

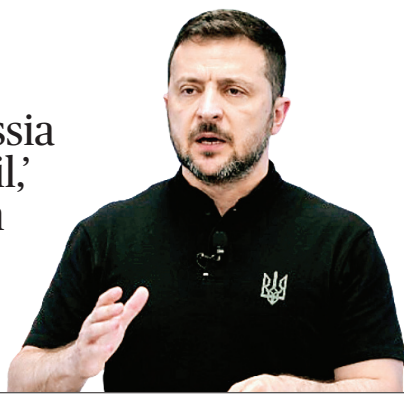
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Barack and Michelle Obama endorse Kamala Harris for president

LALIT K JHA / WASHINGTON

KAMALA HARRIS will be a "fantastic President of the United States," former president Barack Obama said on Friday, as he and his wife Michelle endorsed the US Vice President and vowed to do "everything we can" to enable her to win the high-stakes election against Donald Trump in November. Harris, 59, launched her presidential campaign last week hours after President Joe Biden withdrew from the race for a second term. She is, however, yet to be officially declared as the presidential candidate by the Democrats.

Obama hadn't immediately endorsed Harris following President Biden's announcement on Sunday but on Friday released a video to support the Vice President, who if elected, would be the first female president. With Obama's endorsement, Harris, who is of Indian and African origin, has secured support from all major Democrats and party leaders in Congress, including former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

In the 55-second video -- an endorsement that will give a big boost to Harris' presidential campaign -- the former president and first lady called on the Americans to join them in getting to work to elect Harris and gave their full-throated support and commitment to doing everything they can to make her the next president of the United States. / PTI /

## On 25th Kargil Diwas, PM asserts terror attempt by Pakistan will be crushed



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a program to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the 'Kargil Vijay Diwas' at the Kargil War Memorial, in Dras on Friday. / PTI

DRAS/NEW DELHI India on Friday hailed the valour of its soldiers in the Kargil conflict 25 years ago with Prime Minister Narendra Modi issuing a stern message to Pakistan, saying it has been trying to stay relevant by using terrorism and proxy wars but all such terror attempts will be crushed with full force. Various events were organised in states and at the Kargil War Memorial in Dras in Ladakh to mark the 25th Kargil Vijay Diwas.

In Parliament, members paid their homage to the fallen soldiers. As a mark of respect to the over 500 soldiers who laid their lives in the war, both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members stood in silence for a brief while.

President Droupadi Murmu said the Kargil Vijay Diwas is an occasion to pay tributes to the courage and extraordinary valour of the country's armed forces.

"I pay tribute to each soldier who made the supreme sacrifice while protecting Mother India on the peaks

of Kargil in 1999 and bow in reverence to their sacred memory. I am sure that all countrymen will draw inspiration from their sacrifice and valour. Jai Hind Jai Bharat!" she said in a post in Hindi on X.

A shepherd named Tashi Namgyal is believed to have reported the intrusion by Pakistani soldiers into Kargil on May 2, 1999. The Indian Army launched a fierce counter-assault, Operation Vijay, to push back the Pakistani forces that had stealthily occupied important heights in Ladakh. The war went on for nearly three months on the icy heights.

On July 26, 1999, the Army announced the successful culmination of Operation Vijay, declaring victory over Pakistan.

Addressing a ceremony at the Kargil memorial in Dras, Modi said "falsehood and terror" were brought down to their knees by truth in the 1999 war. He also noted that Pakistan has not learnt anything from its past.

"Today, I am speaking at a place

from where the masters of terror can hear my voice directly. I want to tell these patrons of terrorism that their nefarious intentions will never succeed," Modi said in the presence of India's top military brass.

Paying glowing tributes to the fallen soldiers, he said, "In Kargil, we not only won the war, we presented an incredible example of truth, restraint and strength," adding, "The nation is forever indebted and deeply grateful to the mighty superheroes of our armed forces." The war saw Indian armed forces fight in the most challenging terrains amid harsh weather conditions in Dras, Kargil and Batalik sectors.

In his message, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, "Today, on the 25th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas, we remember the indomitable spirit and courage of the brave soldiers who fought valiantly in the 1999 war."

In a post on X, he also said, "Their unwavering commitment, valour and patriotism ensured that our

### PM TARGETS OPPN ON AGNIPATH, SAYS AIM IS TO KEEP ARMY READY FOR WAR

DRASS (KARGIL) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the Agnipath scheme is an example of necessary reforms undertaken by the Army and accused the opposition of playing politics over the recruitment process aimed at keeping the average age in armed forces young.

In his address on Kargil Vijay Diwas here to mark the 25th anniversary of victory in Kargil war, Modi said some people were playing politics over a sensitive issue related to national security and rubbished claims that the Agnipath scheme was launched to save pension money. "The aim of Agnipath is to make the forces young... The aim of Agnipath is to keep the armies continuously fit for war," he said.

"Unfortunately, such a sensitive issue related to national security has been made a subject of politics by some people. Some people are playing politics of lies for their personal interests even on this reform of the army," he said. / PTI /

country remained safe and secure. Their service and sacrifice will continue to inspire every Indian and our coming generations." Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan and all ranks of the armed forces also recalled the supreme sacrifice of the "bravehearts".

"We draw inspiration from the heroes of Kargil, and we will continue to honour their legacy by defending our nation with courage, honour, and sacrifice," the headquarters of the Integrated Defence Staff said. / PTI /

## Kanwar Yatra: SC extends interim stay on directives issued by UP

NEW DELHI The Supreme Court on Friday extended till further orders its interim direction staying the directives of BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh which effectively ensured that 'Kanwar Yatra' goes on without displaying the names of owners, staff and other details of eateries along the route. The Kanwar Yatra began on July 22 and ends on August 6.

A large number of devotees travel from various places with 'kanwars' carrying holy water from the Ganga to perform 'jalabhishek' of Shivalings during the Hindu calendar month of 'Shravan'. Many believers shun consuming meat during the month they consider holy. Many don't even consume meals containing onions and garlic.

A bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and S V N Bhatti said it won't issue any clarification on the July 22 order as "we have said what needed to be said in our July 22 order. Can't force anyone to disclose names." "List the matter on August 5, 2024. In the meantime, interim order passed by this court on July 22, 2024 shall continue," the bench said in its order. / PAGE 5 /

## Ancient site in Palestine gets UNESCO tag amid conflict in Gaza

NEW DELHI Amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza, the ancient heritage site of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer in Palestine on Friday received the UNESCO tag and was simultaneously put on the List of World Heritage in Danger after an "emergency nomination". The announcement was made during the ongoing 46th session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) in Delhi. India is hosting the key UNESCO event for the first time.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer in Palestine has been inscribed on the World Heritage List and List of World Heritage in Danger, it was announced in the plenary meeting of the session. Israel has been carrying out a massive military offensive in Gaza following the unprecedented and multi-pronged attacks on Israeli cities by Hamas militants on October 7.

India in November had urged both the sides to eschew violence, de-escalate the situation and create conditions for an early resumption of direct peace negotiations towards a two-state solution to the Palestine issue. / PAGE 10 /

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## NTA declares final NEET-UG results, number of toppers down to 17 from 61



NEW DELHI The National Testing Agency (NTA) Friday declared the final results of controversy-ridden NEET-UG entrance exam, declaring that 17 candidates have shared the top rank, down from 61 in the revised results, while thousands of others have seen their marks and rankings change significantly. The number of qualifying candidates and the cut-off has also seen a marginal dip.

The "re-revised" results have been released three days after the Supreme Court rejected multiple petitions demanding a NEET-UG 2024 retest because of alleged paper leaks and other malpractices.

The top court had, however, asked the NTA to revise the merit list in light of a controversial physics question which had two possible answers and the correct option was suggested by a three-member expert panel set up by the SC.

It led to a complete reworking of NEET ranks and scores for all 2.3 million students. The scores of at least 4,20,000 students, including 44 of the 61 who achieved perfect 720, decreased by five points with the court invalidating the disputed marks they got for the Physics question.

However, the exact impact on their rankings is not immediately

clear. The exams were held on May 5 and the results were announced on June 4. Doubts about the sanctity of the exam arose when a total of 67 students scored a perfect 720, unprecedented in the NTA's history.

The number of candidates sharing the top rank came down to 61 after the NTA announced the revised results on July 1 after withdrawing grace marks awarded to six candidates to make up for loss of time some centres. On Friday, the NTA declared the "re-revised result" along with a decrease in the number of toppers, the qualifying cutoffs and number of qualified candidates have also decreased in the "re-revised" results of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG).

Seventeen candidates have retained the perfect 720 marks and were declared the toppers, followed by six who scored 716, and 77 with 715 marks, which forms the cohort of top 100 candidates.

