Mishra said the company was also expediting plans to enhance production capacities at its other projects, including the Khetri Copper Complex in Rajasthan's Khetrinagar and the Indian Copper Complex at Ghatsila in Jharkhand, to achieve the overall production target.

During his three-day visit, Mishra inspected the underground mine, concentrator plant, paste-fill plant, tailings dam and expansion work at the Malanjkhanda project.

Gold declines ₹800 to 3-week low of ₹1.45 lakh per 10 grams



Gold price resumed its downward trend to hit a three-week low in the national Capital on Friday, declining by ₹800 to ₹1.45 lakh per 10 grams, and silver dropped ₹2,000 due to sluggish local demand.

The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity depreciated by ₹800 to ₹1,45,500 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) from Thursday's closing level of ₹1,46,300 per 10 grams, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Silver also dropped by ₹2,000 to ₹2,22,500 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). The white metal had closed at ₹2,24,500 per kg in the preceding session.

Gold traded near this level on June 25, when it was quoted at ₹1,45,300 per 10 grams.

Traders said gold prices resumed their decline after a two-session pause, falling to their lowest level in three weeks, while silver continued to witness sustained liquidation.

In international markets, spot gold gained \$15.42, or 0.39 per cent, to \$3,992 per ounce; however, silver edged lower to \$55.37 per ounce.

Govt adds iron ore as 9th core industry



New Delhi

The Government on Friday said it has included iron ore in the list of core sector infrastructure industries, a move which will help in capturing the performance of the economy in a better way.

Consequently, the number of core industries has increased from eight to nine.

Currently, the Government evaluates the performance of eight key sectors — crude oil, petroleum refinery, cement, electricity, natural gas, fertiliser, finished steel and coal — on a monthly basis.

"In view of the extensive

use of iron ore in industrial production and its significant contribution to industrial development, Iron Ore has been included as a core industry in the revised ICI series," the Commerce and Industry Ministry said in a statement.

The new series with base year 2022-23, containing data for nine key sectors, will be released on July 20 this year.

The revised series will replace the existing Index of Core Industries (ICI) series with the base year 2011-12.

The ministry also said that to ensure consistency with the IIP (Index of Industrial Production), the revised ICI series uses gross production data for compiling the

Steel Index, replacing the net production data used in the ICI (2011-12) series.

In the coal sector also, only Raw Coal has been retained in the revised series.

Coal Middlings and Washed Coal have been excluded to eliminate double counting, as both are derived from Raw Coal, it added.

In 2011, the Government included two sectors: natural gas and fertiliser.

Production growth of eight core infrastructure sectors slowed to a seven-month low of 0.5 per cent in May due to a fall in output of coal, crude oil and refinery products.

Markets surge on blue-chip buying; Sensex jumps 965 pts

Mumbai

Market benchmark indices ended sharply higher on Friday, with the Sensex climbing 964.58 points and the Nifty reaching the 24,330 level, propelled by buying in blue-chip Reliance Industries, bank and IT stocks.

Additionally, a strengthening rupee against the US dollar improved sentiment, even as the broader market remained predominantly negative due to weak global cues, traders said.

After a subdued ending in the previous trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex bounced back 964.58 points, or 1.25 per cent, to settle at 78,151.45. During the day, it surged 1,095.68 points, or 1.41 per cent, to 78,282.55.

The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 261.55 points, or 1.09 per cent, to end at 24,334.30. "There is a shift in market momentum, with strong traction moving toward large-cap stocks, led by the IT and banking sectors. This is supported by optimism around business updates and Q1 earnings expectations," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

The trend appears to be driven largely by domestic institutional investors rotating out of expensive mid and small-cap stocks and into more attractively valued large caps that offer a better risk-reward profile, he added.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark climbed 582.06 points, or 0.75 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 127.4 points, or 0.52 per cent.

From the Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra jumped 3.91 per cent after it reported a 28.4 per cent rise in consolidated net profit for the June quarter to ₹1,465 crore, and expressed confidence about the demand environment.

Kotak Mahindra Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries, Hindustan Unilever, Mahindra & Mahindra, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank and Bajaj Finance were also among the winners.