Forty-four out of the 67 candidates who were earlier declared toppers, when the results were originally announced on June 4, had scored full marks because of that particular physics question. / PTI /

## DOVAL CALLS FOR INCREASED BIMSTEC COOPERATION IN COUNTER-TERRORISM

NAYPYIDAW (MYANMAR) National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Friday called on BIMSTEC nations to strengthen cooperation in counter-terrorism; combating drug trafficking, arms smuggling and organised crime. Doval, leading the Indian delegation at the 4th annual meeting of the security chiefs of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), delivered India's national statement at the meeting here in Myanmar capital.

"NSA delivered India's national statement at #BIMSTEC meet. He spoke on strengthening cooperation in counter-terrorism; combating drug trafficking, arms smuggling and organised crime; BIMSTEC connectivity; holding 2nd Ports Conclave; and water security of Himalayan river systems," the Embassy of India in Myanmar said in a post on X. The meeting has been convened to strategise and coordinate initiatives crucial for addressing common security challenges faced by member states. / PTI /

## Arson attacks paralyze French rail network before start of Olympics



French military personnel patrol outside Gare du Nord station in Paris on France. / PTI

PARIS France's high-speed rail network was hit Friday with widespread and "criminal" acts of vandalism including arson attacks, paralyzing travel to Paris from across the rest of France and Europe, and thwarting Olympic athletes from travel, only hours before the grand opening ceremony of the Games. French officials condemned the attacks as "criminal actions," though they said there was no sign of a direct link to the Games. Prosecutors in Paris opened a national investigation saying the crimes could carry sentences of 10 to 20 years.

"It's a hell of a way to start the Olympics," said Sarah Moseley, a 42-year-old traveler waiting at the Gare du Nord station in Paris as she learned that her train to London was delayed by the rail chaos.

As Paris authorities geared up for a spectacular parade on and along the Seine River, three fires were reported near the tracks on the high-speed lines of Atlantique, Nord and Est, causing disruptions that affected hundreds of thousands of travelers.

Among them were Olympic athletes themselves.

Two out of four trains carrying Olympic athletes to Paris on the western Atlantique high-speed line were stopped hours before the opening ceremony, affected by the coordinated sabotage on the tracks, an official from the French railway operator SNCF said Friday.

Also, two German athletes in showjumping who were on a train to Paris to take part in the opening ceremony but had to turn back in Belgium because

of the closures, and will now miss the ceremony, German news agency dpa reported.

"There was no longer a chance of making it on time," rider Philipp Weishaupt, who was traveling with teammate Christian Kukuk, told dpa.

There were no known reports of injuries from the attacks. French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said France's intelligence services have been mobilized to find the perpetrators of the "acts of sabotage" which he described as "prepared and coordinated." Attal said that the actions on the eve of the Olympics had "a clear objective: blocking the high-speed train network." He said the vandals strategically targeted the axes from the north, east and west toward Paris hours before the Olympics opening ceremony. / AP /

## Chief Secy reviews steps to check spread of diarrhoea



DW BUREAU / CHANDIGARH

IN THE light of the directions of the Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann to take necessary steps with regard to check the spread of Diarrhoea in some towns of the State, the Chief Secretary Mr Anurag Verma today reviewed the situation in a meeting with all the Deputy Commissioners.

Verma made it clear that the onus of ensuring the good health of every resident of the State lies with the Government and there would be zero tolerance for any laxity in this regard. Mr Verma further said that in case a new sample fails, then the officer responsible for water supply in the area concerned would be strictly

proceeded against. He further added that the Health Department has released a sum of Rs. 2 Lakh for large districts and Rs. 1 Lakh for small districts concerning the purchase of testing kits for the purpose of checking drinking water samples. The Principal Secretary Water Supply & Sanitation on the occasion divulged that a total of Rs. 25 Lakh have been released for testing kits.

The Deputy Commissioners during the meeting apprised that the certificates have been received from field officers regarding supply of clean drinking water in all the areas. Mr Verma said that it should be ensured that the water available for drinking must be 100 percent clean and wherever the water is

found contaminated, severe action would be taken against the officers responsible.

During the meeting, Additional Chief Secretary Local Government said that a charge sheet has been issued to the EO, JE, Sanitary and Chief Sanitary Inspector of Patran in Patiala District. Similarly, the Chief Secretary has directed the DC Mohali to initiate due legal action in the matter of the non-cleaning of water tanks in Kharar. The Chief Secretary further directed the DCs to personally visit the areas such as the slums where the cases of Diarrhoea have been reported and ensure the clean and hygienic conditions. Likewise, the District Health Officers must make sure that the quality of open fruits being

sold, drinking and edible products is up to the mark. Apart from this, a campaign is also being waged to spread awareness amongst the people regarding importance of cleanliness and hygiene.

The Health Secretary disclosed that after the directions of the Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, the number of water samples has been doubled and new directions in this connection have been issued. Now in big cities, 400 samples, middle level cities 300 and in small cities 200 samples are being taken for testing. He also added that after July 17th barring one or two places, no new case has been reported in the State. Full vigil is being exercised to ensure that no new case comes.

## Briefly

### PUNJAB, KERALA JOIN HANDS TO ADDRESS NRI CONCERNS



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM (KERALA) CHANDIGARH In a significant move, Cabinet Minister Kuldeep Dhaliwal and Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan held discussions on key issues affecting Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) from both states. Visiting Punjab NRIs Affairs Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal informed that they deliberated on permitting NRIs to purchase agricultural land, currently restricted to commercial land only. They decided to jointly raise this issue with the Union Government, seeking a policy change to benefit NRIs. Furthermore, they urged the Union Government to ensure that Indian Missions worldwide have staff familiar with the native languages of Punjab and Kerala, facilitating better support for NRIs from these states. This collaboration demonstrates the commitment of both state governments to addressing the concerns of their diaspora community. / DW BUREAU /

### MP VIKRAM SAHNEY SEEKS SPECIAL GRANT FOR PUNJAB

NEW DELHI Member of Parliament Vikram Sahney on Friday demanded a special grant and an industrial zone for Punjab. Speaking on the discussion of Budget 2024-25, Sahney, Member of Parliament from Punjab, demanded the budgetary provision of Rs 1.5 lakh crore, which is for providing 50-year long-term interest-free loans to states and Punjab should get a significant share out of it. He said in the budget there were special provisions for some states. "We welcome that decision, but it is disheartening to note that Punjab which ensures India's food security and border security did not get anything from the budget." Sahney demanded that the Minimum Support Price (MSP) committee report be presented and then the Parliament should discuss "how we can empower the farmers by its implementation." Besides, Sahney demanded the required members to form a Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) should be 100 instead of 300 then only this initiative will get success. He also demanded that the Agrievance scheme should be reviewed and at least 50 per cent of the Agrievances should be absorbed by paramilitary forces. Sahney said in the budget there is provision for 12 industrial parks. He demanded that at least one park should be given to Punjab either in Ludhiana or Jalandhar. / IANS /

### GODREJ PROPERTIES SAYS UT CHANDIGARH ADMN REVOKES BLDG PLANS, OC OF COMMERCIAL PROJECT

NEW DELHI The government of Union Territory of Chandigarh has revoked building plans and occupation certificate of a commercial project of Godrej Properties in the city. In a regulatory filing, Godrej Properties informed that the "Office of the Estate Officer, UT, Chandigarh vide its order dated July 24, 2024, received by the company on July 25, has revoked the approved building plans and the occupancy certificate (OC) dated June 09, 2015, of our commercial building Godrej Eternia at Chandigarh citing alleged violations of conditions of environmental clearance". The company said it will challenge this order. "We strongly believe that the order was passed based on a wrong premise and a misunderstanding of the facts. We are reviewing the order's contents and will contest this decision in the appropriate forum in accordance with the law," the company said. / PTI /

### SPEAKER SANDHWAN CONDOLES DEMISE OF FORMER LEGISLATOR

CHANDIGARH Punjab Vidhan Sabha Speaker Kultar Singh Sandhwan, expressed deep sorrow over the unfortunate demise of S. Kabal Singh. In a press communique issued here today, the Speaker said that the 90-years old S. Kabal Singh, Father of S. Amarjit Singh Sandhya, former MLA (Constituency Rupnagar) was fair-minded and forward-thinking. It is to be mentioned that after a sudden health deterioration, he was admitted to Parmar Hospital in Rupnagar, where he breathed his last. The Speaker prayed to almighty to grant eternal peace to the departed soul and to provide strength to the family. / DW BUREAU /

## Fake billing scam of crores of rupees unearthed: FM Cheema



DW BUREAU / CHANDIGARH

PUNJAB'S FINANCE Minister Harpal Singh Cheema Friday said an investigation by the state taxation department's enforcement wing has uncovered fake billing scams worth thousands of crores of rupees. Two firms dealing in gold were found to have generated fake bills worth Rs 860 crore, while 303 firms dealing in iron were involved in fake billings of Rs 4,044 crore, he said here.