Reliance Industries is scheduled to announce its June quarter earnings later in the day.

Sun Pharma, Trent, Bharti Airtel and UltraTech Cement were among the laggards.

NSE NIFTY

Intra-day on July 17, 2026

High: 24,367.30

Low: 24,099.05

Open: 24,127.60

Previous close: 24,072.75

Close: 24,334.30

BSE SENSEX

Intra-day on July 17, 2026

High: 78,282.55

Low: 77,308.00

Open: 77,370.77

Previous close: 77,186.87

Close: 78,151.45

KBK Infographics

AI skill demand rises over 17-fold in technology jobs, says report

New Delhi

AI fluency is rapidly emerging as a baseline workplace capability, with AI-related skills now featuring in 15.4 per cent of technology job descriptions, while AI skill mentions in non-technology roles have increased nearly sixfold, says a report.

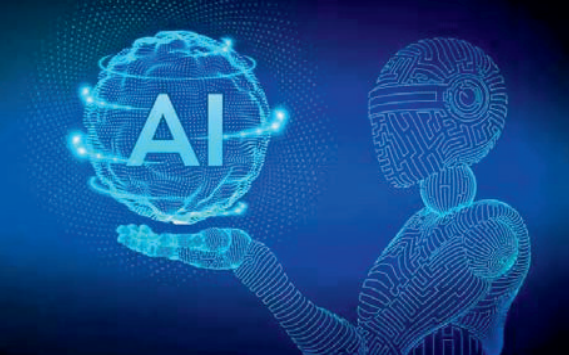
According to Naukri's latest World AI Day Report 2026, AI-related skills now appear in 15.4 per cent of technology job descriptions, up from 0.9 per cent in 2020, reflecting a nearly 17-fold increase in employer demand over the past six years.

The report drew insights from nearly 27,000 professionals across 80+ industries and 15+ cities and analysed over 3 lakh job descriptions.

Interestingly, AI adoption is spreading beyond traditional technology functions. Mentions of AI-related skills in non-technology job descriptions have increased from 0.26 per cent in 2020 to 1.59 per cent in 2026, reflecting nearly six-fold growth.

As AI talent becomes increasingly valuable, professionals with AI skills continue to enjoy a measurable salary advantage.

"AI is no longer a future



trend; it is already reshaping how India works. It's showing up in job descriptions, hiring patterns, workplace tools and career decisions. The real question now is readiness," Sumeet Singh, Group CMO, Info Edge (India) Ltd, said.

According to the report, professionals with AI skills earn higher median salaries across both IT and non-IT roles than peers without AI skills. AI-enabled roles have also recorded stronger salary growth over the past four years, reinforcing the growing business value of AI expertise.

AI hiring has grown fastest among professionals with 13 to 16 years of experience, followed by those with 16+ years, as per the report.

Recruiter demand has also increased significantly for higher salary brackets,

including ₹40-49 lakh and ₹50 lakh and above, indicating that organisations are investing in experienced professionals capable of leading enterprise AI transformation.

AI usage is particularly high among professionals working in AI-intensive functions. Product Management, Data Science and Analytics, and Engineering, Software and QA report the highest proportion of professionals who rely heavily on AI in their work.

The report noted that India's AI journey has entered a new phase. While organisations are accelerating AI adoption and demand for specialised skills continues to grow, sustained investment in workforce development will determine how effectively businesses and professionals realise AI's full potential.

India's forex kitty jumps \$964 million to \$675.15 billion



Mumbai

India's forex reserves jumped \$964 million to \$675.157 billion in the week ended July 10, the Reserve Bank said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had jumped by \$7.26 billion to \$674.193 billion.

The kitty had expanded to an all-time high of \$728.494 billion during the week ended February 27 this year before the onset of the West Asia conflict, which led to several weeks of drop as the rupee came under pressure and the RBI had to intervene in the forex market through dollar sales. For the week ended July 10, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by \$930 million to \$546.508 billion, the central bank's data showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effects of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units, such as the euro, pound, and yen, held in the foreign exchange reserves.

The value of gold reserves increased by \$24 million to \$105.223 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up by \$3 million at \$18.626 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was also up by \$7 million to \$4.793 billion at the end of the reporting week, according to the apex bank's data.

Punjab National Bank (PNB), one of India's leading public sector banks, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Digital India BHASHINI Division (DIBD) at its Corporate Office in Dwarka, New Delhi.

The MoU was formalised in the presence of M Paramasivam, Executive Director, PNB; Amitabh Nag, CEO, Digital India BHASHINI Division (DIBD); and Atish Kumar Rout, Chief General Manager (D), Digital Banking Transformation Division (DBTD), PNB.

Through this partnership, BHASHINI's advanced multilingual AI capabilities will be integrated into PNB's digital platforms. This will empower customers to access banking

PNB signs MoU with Digital India BHASHINI for multilingual AI banking



New Delhi

services seamlessly in multiple Indian languages via both voice and text.

Speaking on the occasion, M Paramasivam, Executive Director, PNB, said, "The collaboration between BHASHINI and PNB demonstrates how digital public infrastructure can accelerate inclusive digital transformation across sectors. By combining multilingual AI with public service delivery, this initiative will help bridge language barriers and ensure that digital banking services are more accessible, equitable, and citizen-friendly for people across the country."

Amitabh Nag, CEO, Digital India BHASHINI Division (DIBD), said, "Language should never be a barrier to essential banking services. Our partnership with PNB advances BHASHINI's vision

of a voice first, multilingual banking system. By integrating AI powered language technologies, we are building inclusive digital infrastructure that enables citizens to access financial services seamlessly in their preferred Indian language, making digital banking more intuitive, inclusive, and citizen-centric."

Atish Kumar Rout, Chief General Manager (D), DBTD, PNB, remarked, "PNB remains committed to delivering accessible, secure, and customer-centric digital banking services. Our collaboration with the Digital India BHASHINI Division will enable us to leverage cutting-edge multilingual AI technologies, making our digital platforms more inclusive and easier to use for customers across diverse linguistic backgrounds."

Trump admin overhauls endangered species rules, scaling back automatic protections for threatened species

WASHINGTON, July 18: The Trump administration finalized major changes to how the U.S. Endangered Species Act is implemented, removing automatic protections for threatened species and giving regulators more flexibility to weigh economic, energy and security considerations when making conservation decisions.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said the revisions were aimed at improving "transparency, clarity, predictability and efficiency" in implementing the decades-old law while maintaining protections for threatened and endangered species.

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum said the changes would return the agency to what he described as the law's original intent.

"We are following the original intent of the law, looking at the facts on the ground and listening to local voices when making decisions under the Endangered Species Act," Burgum said.

The revised rules remove a broad "blanket rule" for threatened species protections introduced during the final months of the Biden administration. Under the new approach, the agency said threatened species will no longer automatically receive the same protections as endangered species, allowing officials to create species-specific safeguards.

The administration also revised rules governing critical habitat designations, requiring officials to consider economic impacts, national security concerns and other factors when deciding whether certain areas should be protected.

Burgum criticized previous enforcement of the law,



arguing it had been used to block development projects and increase costs.

"For too long, the Endangered Species Act has been weaponized to stop almost any new project in America," Burgum said, adding that conservation success should be measured by "species recovery and delisting, not by adding more species to the list."

Threatened species protections, it eliminates the burdensome "blanket rule" option under section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act for "threatened" species created in the final months of the Biden administration. Revises the "critical habitat" designation process to follow the law and consider the economic, national security and other relevant impacts following the

designation of any particular area as "critical habitat." The revision also allows an area to be excluded from a "critical habitat" designation if that exclusion will not cause the extinction of the species.

The Fish and Wildlife Service said the changes would allow for a more targeted approach based on individual species and locations rather than broad nationwide requirements.

Service Director Brian Nesvik said the agency would focus on science-based decision-making while balancing conservation goals with economic activity.

"In the 21st century, the Service will embrace a data-driven approach to tailor regulatory protections for America's precious natural resources," Nesvik said.

The administration said the revisions are part of President Donald Trump's broader effort to increase energy independence, reduce regulatory uncertainty and shift more decision-making authority toward states and local communities.