Additionally, 68 firms were found to have engaged in fake billing of Rs 533 crore after getting their firms registered in other names, he noted.

Cheema, who also holds the Excise and Taxation department portfolio, said, "On inspection of a firm dealing in gold in Amritsar, the enforcement wing found that fake bills of gold worth Rs 336 crore were made by the said firm for sale and purchase of gold".

He said that the registrations of the two firms from which the company showed that it has purchased gold have been

cancelled, and these firms further have no record of purchasing any gold.

Referring to the Ludhiana-based firm, which allegedly did similar manipulation in gold transactions, the finance minister said gold sale-purchase was made against fake bills worth Rs 424 crore by this firm.

In this case, the registrations of the two firms from, which the company showed the purchase of gold have been cancelled, and in this case too, these firms had no record of purchasing any gold.

Apart from this, giving information about the fake sale-purchase of iron worth Rs 4,044 crore by 303 firms, the minister said that 11 firms out of these firms are registered with Punjab, 86 firms with other states, and 206 firms with the central government. He said that of the total 217 firms registered with the Centre and Punjab had an outstanding ITC of 89.7 crore, which has been blocked by the Centre and state governments.

"A total fake ITC of Rs 707 crore was claimed in this case," he said.

Cheema said the state taxation depart-

ment has taken action against all 11 firms, and their registration has been cancelled or suspended, and the action is ongoing as per the law while the list of the remaining 206 firms has been given to the concerned authorities of the central government.

Meanwhile, while giving information about the case of 68 firms involved in fake billing registered in other persons' names, he said the department has identified five persons and filed an FIR against them at Ludhiana and a total of 11 persons have been named.

Bogus billing of Rs 533 crore has been found in this case, "due to which nearly Rs 100 crore of fake ITC has been claimed", he added.

Referring to the efforts being made by the state to prevent tax evasion, the finance minister said that the department is linking the GST registration in the state with Aadhaar-based biometric authentication so that the persons registering in the name of others can be identified and caught in time.

## Power minister orders suspension of PSPCL Sr XEN, two others

DW BUREAU / CHANDIGARH

IN LINE with the Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann led Punjab Government's zero-tolerance policy towards corruption, Punjab Power and Public Works Minister Harbhajan Singh ETO on Friday announced the immediate suspension of a Senior Xen, JE, and Store Keeper for attempted financial malpractice at PSPCL's Kotakpura central reservoir. He said that police action has been also initiated against the employees and the trader involved in the case.

Giving this information in a

press statement issued here, the Power Minister Harbhajan Singh ETO said that the teams of PSPCL's Enforcement Wing and Technical Investigation Wing jointly conducted a surprise checking of Central Warehouse, PSPCL, Kotakpura on July 25, and inspected the ongoing sale of scrap under scrap sale order. He said that this surprise inspection revealed an attempt to conceal new aluminum conductors among scrap goods in one of the three trucks carrying the scrap, potentially causing financial losses to PSPCL.

Power Minister said that the

officials found responsible including Senior Xen (Store) Beant Singh, JE Gurmail Singh, and Store Keeper Nirmal Singh were suspended, and police action was initiated against them and the involved trader. He emphasized that regardless of rank or seniority, no officer will be exempt from accountability if found guilty of negligence or corruption in their duties. "The highest standards of integrity and performance will be expected from all officials, and swift action will be taken against anyone who fails to meet these expectations", he added.

## Health minister Dr Balbir Singh pays tributes to Kargil war heroes

DW BUREAU / CHANDIGARH

TO MARK the 'Silver Jubilee of Kargil Vijay Diwas', Punjab Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Balbir Singh on Friday paid glorious tributes to the heroes of Kargil War by laying a wreath at War Memorial here on Friday.

The Kargil war (Operation Vijay) was fought in Kargil Sector of Jammu & Kashmir from May to July 1999. The brave soldiers of the Armed Forces of India had won this battle by sacrificing their lives and protected the unity and integrity of the country by driving out the enemy soldiers from within the borders of the country. As many as 65 great sons of Punjab had sacrificed their



lives for the Nation during this war. The Kargil Vijay Diwas is being celebrated throughout the country on July 26 to honour the sacrifices of our martyrs.

Apart from Chandigarh, functions were held in Gur-

daspur, Bathinda, Hoshiarpur and Ludhiana where Veer Naris, Gallantry Awardees and disabled soldiers of Kargil Operation were honoured and felicitated by Political Dignitaries and District Administration. Health Minister Dr Balbir

Singh, while addressing the media on the sidelines of the function, said that Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann led Punjab Government is committed for the welfare and rehabilitation of families of martyrs and Ex-servicemen of Punjab.

He assured that all proposal for Ex-servicemen/widows are being approved on priority and the State Government has not been leaving any stone unturned for their welfare.

The Cabinet Minister also interacted with Veterans, NCC Cadets and students of Mai Bhago Armed Forces Preparatory Institute and Maharaja Ranjit Singh Armed Forces Preparatory Institute during the occasion.

## Harsimrat Kaur slams Centre for not granting MSP on crops as per Swaminathan report

DW BUREAU / NEW DELHI

SHIROMANI AKALI Dal MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal on Friday slammed the Union government for not implementing the M.S. Swaminathan Committee's report on the minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

She also demanded reopening the Wagah border for international trade, giving concessions to the cycles and sports industry, and releasing the Rural Development Fund and Sarv Siksha Abhiyan dues to Punjab.

Speaking during the discussion on the Union Budget, the Bathinda MP also called for righting the historical wrongs done to Punjab by giving it compensation for the grant of eight MAF (million acre-feet) water to Rajasthan as well as ensuring the transfer of Chandigarh to the state.

Asserting that the "Sarkar Bachao budget" 2024 had discriminated against the farmers, poor, women and the youth, Harsimrat Badal said: "This budget has only tried to serve the two alliance partner states of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar which received the lion's share of funds along with BJP-ruled states even as all other states had been given a step-motherly treatment."

She said it was shocking that even natural calamities like floods and religious circuits had not been spared from bias. "Religious circuits and temples have received special grants but Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, where two lakh lakh devotees from across the globe visit every day, has not been given any grant under the religious tourism head."

She said similarly the pick-and-choose policy had been implemented in the case of natural calamities as well. "Himachal has received flood relief but Punjab, which is flooded when gates of dams in Himachal are thrown open, has been forgotten."

Asking if the Centre had any



enmity with Punjab, Harsimrat Badal said that "when there are floods, Punjab suffers but when there is water shortage, all parties, including the Congress, the BJP and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) demand the SYL canal be constructed to rob Punjab of its river waters".

Asserting that the issue of cost to be imposed on 8 MAF water given to Rajasthan was dragging since 70 years, she said either water going to Rajasthan should be stopped or compensation should be given to Punjab for the same.

Speaking about how the income of farmers had declined in the past decade, Mrs Badal said the NDA government had promised to double farmer income but the truth was that agri growth which was 4.7 per cent in 2022-23 was now 1.4 per cent. Speaking about the input costs, she said a 40 kg bag of wheat seed which cost Rs 800 to Rs 1200 in 2016 now priced at Rs 2000.

She said even fertilizer prices had nearly tripled during this period. Demanding implementation of the Swaminathan Commission recommendations, Mrs Badal said MSP should be calculated on the basis of fifty per cent profit plus comprehensive cost of production. She said till this is not done the Bhav Antar scheme should be implemented to ensure farmers were compensated for the losses suffered by farmers in selling short of MSP.

## Area under horticulture grows to 4.81 lakh hectares: Jouramajra

DW BUREAU / CHANDIGARH

PUNJAB HORTICULTURE Minister Chetan Singh Jouramajra, on Friday, informed that significant progress has been noticed in crop diversification under Chief Minister S. Bhagwant Singh Mann's leadership.

While presenting statistics showing growth in Punjab's horticultural sector over the past 28 months, S. Chetan Singh Jouramajra said that the total area under horticulture has increased by 42,406 hectares since the current government took office in March 2022. The cultivated area has grown from 4,39,210 hectares to 4,81,616 hectares, indicating a shift towards crop diversification.

The Cabinet Minister detailed that orchard coverage has grown from 96,686 hectares to 1,03,161 hectares, with an increase of 6,475 hectares for fruit cultivation, while Vegetable cultivation has seen a large increase of 35,009 hectares, with the total area growing from 3,21,466 hectares to 3,56,465 hectares in the last 28 months.

The area for ornamental plant cultivation has increased from 1,728 hectares to 2,050 hectares, informed S. Chetan Singh Jouramajra, while noting growth in mushroom cultivation, mentha oil and turmeric production. "These



numbers show the Horticulture Department's efforts and the success of Chief Minister Mann's vision for agricultural diversification in Punjab," said the Cabinet Minister. He said that this shift towards horticulture is important for sustainable farming and improving farmers' incomes in the state.