"President Trump believes the people closest to the challenges are closest to the solutions," concluded Burgum.

"His trust in the American people is the foundation of these reforms, which will lower costs for Americans and lead to more species successfully coming off the Endangered Species List—two things all Americans can celebrate."

The regulatory revisions also take into account site-specific and species-specific characteristics in order to relieve the financial burdens that are imposed upon citizens' daily lives around the nation as the result of one-size-fits-all decisions that are all too often made in Washington, D.C.

Russian strikes kill 4 in Ukraine as Zelenskyy's defence shake-up sparks anger

Kyiv

Russian attacks on Ukraine overnight killed at least four civilians and wounded 20 other people, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, as he faces a political crisis after firing his popular defence minister.

Zelenskyy's major reshuffle of his Government on Thursday, which included the appointment of a new prime minister, unsettled the country's military leadership and triggered a public outcry. It was an unwelcome difficulty after Ukraine has gained traction in its fight



against Russia's more than 4-year-old invasion.

The surprise departure

from the defence ministry of Mykhailo Fedorov, a youthful and popular member of the

Government, saw thousands of people demonstrate against his dismissal in cities across Ukraine on Thursday. Further street protests were expected on Friday.

Fedorov, 35, who was in the post for just six months, is widely seen as the driving force behind Ukraine's swift and successful technological innovation and other measures, such as fighting military corruption, that have brought fresh hope in the war for Ukrainians.

Relations between Fedorov and Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander of Ukraine's armed forces who

started his military career in the former Soviet Union, had broken down, according to Zelenskyy, and made Fedorov's position untenable. Zelenskyy said he had asked Maj Gen Yevhen Khmara, acting head of the state's security service and a highly regarded special operations expert, to take over the defence minister's duties.

Zelenskyy said late Thursday he would ask Parliament to formally approve Khmara's appointment as defence minister, as required by law. That step could be held up by bureaucratic hurdles, however.

Ukrainian law requires the defence minister to be a civilian, so a serving soldier or security service officer must leave active service before being formally appointed. Also, lawmakers will be on summer recess through mid-August.

Khmara has been in charge of the SBU security service since January. He had previously led the SBU's elite Alpha special forces unit and is known for being an architect of Operation Spiderweb, one of Ukraine's most spectacular attacks when it struck Russian air bases last year.

Pak, China FMs discuss AI, trade in Shanghai

Islamabad

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Friday held talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on ways to advance ties in trade, investment, digital economy and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The two leaders met on the sidelines of the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai.

They "reviewed the broad canvas of Pakistan-China bilateral relations and reaffirmed their shared commitment to further deepening the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership," Radio Pakistan reported.

They underscored the importance of advancing CPEC 2.0 — the upgraded second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor — and enhancing collaboration in trade, investment, science and technology, the digital economy and artificial intelligence, the report said.

The two sides also exchanged views on the latest regional and global developments and reaffirmed their resolve to coordinate on issues of mutual interest, it said.

On Thursday, Dar, who is also the deputy prime Minister of Pakistan, signed an agreement in Shanghai to establish the World Artificial



Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO).

"Pakistan looks forward to working closely with fellow WAICO member States in efforts to help bridge the global AI divide and to promote equitable access to AI to advance development for all," Pakistan's Foreign Office said in a statement on X. As many as 29 countries — including China, Russia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Laos and Indonesia — have signed the agreement to establish WAICO. It is supposed to be an independent inter Governmental organisation headquartered in Shanghai, which will uphold the purposes of the UN Charter, be committed to consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit and adhere to a people-centred approach, China's State-owned Xinhua news agency reported.

Pakistan has reaffirmed its commitment to advancing international cooperation in artificial intelligence, particularly from the perspective of the Global South, its Foreign Office said.

24 terrorists killed in operations in Pakistan's KPK

Peshawar

Twenty-four terrorists were killed during a series of intelligence-based operations in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the army said on Friday.

The operations were launched in and around the restive Bannu district over the last 24 hours, the military's media wing said in a statement.

It said 24 terrorists were killed during the operations, and a cache of weapons and ammunition was recovered from them.