The increase in horticultural acreage demonstrating the Punjab government's tireless efforts to promote crop diversification and support farmers in adopting alternative, high-value crops, he added.

The Horticulture Minister said that for bolstering crop diversification and promoting horticulture in the state, Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann-led government has also released new nursery rules (amended).



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Chief Minister, Punjab



**₹ 225.60 crore released under the post-matric scholarship scheme for SC students**



**₹ 193.77 crore released to 38,179 SC beneficiaries under Ashirwad scheme**



**₹ 366.00 crore issued for outstanding amounts due under the SC post-matric scholarship scheme for 2017-20**



**₹ 165.00 crore released for distribution of free text books to SC students**

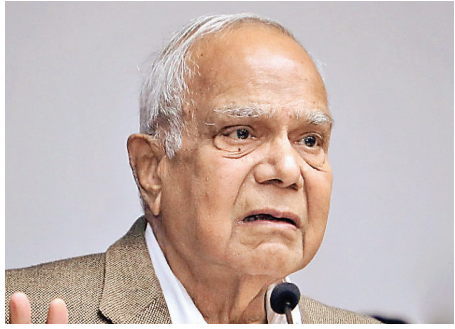


**₹ 94.22 crore released to 18,510 beneficiaries from backward/economically weaker sections**



**Disbursed loans worth ₹ 0.79 crore to 38 beneficiaries under self-employment schemes**

Purohit says will visit border areas even if CM feels bad



CHANDIGARH Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit responded on Friday to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's dig at him for visiting the state's border districts, and said he will not refrain from doing so even if the AAP leader "feels bad". Mann had on Thursday hit out at Purohit, saying he should refrain from creating an "atmosphere of conflict" and instead inaugurate a seminar at a university.

The governor, who earlier had been at log-gerheads with the chief minister over various issues, also asked Mann "not to be afraid of him" and stressed that there was no reason for him to be "upset".

Addressing the media here on Friday evening, Purohit spoke at length about his tours to the six border districts of Pathankot, Amritsar, Ferozpur, Fazilka, Gurdaspur and Tarn Taran.

He stressed that because of his visit, coordination between the police force and central agencies has improved which will help in their efforts to check smuggling of drugs and weapons from Pakistan.

Purohit also said village-level defence committees have been formed in border villages at his instance and that he has also declared cash prizes for villagers helping in the recovery of drones and drugs.

Speaking to reporters in Jalandhar on Thursday, Mann said the governor holds a constitutional post and should fulfil his responsibility "and we will fulfil ours". He was reacting to Purohit's visits to border districts and meetings with villagers and officials of the police and central agencies. Replying to a question about it, Purohit said, "Even if he feels bad about my visit, I will still go." Referring to his current role, the governor said, "I meet all. I meet representatives of every party. I listen to them. There is no politics in me."

On the issue being made out of his visits, Purohit said, "Why the CM saab needs to be afraid of me? Why should the governor be a problem for anybody?" Referring to his first visit to border districts several months back, Purohit told media persons that he came to know about a lack of coordination between central agencies and the state police force.

"How to rectify it, was a challenge for me. People were afraid and they could not muster the courage. In villages, there is a culture that people know each other closely, they live like a family and know who is doing what," he said.

Kangana Ranaut congratulates Modi on poll victory, focuses on challenges in HP



NEW DELHI The nation was anxious over the state of the economy 10 years ago but is now aiming towards becoming the third largest economy in the world, actor-politician Kangana Ranaut said on Friday while commending Prime Minister Narendra on his electoral victory.

In her first major speech in the Lok Sabha, the BJP's first-time MP from Mandi also spoke of the challenges in her home state Himachal Pradesh. "I am a new member of this Parliament, but I am well aware of the importance of the recent elections where Modi ji broke records by winning three consecutive terms," Ranaut said during a discussion on the budget in the Lok Sabha.

"We all know the state of our economy 10 years ago. The entire nation was anxious. However, we have moved up from the 11th to the fifth position and are now aiming for the third, which will help us achieve the goal of a developed India." Ranaut, who spoke in Zero Hour in the House on Thursday, expressed concern over the flood crisis in Himachal Pradesh.

"Last year, we faced a major flood and it is disheartening that Himachal Pradesh has not recovered from it. The situation persists due to the negligence of the Congress government there," Ranaut said.

The "Queen" actor said the amount of work done in the last 10 years is more than what was done in the six decades before that.

"In Himachal Pradesh, the few roads that exist were also built during former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure. Institutions like AIIMS, IIT, and others of global standards have been established in our state now," she said.

Ranaut also proudly highlighted the achievements of her state, saying, "Our Himachal Pradesh is open-defecation free and every household has gas connections." She also called for the development of an international airport in Mandi, emphasising its potential to boost tourism. /PTI/

## Mann slams Centre on issue of farmers protesting on border



DW BUREAU / CHANDIGARH

PUNJAB CHIEF Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday attacked the Centre, saying if the BJP-led government will not allow the protesting farmers camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border to enter Delhi then should he "send them to Lahore".

Farmers from Punjab, led by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, began the 'Delhi Chalo' march on February 13 to press the government to accept their demands which include that the Centre should give a legal guarantee for MSP for crops.

They were stopped by Haryana Police, who had set up barricades, including cemented blocks, on the Ambala-New Delhi national highway. The farmers

have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points ever since.

"At Khanauri and Shambhu, the border has been fortified with iron nails and barricading so that farmers cannot enter Delhi. The government runs from Delhi so they will go there. If they will not go to Delhi, should I send them to Lahore," Mann said while addressing a public meeting in poll-bound Haryana.

The Punjab CM said that even four years ago, the farmers were stopped from entering Delhi.

"As many as 726 farmers died during farmers' protest against now repealed farm laws when they were stopped earlier," he added.

Speaking at the event in Hisar's Barwala, Mann alleged that people of Haryana gave chance to different

parties but they all looted the state.

"If a doctor is not able to cure an ailment then the doctor should be changed," the AAP leader said, adding that like Delhi and Punjab voters, people of Haryana should also "vote for 'badlaw' (change) this time".

Mann touched upon several initiatives of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Punjab and Delhi.

In Punjab, 43,000 government jobs have been given purely on merit basis, the chief minister claimed.

"There have been paper leak incidents in Haryana but in Punjab, you will not hear such things," Mann added.

He said Punjab and Haryana are brothers. "We may have become separate states but our hearts are one," Mann said. "We are giving

600 units of free electricity to everyone per billing cycle of two months in Punjab," he said.

Mann said the AAP government in Delhi has reformed government schools. "Children of poor families are cracking top competitive exams in Delhi now," he said.

"We have taken government to people's doorsteps to facilitate them and make their lives better," Mann said. He urged the people of Haryana not to be carried away by the promises being made by the BJP and Congress.

"Earlier, they (BJP and Congress) used to rule by turns and people had no other option, but now they have an alternative in AAP," Mann said.

"BJP has been in power for 10 years, did they give you any job, did they un-

dertake development," he asked while addressing the gathering.

"I am told if it rains for 1 minutes in Barwala, people have to take out boats, such is the situation," Mann said.

Attacking the BJP government at the Centre, he said during the Lok Sabha polls, the saffron party talked of "400 paar" but now they are running their government with the support of allies.

"Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal belongs to Haryana and he changed the direction of the country's politics. He had said BJP will change constitution if they get overwhelming majority. Thankfully, they did not get majority, otherwise they would have changed the constitution," Mann said.

## Haryana govt doctors' indefinite strike enters second day

CHANDIGARH The indefinite strike called by an association representing government doctors in Haryana that hit services in state-run hospitals entered its second day on Friday. The Haryana Civil Medical Services Association (HCMSA) launched the strike to protest the non-fulfilment of their several demands, including a career progression scheme. Marathon talks between the association and the government on Thursday failed to make much headway.

"The indefinite strike by government doctors continues. Hunger strike by four doctors is also going on simultaneously," HCMSA president

Dr Rajesh Khyalia said on Friday.

He said around 3,000 doctors joined the indefinite strike on Thursday. It hit services in state-run hospitals and long queues were outside OPDs. On Thursday, some patients said they were being treated by interns or retired doctors.

Seeking to resolve the issue, the government had on Wednesday invited the doctors' body for talks here.

State government representatives, including Rajesh Khullar, chief principal secretary to the chief minister, held talks with the doctors' body on Thursday afternoon which was followed by another round of talks

with the ACS (health). The doctors' demands include the formation of a specialist cadre for them and a career progression scheme that ensures parity with their central government peers. According to the association, the doctors have to submit two bonds of Rs 1 crore each for admission to postgraduate courses. It has demanded that the amount be reduced. The other demand raised by the association is to stop the direct recruitment of senior medical officers.

The association said the direct recruitment of senior medical officers will block the growth of hundreds of medical officers awaiting promotion

after the completion of 20 years of service. At the end of the first round of talks, Khyalia told reporters on Thursday that the government had agreed to reduce the bond amount to Rs 50 lakh. Khyalia had also said there was not much headway on the assured career progression issue.