The slain terrorists were involved in multiple terrorist activities and the killing of civilians, the statement said.

Meanwhile, President Asif Ali Zardari lauded the security forces for the "successful operations", according to



a statement issued by his office.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also praised the security forces for the operations. According to a statement issued by the Interior Ministry, Naqvi

described the intelligence-based operations as essential for restoring peace and stability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and termed the security personnel "our true heroes".

20 children, 1 adult killed in Uganda elementary school bus crash

Kampala

An elementary school bus carrying pupils back from an educational tour to a scenic waterfall in Uganda veered off the road and overturned, killing at least 20 children and one adult, police said on Friday.

The bus crashed Thursday night in the Kapchorwa District in eastern Uganda while returning from a visit to the region's Sipi Falls, the Uganda Police Force said in a statement posted on X.

Survivors including three adults and several children



were taken to several hospitals, according to police, who did not immediately give an exact number of people who were injured.

At least nine children were hospitalised in critical condition, while the adult who died appeared to be the founder and head of the school, Ugandan Minister of Local Government Balaam Ateenyi said on X. Residents of the village where the crash occurred acted as first responders and helped transport injured children to hospitals while trying to save some victims, Barugahara said. The bus belonged to the King

David Junior School, an elementary school situated in the capital Kampala, police said.

The driver reportedly lost control of the bus, which veered off the road, struck a rock and overturned, according to the police statement, which added that the information was preliminary and the cause of the crash was under investigation.

A police photo showed the bus lying on its side with the entire roof ripped off and the seats exposed, including some that were mangled. Luggage and clothing lay strewn on the road. Road accidents are common

in Uganda and often are blamed on poorly maintained vehicles, speeding and poor road conditions, which are problems across Africa.

Africa has the worst road safety record in the world, with more than 300,000 annual road deaths and around 26 deaths per 100,000 people.

In Europe, which has far more road traffic, there are around 20,000 deaths yearly and nine deaths per 100,000 people, according to the World Health Organisation and the United Nations.

Europe's early heatwave linked to over 10,000 excess deaths

London

Heat that hit Europe exceptionally early and hard this year appears to have led to a spike in deaths, with well over 10,000 more people dying at the height of the heat wave than would normally have been expected, according to figures that are still emerging across the continent.

Measures of what researchers call "excess mortality" — the difference between the normally expected number of deaths and the actual number — spiked in late June, when parts of Europe experienced record temperatures.

Experts caution that it takes a while for a full picture to emerge, and that many heat-related deaths will never formally be recorded as such. For example, a heart attack,



which can be triggered by extreme heat exposure, especially in people who are older or have underlying health issues, may be listed on a death certificate simply as a heart attack.

It's an alarming start to the summer. Several heat waves have killed thousands of people in the past few years in Europe. Still, 2003 stands as

the deadliest year in Europe for heat, with about 70,000 deaths. The frequency and intensity of heat waves are supercharged by climate change, which comes from the burning of fuels like coal, oil and gas.

The EuroMOMO mortality monitoring hub, which receives data from two dozen countries, gave an estimate of

14,260 for excess mortality from all causes in the week ending June 28, more than 12,000 of those deaths being among people age 65 and older. That's out of a total 84,583 deaths that week. Figures in the preceding and following weeks were far lower.

Lasse Vestergaard of Denmark's Statens Serum Institut, which coordinates EuroMOMO, said that "we attribute this to the heat wave affecting quite a lot of countries in Europe, and we do that because there is no other obvious explanation that could explain such a high excess mortality happening at the moment."

Such a high excess in a single week is "highly unusual," he added.

EuroMOMO doesn't give absolute numbers for individ-

ual countries, but found the highest rates of excess in France, Belgium and Germany.

Nations that bore the brunt of the heat have issued their own estimates — which don't always follow the same methodology or timelines. Here is a snapshot of heat-related deaths being reported by various countries.

Germany's disease control center, the Robert Koch Institute, directly attributed 6,830 deaths to heat this year through early July, 6,470 of them among people 65 and older. Temperatures in Germany late last month hit their highest levels since records began, peaking with a measurement of 41.7 degrees Celsius (107.06 Fahrenheit) on June 28, according to the German Weather Service.

Gangster Nitish held in Vermont: FBI

Washington

The FBI has arrested gangster Nitish Kaushal, allegedly involved in murder, kidnapping and drug trafficking in the US, days after adding him to its list of most wanted criminals. "Nitish Kaushal has been arrested in Vermont," the FBI said in a post on X.

Kaushal, an Indian national, allegedly carried out acts of violence on behalf of the Bhagwanpuria organised crime group, including, but not limited to, kidnappings and assaults, the FBI said.

The FBI had added Kaushal to its most wanted list. The FBI was on the lookout for Kaushal for his alleged involvement with a transnational criminal organisation engaged in, among other things, acts involving murder, kidnapping, drug trafficking, extortion, weapons trafficking, money laundering, and human smuggling.

It said the Jaggu Bhagwanpuria Organised Crime Group originated in the Punjab state of India and operated in the Central District of California and elsewhere.

The US District Court of the Central District



of California, Los Angeles, issued a federal arrest warrant for Kaushal on June 25 after charging him with racketeer influenced and corrupt organisations conspiracy. The FBI action followed Operation Hard Ball, a coordinated international enforcement action targeting the Bhagwanpuria gang.

The operation involved raids and law enforcement action across the US, Canada, and Europe, highlighting the growing international focus on dismantling transnational criminal syndicates with roots in India.

Hours Before FIFA World Cup Final, Spain Hit By Unexpected Training Setback

New Delhi: Spain's training session ahead of Sunday's World Cup final against Argentina has been suspended because of storms and lighting in the area, the team announced Saturday. The players moved indoors for warm-up session. There was no immediate indication if the team would try to get back outside for a full session. New Jersey Gov. Mikie Sherrill warned residents Saturday that severe storms are expected across the state, with the potential for damaging winds, tornadoes, flash flooding, and large hail.

The Spanish national team's training session on the pitches at the Melanie Lane Training Ground in New Jersey has been suspended in accordance with the US storm safety protocol," the Spanish federation (RFEF) said in a statement.

"The players are currently taking part in a warm-up session indoors."

In contrast, the Argentine players decided to train outdoors despite the rain.

Argentina is also in the same area ahead of Sunday's match. Argentina will be playing for its second consecutive World Cup title and fourth overall. Spain's only World Cup championship was in 2010. Spain, the reigning European champions, are aiming for their first FIFA World Cup crown since 2010, while Lionel Messi's Argentina seek back-to-back titles.

Defending champions Argentina secured a thrilling 2-1 comeback win over England in the semifinal, overturning a first-half deficit with Enzo Fernandez scoring the equaliser before Lautaro Martinez netted the stoppage-time winner to send the defending champions into the



title clash against Spain. The win over England sent Argentina into the World Cup 2026 final, while England's hopes of reaching their first World Cup final since 1966 came to a heartbreaking end. Spain, on the other hand, secured a place in the FIFA

World Cup final for the first time since their 2010 triumph after defeating France 2-0 with a composed performance. France coach Didier Deschamps admitted his side does not want to play the FIFA World Cup 2026 third-place playoff against England in Miami on

Saturday (local time) but stated it is their duty to win the bronze medal, as per Reuters. France's hopes of reaching a third consecutive FIFA World Cup final ended with a 2-0 defeat to Spain in the 2026 semi-finals. Speaking ahead of the third-place match, speaking at the pre-match press conference, Deschamps said neither France nor England wanted to play the match, but stressed that it is not a friendly and that his team has a duty to compete and secure the bronze medal.

Lamine Yamal's Barber Arrives In Rolls Royce To Give Him New Look Before FIFA World Cup 2026 Final

"If We Win FIFA World Cup, I'll Retire": Spain Star Marc Cucurella's Stunning Remark Ahead Of 2026 Final

At 15, He Begged Lionel Messi Not To Quit. Now He's One Win From History

France coach Didier Deschamps admitted his side does not want to play the FIFA World Cup 2026 third-place playoff against England in Miami on Saturday (local time) but stated it is their duty to win the bronze medal, as per Reuters. France's hopes of reaching a third consecutive FIFA World Cup final ended with a 2-0 defeat to Spain in the 2026 semi-finals. Speaking ahead of the third-place match, speaking at the pre-match press conference, Deschamps said neither France nor England wanted to play the match, but stressed that it is not a friendly and that his team has a duty to compete and secure the bronze medal.