The association has called for a shutdown of health services in government hospitals as a mark of protest over the non-fulfilment of their demands. Health officials have said alternative arrangements had been made in view of the strike call so that not much inconvenience is caused to patients. /PTI/

## Himachal's brave soldiers earned state its 'Vir Bhoomi' name: Minister on Kargil Vijay Diwas

SHIMLA Fifty-two soldiers from Himachal Pradesh sacrificed their lives in the Kargil War, and their role earned the state its moniker 'Vir Bhoomi', cabinet minister Col Dhani Ram Shandil said Friday.

The minister was speaking at a state-level felicitation ceremony held on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Kargil Vijay Diwas at Gaiety Theatre here to felicitate the family members of soldiers killed in Kargil War and ex-servicemen who were part of the 1999 war.

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu also extended his heartfelt gratitude to the soldiers killed in the line of duty during the Kargil War. They sacrificed their lives

for the cause of the nation and fought bravely, facing the harsh and lifeless mountains and cold deserts during the 1999 Kargil War, Sukhu was quoted as saying in a statement.

Shandil, the Sainik Welfare Minister, who attended the Kargil Vijay Diwas ceremony in Shimla, said sacrificing one's life for the nation is the biggest sacrifice.

"In the Kargil War, 52 brave soldiers of Himachal Pradesh sacrificed their lives for the country. We should always remember their sacrifice," he was quoted as saying in a statement.

Since independence, about 1,700 soldiers of Himachal Pradesh have sacrificed their lives for the country -- 52 of them during the Kargil

War, the statement said. In total, 527 soldiers were killed in action during the war, it said.

Shakuntala, wife of Grenadier Naresh Kumar, Neetu Kumari, wife of Shaurya Chakra awardee Rifleman Kulbhushan Manta, Praveen Kumari, wife of Lance Naik Kishori Lal were felicitated at the ceremony.

Ex-servicemen who were a part of the Kargil war were also honoured at the function. These included Subedar Ratan Sisodia, Subedar Major Diwakar Dutt Sharma, Subedar Major Sham Lal Sharma, Subedar Major Kailash Chauhan, Subedar Ved Prakash Sharma, Havildar Lakshmi Dutt Sharma, Havildar Ram Lal, Havildar Praveen, Subedar Ram Lal. /PTI/

## HP: NH-3 REOPENED AFTER FLASH FLOODS, MET PREDICTS HEAVY RAINS TILL JULY 30

SHIMLA The Manali-Leh National Highway 3 has been opened for vehicular traffic, officials said on Friday, two days after a section of the road was blocked between Dhundi and Palchan Bridge following a flash flood. The deluge was caused by a cloudburst at the Anjani Mahadev nullah in Manali around Wednesday midnight. The road was thrown open on Thursday evening by the Border Road Organisation

(BRO), the officials added. The traffic was earlier being routed via Rohtang Pass.

Flash floods triggered by the cloudburst swept away three houses and critically damaged another one, leaving four families homeless. The affected families are putting up at a school for the time being.

The Shimla meteorological office on Friday issued a 'yellow' alert of heavy rainfall at isolated places in eight out of

12 districts of the state for the next four days till July 30.

It cautioned about damage to plantations and standing crops, vulnerable structures and 'kutchra' houses due to strong winds, and waterlogging in low-lying areas.

Intermittent rains continued to lash parts of the state, with Dharamshala recording 53.6 mm of downpour, followed by Shimla 50 mm, Brahmani 40.6 mm, Sundernagar 45 mm, Gohar 40 mm, Slapper 32.3 mm, Baggi 31.4 mm, Dhaulakuan 31 mm, Jubberhatti 21.2 mm, Kasauli 12 mm, Dalhousie 11 mm and Manali 10 mm. /PTI/

## Briefly

**HARYANA AWARDS HIGHEST PRIZE MONEY TO OLYMPIC MEDAL WINNERS: CM NAYAB**



CHANDIGARH Olympic Games-2024, often referred to as the "Maha Kumbh of sports," commenced in Paris today. India will be represented by a contingent of 115 athletes, with 25 of these athletes hailing from Haryana. Haryana Chief Minister Shri Nayab Singh Saini extended his heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to the players from the state and the entire country. He expressed confidence in their abilities and hoped they would excel in their respective events, bringing glory and honor to India on the global stage. Nayab Singh Saini said that the selection of 22 percent players from Haryana, which has 2 percent population, is a matter of great pride for the entire state of Haryana. He said that both the Haryana Government and its people recognize the immense dedication, hard work, and perseverance required to compete at this level. They are also aware of the physical and mental challenges athletes face while preparing for such prestigious events. Consequently, the state government is committed to continuously supporting the athletes through various incentive schemes. /DW BUREAU /

**BUDGET IGNORED HARYANA, VOTERS WILL IGNORE BJP DURING POLLS: DEEPENDER HOODA**

NEW DELHI Several Congress MPs from Haryana on Friday protested in Parliament complex for the government's alleged neglect of the state in the Union Budget and said people will similarly ignore the BJP in the upcoming assembly elections there. Rohtak MP Deepender Hooda claimed that the Budget has made no provision for Haryana and party colleagues from the state were targeted by Union minister Lalan Singh for raising the issue in the House. Singh asked them to focus on what the Budget has for the country and not Haryana, he said. "Is Haryana not part of the country? The government has objection even at us making demand for the state. Let me tell them that people will ignore the BJP in the polls in the same manner the Budget has ignored the state," Hooda said. The assembly polls in the BJP-ruled state are expected to be held in October. /PTI/

**EIGHT INJURED AS BUS SKIDS OFF ROAD IN HIMACHAL**

MANALI (HP) A bus skidded off the road and fell on the banks of the Beas river near Himachal Pradesh's Manali on Friday, leaving eight people injured, police said. The bus with 12 people on board was on its way to Pathankot from Manali when the accident took place. Locals rushed to the spot and immediately alerted authorities. The police along with locals started the rescue operation and transported the injured to nearby hospitals. A car was also damaged in the accident. A case has been registered and further investigations are underway. /PTI/

**BEAUTIFICATION PROJECTS WORTH RS 46 LAKH IN HISAR INAUGURATED**

CHANDIGARH Haryana Minister of Civil Aviation and Health Dr Kamal Gupta inaugurated various projects in Hisar Assembly constituency today symbols of national pride have been installed at various squares in Hisar. He said that he is committed to undertaking as many development projects as possible in the city. The development achieved by the Haryana government over the last 10 years has been possible due to the double-engine government. Dr. Kamal Gupta inaugurated three beautification projects worth Rs. 46 lakhs in Hisar today. He stated that the government has been focusing on uniform development of the state over the past 10 years. The Municipal Corporation is rapidly carrying out development and beautification works in the city. Dr. Kamal Gupta inaugurated a replica of the Red Fort at Tuls Chowk, built at a cost of approximately Rs.20 lakh, replica of Chandrayana near Laxmibai Chowk, built at a cost of Rs.17 lakh, and replica of India Gate at the entry point from Sector 9-11 Delhi Road, constructed at a cost of around Rs.9 lakh. He stated that Chief Minister, Sh. Nayab Singh Saini is working with a spirit of public service, launching various schemes for the welfare of the people. /DW BUREAU /

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## AAP: Kejriwal treated as 'political prisoner', efforts to scare him



NEW DELHI AAP alleged on Friday that the BJP-led central government is treating Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as a "political prisoner" and said all INDIA bloc parties have given in-principle approval to attend a protest to support him on July 30 at Jantar Mantar. At a press conference here, AAP general secretary (organisation) Sandeep Pathak claimed that Kejriwal's blood sugar level dropped to 50 mg/dL and below 34 times in jail between June 3 and July 7.

"Dictators imprison people due to their political animosity, and Arvind Kejriwal is also a political prisoner," he said and added that the opposition alliance will join the protest to support Kejriwal.

"Efforts are being made to scare Kejriwal but he is not going to be afraid. This is not a question of an individual or the Aam Aadmi Party but to save the country and the system from the whims of a dictator," Pathak said.

This issue has been considered by the INDIA bloc parties and there is "consensus" that this is not a question of any one party or a person but of saving the system of the country and protecting it from being ruined by any one person, he added.

"The heads of all the constituent parties of the INDIA bloc have agreed in principle to attend the protest, Pathak claimed.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh is reaching out to leaders

of various parties to urge them to attend the protest at Jantar Mantar, he said.

Pathak said Kejriwal is a chronic diabetic and a drop in the blood sugar level is dangerous for him. It can cause sudden unconsciousness and the patient may even slip into a coma, he added.

He also lashed at the Delhi LG and the leaders of BJP for statements that the Delhi chief minister was not taking adequate quantity of food in jail to effect a "deliberate" drop in his blood sugar level.