Lamine Yamal's Barber Arrives In Rolls Royce To Give Him New Look Before FIFA World Cup 2026 Final

"If We Win FIFA World Cup, I'll Retire": Spain Star Marc Cucurella's Stunning Remark Ahead Of 2026 Final

India pick proven performers for Women's Hockey World Cup



New Delhi

There were no surprises on offer in the Indian women's hockey squad announced for next month's World Cup in Belgium and the Netherlands with the selectors naming the same 20-strong group that has been picked for the Asian Games in September-October.

The 20-member squad, announced on Friday, will be led by Salima Tete and chief coach Sjoerd Marijne has described it as a well-balanced group. The World Cup is scheduled to be held from August 15 to 30. The squad, which is currently training at the national camp in Bengaluru, features a mix of experienced campaigners and promising young players.

They were impressive during recent international assignments, most notably at the FIH Nations Cup in New Zealand last month, where the team lifted the trophy in an unbeaten campaign that promoted it back to the

elite FIH Pro League. Savita and Bichu Devi Kharibam are the two goalkeepers. The defensive unit comprises Ishika Chaudhary, Sushila Chanu Pukhrambam, Lalhantluangi, Jyoti and Shilpi Dabas.

Captain Salima, Nikki Pradhan, Sakshi Rana, Sunelita Toppo, Neha and Deepika Soreng will anchor the mid-field. The forward line features Lalremsiami, Rutuja Dadaso Pisal, Navneet Kaur, Deepika, Ishika, Baljeet Kaur and Beauty Dungdung.

"We have chosen a well-balanced group of players who are ready for the big challenges we will face this summer. The team has worked hard in the lead-up to the tournament and we are confident in this group's abilities," Marijne said in a press release issued by Hockey India.

'Kohli, Gambhir talk 10 times in a day'

Cardiff

India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak has denied a breakdown in communication between head coach Gautam Gambhir and star batter Virat Kohli, insisting that the two talk to each other "10 times a day" even though they appear distant during training sessions.

There is speculation that Gambhir and Kohli have not been on talking terms for quite some time and it has been suggested to the BCCI that a mediator can be used to make the duo sit across the table and sort out their differences.

Even during training sessions in Birmingham and Cardiff, the two weren't seen interacting. Kohli was seen talking to Kotak after a net session.

When asked if he is the "bridge" between Kohli and Gambhir, the former Saurashtra left-hander laughed.

"Virat Kohli and Gautam



Gambhir speak to each other at least 10 times a day. I don't think he (Kohli) needs a bridge to communicate with head coach," Kotak claimed, contrary to what is being spoken about in the corridors of power of Indian cricket. "You asked about communication, I don't know from where you hear these things but these are rumours," he further asserted. Kotak reiterated his predecessor Abhishek Nayar's recent remark that unless the legend himself looks for advice on his batting, one should give him none.

"When Virat goes out to bat, what I have felt as a batting coach is that if he doesn't ask for inputs or there is something major that warrants attention, there is no point in disturbing him. You shouldn't give him unsolicited advice," he said.

Japan Open: Sindhu enters into her first Super 750 semifinal

Tokyo

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu sailed into her first Super 750 semifinal in nearly three years after former world champion Nozomi Okuhara withdrew ahead of their women's singles quarterfinal match at the Japan Open here on Friday.

The 31-year-old Indian, the 2019 world champion, will feature in the last four of a Super 750 event for the first



time since the Denmark Open in 2023. It is also her third semifinal appearance of the season, following impressive runs at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 and the Australian Open Super 500.

Ironically, Okuhara had herself benefited from a withdrawal in the pre-quarterfinals, progressing after South Korea's An Se-young pulled out with a left foot injury.

Sindhu's reward is a semi-

nal clash against Tokyo Olympic champion Chen Yufei, who brushed aside South Korea's Sim Yu Jin 21-10, 21-12 to secure her place in the last four at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium.