Kejriwal is not only a three-time chief minister who is admired and supported by millions, but the political future of the country also depends on him, Pathak asserted.

"It is a very serious matter that

such a person is held captive in jail in a fluctuating state of his blood sugar level," he added.

Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21 in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged liquor scam. He was later also arrested by the CBI after he got bail from a trial court.

The AAP's national convener was arrested by the CBI to keep him "forcibly imprisoned and tortured" and his life is being put at risk, Pathak claimed. Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said calling Kejriwal a political prisoner is an "insult" to freedom fighters and emergency detainees, and Pathak should tender an apology for it. /PTI/

## Briefly

### SATISFIED WITH POLICE PROBE INTO THREAT TO LIFE, HAVE ALWAYS BEEN WITH CM ADITYANATH: BJP MLA

GORAKHPUR (UP) BJP MLA from Caimpiyarganj, Fateh Bahadur Singh, who has accused a party worker of plotting to get him killed, on Friday said he was satisfied with the progress of the police investigation into his complaint.

Emphasising his long-standing loyalty to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, he said, "I have always been with hon'ble Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ji and continue to stand by him." Last week, Singh, a former minister in Uttar Pradesh, had accused police of inaction in the matter. "I want to clarify that the Y-plus category security provided to me for the past five years is due to the hon'able chief minister. Under his leadership, Uttar Pradesh has made significant progress, which is being recognised nationwide," the seven-time MLA said in a statement issued on Friday. /PTI/

### NADDA SLAMS CONGRESS, SAYS MODI GOVT DEDICATED TO NATIONAL SECURITY



NEW DELHI BJP president J P Nadra on Friday asked if the Congress has the moral strength to commemorate 'Kargil Vijay Diwas', as he cited the party's alleged involvement in several scams linked to defence purchases and neglect of the needs of the armed forces when it was in power. Addressing an event to mark the 25th anniversary of India's victory over Pakistani forces in the Kargil war, he said opposition leaders should introspect if they have turned against the interests of the country in their quest to criticise Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Modi government has boosted border infrastructure to ensure quick movement of troops, armed defence forces with modern weaponry and fulfilled their long-pending demand for 'one-rank-one-seniority', he said. The prime minister and his government are dedicated to the country's security, he said. /PTI/

### JK ADMN CLEARS PROPOSALS FOR TRANSFER OF LAND FOR INDUSTRIAL ESTATES

SRINAGAR Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Council on Friday approved proposals for the transfer of land for industrial estates in various districts, an official spokesman said. The council met under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha. A total of 3,188 kanals and 8 marlas of land has been transferred to the Industries and Commerce Department for the purpose, the spokesman said. The transferred land parcels are in Kupwara, Bandipora, Anantnag, Pulwama, Baramulla and Budgam districts. Development of industrial infrastructures has been a focus area post-2019 and has been considered as main vehicle for accelerating economic activity besides providing employment, the spokesman said. /PTI/

### UP DEPUTY CM MAURYA HITS BACK, SAYS AKHILESH YADAV HAS BECOME 'PAWN' OF CONGRESS

LUCKNOW UP Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya on Friday alleged that SP chief Akhilesh Yadav has become a "pawn" of the Congress. Maurya was reacting to Yadav's remarks in which he had alleged that corruption in the state is being exposed because some people such as Maurya have become pawns and passwords of "Delhi's Wi-Fi". Yadav apparently meant that Maurya is acting on the directions of party big wigs in Delhi. "SP Bahadur Akhilesh Yadav, who has become a pawn of the Congress, should focus on saving the SP (Samajwadi Party) from extinction instead of having misconceptions about the BJP, targeting the backward and insulting them," Maurya said in a post on X in Hindi on Friday. In the same post, Maurya said, "The BJP will repeat 2017 in 2027. The lotus has bloomed and will keep blooming." The 2017 assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh were held during Keshav Prasad Maurya's tenure as BJP state president, in which the party. /PTI/

## Delhi HC asks police to reply to MP Mahua Moitra's plea to quash FIR

NEW DELHI The Delhi High Court on Friday asked the city police to respond to Trinamool Congress (TMC) Lok Sabha MP Mahua Moitra's plea seeking quashing of an FIR registered over an alleged "derogatory" social media remark on NCW chief Rekha Sharma. Justice Neena Bansal Krishna issued a notice to the Delhi Police on the petition and asked it to file a status report within four weeks.

The high court listed the matter for arguments on the legality and validity of the FIR, as challenged in the petition, on November 6.

The police registered an FIR against Moitra this month Under Section 79 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) that deals with a word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman.

This was the first FIR registered under the BNS by the Delhi Police's Special Cell since it came into force on July 1.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader had commented on a video posted on X that showed National Commission for Women (NCW) chief Rekha Sharma arriving at the site of a stampede in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras on July 4.

Moitra later deleted the post, which referred to a man holding an umbrella and walking behind Sharma.

During the hearing, senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for Moitra, submitted that they were not provided with a copy of the FIR despite asking for it. She said she came to know about the FIR through media.

The counsel for the police then handed over the FIR copy to the petitioner's counsel in the court.



Besides the FIR, Moitra has also challenged the letters written by Sharma and NCW joint secretary to the Lok Sabha Speaker and Delhi Police Commissioner, respectively, seeking action against her.

The counsel appearing for the police raised objection to the prayer and said it was not maintainable.

The FIR stated that the NCW took suo motu (on its own) cognisance of Moitra's alleged "derogatory remarks" and the FIR was lodged on a complaint by the NCW.

The FIR said, "The crude remarks made by Moitra are extremely outrageous and a sheer violation of a woman's right to live with dignity".

The NCW had earlier alleged Moitra's remark was "outrageous and a violation of a woman's right to dignity", observing that it attracted Section 79 of the BNS.

"An FIR should be registered against Moitra and a detailed action report should be communicated to the commission within three days," it had said in a post on X. /PTI/

## Rahul Gandhi appears in UP court, calls defamation case against 'cheap publicity'



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on his way to appear at a district court in connection with a defamation case, in Sultanpur, Friday, July 26, 2024. /PTI/

SULTANPUR (UP) Congress leader Rahul Gandhi appeared before an MP-MLA court here on Friday in a defamation case against him and said it was filed to gain "cheap publicity". According to Gandhi's lawyer Kashi Prasad Shukla, the Congress MP, who appeared before Special Judge Shubham Verma, said he never made a statement against anyone that could lead to a case of defamation.

Local BJP leader Vijay Mishra filed the complaint on August 4, 2018, against Rahul Gandhi for his alleged objectionable comments against Amit Shah at a press conference in Bengaluru in May of that year during the Karnataka elections.

The complainant referred to Gandhi's comment that the BJP claims to believe in honest and clean politics but has a party president who is an "accused" in a murder case. Shah was BJP president when Gandhi made the comment. About four years before Gandhi's remark, a spe-

cial CBI court in Mumbai discharged Shah in a 2005 fake encounter case when he was a minister of state for home in Gujarat.

The MP-MLA court in Sultanpur fixed August 12 as the next date of hearing in the matter when the statement of the petitioner will be recorded. Sources said Gandhi need not appear in the court on that date.

Advocate Santosh Kumar Pandey, representing Mishra, said Gandhi has recorded his statement before the judge and evidence will be presented on August 12. On his way back to Lucknow after attending the court proceedings, Gandhi stopped at the shop of a cobbler on the outskirts of Sultanpur and spoke to him about his problems.

Gandhi halted his 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Amethi on February 20 and appeared in the court which granted him bail. On Friday morning, Congress workers gathered at the civil court in Sultanpur in large numbers for Gandhi's arrival. /PTI/



UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a Kargil Vijay Diwas function, in the Central Command, Lucknow, Thursday, July 26, 2024. /PTI/

## Kanwar Yatra: SC extends interim stay on directives issued by UP

NEW DELHI The Supreme Court on Friday extended till further orders its interim direction staying the directives of BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh which effectively ensured that 'Kanwar Yatra' goes on without displaying the names of owners, staff and other details of eateries along the route. The Kanwar Yatra began on July 22 and ends on August 6.

A large number of devotees travel from various places with 'kanwars' carrying holy water from the Ganga to perform 'jalabhishek' of Shivlings during the Hindu calendar month of 'Shravan'. Many believers shun consuming meat during the month they consider holy. Many don't even consume meals containing onions and garlic.

A bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and S V N Bhatti said it won't issue any clarification on the July 22 order as "we have said what needed to be said in our July 22 order. Can't force anyone to disclose names." "List the matter on August 5, 2024. In the meantime, interim order passed by this court on July 22, 2024 shall continue," the bench said in its order.

The bench asked the Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments to file their response to the pleas challenging their directives. It also allowed the petitioners to file their responses to the replies of the state governments.