The fourth-seeded Chinese holds an 8-6 head-to-head advantage over world No. 12 Sindhu and has won each of their last four meetings, including a straight-games victory at this year's Indonesia Masters.

Dan Brown lights up British Open



Southport (England)

Dan Brown is lighting it up again at the British Open. One of the few smokers in golf, Brown went through "seven or eight" cigarettes during his 4-under 66 that left him tied for second place, one shot off the lead, after the first round at Royal Birkdale on Thursday.

After weeks of sunshine in this northwest corner of England, the fairways here are baked and parched - making them a potential fire hazard from discarded cigarettes.

"I've been making sure that they're out," the 31-year-old Englishman said reassuringly.

Not that he sounds too proud of a habit that makes him stand out on the circuit, but which he feels is needed to relieve some stress.

"Sorry, Mum," he said with a cheeky smile.

The burly and bearded Brown is an interesting character, not least because of the 10 tattoos on his body - three of which are of little birds - and his YouTube channel called "BeersForeBogeys" which has around 4,000 subscribers. (AP)

Putting woes hurt Rory McIlroy at British Open



Southport (England)

There were no "I'm so bad at golf" exclamations from Rory McIlroy this time. The puzzled looks, shakes of the head and sagging shoulders said it all.

McIlroy was just 10 holes into his bid to win the British Open for the first time since 2014 and he was veering dangerously close to playing himself out of title contention. Missing one putt from four feet wasn't necessarily unusual. But doing it three times? In the space of four holes? That trio of bewildering close-range mishaps - on Numbers 7, 8 and 10 - came either side of McIlroy driving the green to make birdie on the 415-yard Number 9. Go figure.

And it pretty much summed up the world Number 2's wild late-afternoon ride in a 2-over 72 that included six bogeys and left him seven shots off the first-round lead, held surprisingly by 115th-ranked Jackson Suber on Thursday. "Just too

many stupid mistakes," McIlroy said - and he was specifically referring to his putting on greens he described as "very inconsistent"

"I missed a couple early on that looked like they were going to break one way and they actually went another way, and then when you get the next one, you're over it and it's just very hard to trust that the ball is going to do what you think it's going to do. Then you maybe don't make quite as committed of a stroke." McIlroy arrived at the Open after a seventh-place finish at the Scottish Open, where he went viral by shouting "I'm so bad at golf" following a poor approach shot late in his final round. The sixth player - and only European - to complete the career Grand Slam rarely hides his emotions and he cut a frustrated figure for most of his round Thursday, not least when he chipped through the green and into a bunker at the par-5 Number 17. (AP)

Root digs in as England level series with four-wicket victory over India

Cardiff

A steadfast Joe Root anchored England's series-levelling four-wicket win over India in the second ODI here after the visitors' batting once again seemed vulnerable with senior player Rohit Sharma's struggles triggering fresh speculation around his future.

Root delivered an unbeaten 99 off 133 balls to steer England home and keep them alive in the three-match series that will conclude at the Lord's on Sunday. That game could well be Rohit's final in India colours after he struggled to a 47-ball 26, adding to the pressure on him.

He looked out of touch as India were dismissed for 233 in 44 overs on Thursday. Virat Kohli (65) and Shreyas Iyer (66) ensured that the bowlers had something to fight with after other batters disappointed.

In reply, Root's was a model innings that showed how to control a chase on a track that offered sharp bounce, making the Indian pace troika menacing during the early part of the run chase. His 72-run stand for sixth wicket with Will Jacks (30) sealed the game after England had their own struggled after being reduced to 125 for five. The chase was completed in 44.1 overs.

Root used the big square dimensions of the field to keep the scoreboard ticking. Since the target was a small one, England were never under scoreboard pressure which allowed



Root to score runs at a slow pace. He came tantalisingly close to a hundred but Gus Atkinson hit the winning boundary to deny him.

Earlier, Rohit once again found himself under intense scrutiny with

every dot ball adding to the pressure. Opposition teams have decoded the flaws in his technique and left-arm seamers, who create awkward angles, are quickly introduced to pose problems for the former India skipper.