Apart from the Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments, the BJP-controlled civic body of Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh had allegedly issued a similar directive. Ujjain is home to the famous "Mahakal" temple to Lord Shiva.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for UP, said their stand is that the directive is the requirement under law.

He urged the court to take up the matter next Monday otherwise the issue will become infructuous. There is huge rush of devotees at Shiva temples on Mondays, especially during the month of Shravan.

"We have suffered ex-parte order and without hearing us, the order was stayed," he submitted, adding that the interim order is not in line with the central law.

The bench said if there is any law governing eateries and shops, the state should enforce it across areas under its jurisdiction. "Let the law be enforced all across the state and not only in certain areas. You please file an affidavit showing that the law has been enforced all over," Justice Roy told Rohatgi.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Mahua Moitra, said if this law mandating display of names and other details has not been put into force for the past 60 years, the issue can be taken up in due course of time and let the yatra continue without enforcing it. He submitted the UP's reply was supplied at 10:30 p.m. yesterday and he needed time to respond.

Deputy Advocate General for Uttarakhand Jatinder Kumar Sethi said the state has not issued any specific order with respect to Kanwar Yatra and the government was only enforcing laws that mandated disclosure of the names of eateries during all festivals.

He said Kanwar Yatra is an annual pilgrimage in which a large number of people participate, and to avoid any mischief, the state needs to enforce the law. Sethi urged the bench to allow the state to take action to implement two laws under which it was mandatory for shops and business establishments to

display their registration certificates and identity cards. He said the apex court's interim order was coming in the way of enforcing those laws.

The two laws he referred to are: Food Safety and Standards (Registration and Licensing) Regulations, 2011 (a central law) and Uttarakhand Panchayat Raj Bylaws (a state legislation).

"We are anticipating a law and order problem, if the law is not enforced effectively," Sethi said. The bench, however, refused to pass any such order.

Advocate Barun Sinha and another counsel appearing for intervenors urged the court to lift the stay or issue a clarification otherwise Kanwariyas will get misled and eat at eateries where onions and garlic are served. The bench said it has not prevented anyone from voluntarily displaying the names of owners and other details and its stay was only against forced disclosure of names.

Advocate Sunny Chaudhary, standing counsel for Madhya Pradesh clarified that the Ujjain municipal body has not issued any order for disclosing the names of owners of eateries and other details, and the court has passed the July 22 order against it while relying on a news report cited by the petitioners.

On July 22, the apex court ordered an interim stay on the directives issued by the BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh governments.

"...we deem it appropriate to pass an interim order prohibiting the enforcement of the impugned directives. In other words, the food sellers (including dhaba owners, restaurants, foods and vegetable sellers, hawkers, etc) may be required to display the kind of food that they are serving to the Kanwariyas. /PTI/

## Untreated solid waste in Delhi may lead to public health emergency, says SC; slams MCD

NEW DELHI Over 3,000 tons of untreated solid waste per day in Delhi may lead to a "public health emergency", the Supreme Court said on Friday while voicing concern over poor implementation of the Solid Waste Management Rules in the national capital. The apex court, which slammed the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) over the "sorry state of affairs", observed that the national capital generates over 11,000 tons of solid waste per day, while the daily capacity of processing plants made available by the corporation was only 8,073 tons.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih noted that as per MCD's

affidavit, there is no possibility of creating treatment facilities even till 2027 to deal with 11,000 tons of solid waste generated daily.

Senior advocate Aparajita Singh, assisting the top court as an amicus curiae in the matter related to solid waste management, told the bench that this may lead to public health emergency as there are data, both in Indian and foreign journals, that people are dying because of pollution in the country.

"We are worried about this. In the capital city, this is the state of affairs of the 2016 rules where we are generating un-treated solid waste of above 3,000 tons per day, and with

every day, it will increase," the bench said.

"We don't see light at the end of the tunnel as going by the affidavit (of MCD) and assuming that the timelines mentioned therein are abided by, there is no possibility of creating (additional treatment) facilities in Delhi even till 2027 which will have capacity to deal with 11,000 tons of solid waste every day," it said.

The bench said no guess work was required to say that generation of solid waste will multiply many times by that time.

"We agree with the amicus curiae that this will lead to public health emergency," it said, adding, "This is a sorry

state of affairs when it comes to implementation of Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, in the capital city". The bench directed the secretary of the Union environment ministry to convene a meeting of officials of the MCD and the Delhi government for working out an immediate solution to the issue.

It asked the secretary to submit a report about immediate measures which can be taken for ensuring that non-compliance with the 2016 rules does not create a serious emergency in Delhi.

It also referred to a separate affidavit filed on behalf of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. /PTI/

# EDITORIAL

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

SATURDAY 27 JULY 2024  
CHANDIGARH

## HIV NEW CURE

AN EXPERIMENTAL cancer drug may hold the key to clearing HIV from infected brain cells, according to a new study. The study led by Dr. Woong-Ki Kim at Tulane University, US, reveals that the drug significantly reduced levels of Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV) in the brain -- nonhuman primate equivalent of HIV in humans. For the first time, scientists at the Tulane National Primate Research Center targeted specific immune cells harbouring the virus in the brain. Dr Kim called the findings "an important step in tackling brain-related issues caused by HIV". Even though there are effective medications for HIV, it still leads to brain issues.

The drug which "specifically targets the infected cells in the brain, may be able to clear the virus from the hidden areas" -- a major challenge in HIV treatment, said Dr Kim.

The challenge of eliminating HIV from the brain stems from the blood-brain barrier, which protects the brain but also prevents effective treatment. The virus hides in long-lived cells known as macrophages, contributing to neurocognitive issues in nearly half of those living with HIV. In the study, published in the journal *Brain*, researchers used the small molecule inhibitor BLZ945, previously studied for ALS and brain cancer, to block a receptor in HIV-infected macrophages. This led to a 95-99 per cent reduction in viral DNA in the brain without harming microglia, essential for brain health, or causing liver toxicity.

The study employed three groups of primates: an untreated control group and two groups treated with low or high doses of the drug for 30 days. The high-dose group showed a significant reduction in HIV receptor sites.

The next step involves testing this therapy alongside antiretroviral treatment (ART) to evaluate its potential in a comprehensive HIV eradication strategy.

This innovative approach could revolutionise HIV treatment and significantly improve the quality of life for those affected by the virus.

## How to be ready to keep fit and healthy

FOCUS ON the process of maintaining a healthy lifestyle is more important than the end goal, said a top neurologist on Friday, highlighting measures to remain motivated while on a healthy lifestyle journey. Embarking on a journey towards a healthier lifestyle can be challenging, but staying motivated is the key to long-term success.

Taking to a post on the social media platform X, Dr Sudhir Kumar from Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, Hyderabad offered practical advice to maintain motivation while also achieving lasting health improvements. "Focusing on the process rather than fixating solely on the end goal is crucial," Dr Kumar said. Emphasising the importance of enjoying daily activities that contribute to health, such as walking or running, he said "Choose activities you enjoy, as this increases the likelihood of regular participation".

Dr Kumar also highlighted the benefits of starting the day early with outdoor activities. "Embracing mornings can boost your mood and energy levels. The fresh air, sunrise, and sounds of nature invigorate the senses and fill you with positive energy," he explained. Strength training is another essential component of a healthy lifestyle, he said.

"Incorporating strength training

can improve overall well-being. This can be done at home if gym access is limited, but it's good to seek guidance from a fitness trainer to ensure proper technique and progression," said the neurologist.

Regarding diet, he advised to make simple and sustainable changes. "Gradually shift to a diet you can maintain long-term. This makes it easier to stick to healthy eating habits," he said.

Dr Kumar also stressed the importance of cutting down on sugar, including alternatives like honey and jaggery. "Reducing sugar intake can diminish cravings over time. It may take a month to adjust, but the long-term benefits are worth it," he said. He also recommended adjusting plate proportions from being carb-heavy to protein-rich.

"This change can be introduced gradually to avoid significant resistance from family members," Dr Kumar said. In addition, he suggested tracking progress by monitoring metrics such as weight, waist circumference, blood pressure, and blood test results. "Seeing improvements can be a powerful motivator," he said, also urging people to share the stories and inspire others which "can further boost your motivation."

YAJURVINDRA SINGH

## Their bravery prevailed against all odds on that fateful day

/ SATISH DUA /

**T**wenty-five years ago in 1999, India achieved victory over Pakistan in Kargil after the Indian Army evicted the Pakistani Army personnel who had sneaked in and occupied mountain peaks on the Indian territory.

The Kargil Vijay Diwas on July 26 celebrates the bravery of the Indian soldiers and young leaders who prevailed against all odds, and at a great cost.

A total of 527 officers and men laid down their lives to protect the territorial integrity of our country in Kargil. The younger cross-section made the nation proud. We salute them.

The Kargil conflict was technically not a war, but it was no less than a war in any respect, least of all in the bravery displayed by our soldiers and young leaders. It was not a war because a national emergency was not declared and the war remained localised to Kargil district.

Kargil is a district in Ladakh with remarkable scenic beauty. It was a part of the erstwhile J&K state before becoming a part of the Union Territory of Ladakh after the bifurcation of J&K into two UTs in 2019.

The Line of Control between India and Pakistan runs through the mountainous and rugged terrain of Kargil. The altitude of these snow-covered mountains ranges from 11,000 feet to over 18,000 feet. Why did Pakistan try to occupy the inhospitable snow-covered mountain peaks in Kargil?

First, we must understand what happened at the Siachen glacier to the west of Kargil over a decade earlier. In the eighties, Indian and Pakistan Armies confronted each other at the Siachen glacier.

It was my Battalion that executed the highest attack in the world and captured the Pakistan Quaid post at 21,153 feet, which was later renamed Bana Top in honour of Honorary Capt Bana Singh, PVC, whose section finally assaulted the post.

Stung by this loss, three months later the Special Services Group of Pakistan launched a riposte, which was successfully beaten back. It was launched by their commander, Brig Parvez Musharraf.

Smarting from that defeat, he planned Kargil intrusions when he became the Army Chief, initially without political consent. By occupying these mountain peaks, he hoped to



cut off the road leading from Srinagar to Leh and Siachen.

In 1999, Pakistan sent soldiers across the LoC to Kargil, in areas lightly held by both sides during winters. This was happening as PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee travelled to Lahore on a bus to take the peace process forward -- it was deception at the national level. We were stabbed in the back.

As a conflict, it was rare, if not unique, that it was not allowed to escalate into a full-blown war due to the responsible behaviour on India's part, and the unparalleled bravery displayed by its soldiers.

Not only the conflict was limited to LoC, but also localised to Kargil.

How was that achieved?

It was achieved by the responsible behaviour on the part of India. Indian Army did not cross the LoC. Otherwise, it would have made operational sense to cut off their forces from their logistic bases by launching operations across the LoC. The Indian Air Force also operated with their hands tied behind their backs, as the aircraft were also not allowed to cross the LoC. Our fighter aircraft could have caused heavy damage to the enemy's operational and logistic infrastructure from across the LoC.

Why was it important to retain the sanctity of the LoC after Pakistan had violated it themselves?

It was perhaps the only time when two nuclear nations had gone to war, and the world was watching with bated breath. The US was particularly anxious that the conflict should not spiral out of control as it made conciliation efforts with the leadership from both countries. However, this came at a cost. The soldiers had to launch frontal

attacks to evict the enemy from the mountain peaks, and all assaults were uphill, making our task much more difficult and risky. Yet, it did not deter the soldiers and the young leaders, who proudly went into attack with a fanatical gleam in their eyes, without any fear in their minds. They made us proud. They were drawn from the youth of the country.

Not only did the youth contribute, but the whole nation was supporting the military efforts.

Bravery on the frontline was matched by the 'Joshi' of the nation. As a Commanding Officer, I received a telegram from an officer of my unit, who had been boarded out on medical grounds, saying he wanted to rejoin the Battalion to fight the enemy during the war.

While there is no provision for such participation, it does not take anything away from his 'Joshi' and 'Jazba', his patriotism, bravery, and enthusiasm to participate in combat at grave risk to his life. Such instances abound in our country and make us proud as Indians. The youth always make us proud.

It was also India's first televised war. On one hand, the country watched the progress of operations in real-time, and on the other, it showed the human side of war - the supreme sacrifices made by the officers and soldiers, the heartbreaking sight of their families, and the outpouring of the nationalistic sentiment at the funerals.

When Capt Vikram Batra returned victorious after recapturing a mountain peak, he famously told Barkha Dutt, "Yeh Dil Maange More..."

He fired up the imagination of the youth, and indeed the whole nation. And he laid down his life in the next

attack he led, from the front. He was only 24.

So were many others - they were all in their early twenties. And they led seasoned soldiers who were 10, some even 20 years elder to them. The mood of the nation could only be experienced by those who lived in it at that time.

The Kargil conflict also ushered in military reforms. After it was over, the Kargil Review Committee under K. Subrahmanyam recommended huge changes to structures and processes.

The L.K. Advani-led Group of Ministers and the Arun Singh Task Force went into details, and Tri-Services structures like HQ Integrated Defence Staff, Andaman & Nicobar Command, and Strategic Forces were raised. The government, however, stopped short of appointing a CDS, who was appointed in 2020.

The silver jubilee of Kargil Vijay Diwas not only gives us a justified opportunity to celebrate and honour India's bravehearts, but it also throws on us a responsibility to reflect on the lessons learnt and apply them in today's context.

While the Kargil conflict was the first televised war in India, today's wars will be fought across a multi-domain spectrum, and we need to develop capabilities accordingly.

It also taught us a valuable lesson that we need to be self-reliant in weapons, ammunition, and other war-like stores. In this regard, a great push is being given to 'Aatmanirbharta' in defence. The Kargil conflict was unique in many ways, as we have just seen. But the one thing that stands out is the bravery of the soldiers and the young leaders leading from the front, by personal example.

They were all drawn from the youth of India, both rural and urban areas.

I would like to sign off with a message for the youth - you don't have to join the army to serve the country. The growth story of India needs all the skill sets of the youth. You can also serve the country by doing what you do to the best of your abilities. And if you want to show your respect to a soldier, be a good citizen - a citizen worth dying for.

/ IANS /  
-Jai Hind.

LT GENERAL SATISH DUA (RETD) is a former Corps Commander in Kashmir who retired as Chief of Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal.

## Public resentment over China plan to raise retirement age

K J M VARMA

**T**he ruling Chinese Communist Party's plan to raise the retirement age of the working population to cope with the rapidly ageing population has created ripples of resentment among the public.

According to the present structure, the retirement age for male workers in urban areas is 60 years while that for female workers is 50 or 55 depending on their occupation.

The recently concluded third plenum of the Communist Party of China (CPC) has unveiled comprehensive reforms to advance the modernisation of the economy -- plagued by a deepening demographic crisis, sluggish growth and mounting local government debt.

The powerful body also discussed plans to raise the country's retirement age in a "voluntary and flexible" manner.

The World Population Prospects 2024 report released on July 11 said that China's population, currently 1.41 billion in 2024, will fall to 1.21 billion in 2054 and further decline to 633 million by 2100.

"It is anticipated that China, the country currently with the world's second-largest population, will likely experience the largest absolute population loss between 2024 and 2054 (204 million)," the report said, adding, "Longer-range population projections are more uncertain for China."

The population and its composition by the end of year 2023, according to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, states that the popula-

tion aged 60 and above was 21.1 per cent (296.97 million) of the total and of which, aged 65 and above was 15.4 per cent (216.76 million). The population in the working age bracket, i.e. between 16 and up to 60 years is 61.3 per cent (864.81 million).

The official document approved by the plenum, held here last week, listed over 300 policy measures as part of the wide-ranging reforms to be completed by 2029. However, the CPC has not officially announced any schedule to implement the plan to increase the retirement age.

According to the document, the government would move to increase the retirement age in an "orderly" and "gradual" way and seek to develop the "silver economy" to create diverse jobs for older people. But the plan, which has

been in the works for several years, has generated a backlash in Chinese social media with people expressing their dissatisfaction over the prospect of delayed access to their pensions while younger employees averring that the rise of the retirement age will leave them with fewer jobs if the older workers stay.

People also shared a forecast by the state-run Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2019 stating that China's state pension fund would run dry by 2035 because of its dwindling workforce amid increased concerns.

Peng Peng, executive chairman of the Guangdong Society of Reform, a think tank connected to the provincial government, said delaying retirement might be a double-edged sword in today's economy. "It could reduce the finan-

cial burden on local governments, but it might also increase employment pressure, which is a typical example of the complexity of current reforms," Peng told the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post.

However, Feng Jin, an economics professor at Fudan University specialising in social security, said it was inevitable that the retirement age would rise and a "voluntary and flexible" increase might prove easier for people to accept.

"Delaying retirement faces opposition from some, particularly those with lower incomes and uneasy working conditions; after age 50, their wages remain low with limited growth potential, so they prefer to retire early and start receiving pension sooner," she said. / PTI /

### Bird's eye view

## Indian Cricket at the 'Pearl of the Indian Ocean'

**S**ri Lanka previously Ceylon, was known as the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean" due to its pristine water and beaches. The "emerald island" was another name given to it because of the shape of the country and the lush green tea gardens and forests that it encompassed.

Similar to India, cricket has been a sport revered there because of the British. It was only in 1981 that they finally got recognised as a Test playing nation by the ICC.

Cricket encounters between the two countries have always been interesting battles, as both India and Sri Lanka play the same brand of cricket.

Indian cricket is at present in full force in the beautiful Island, with both the men and

women cricketers there. The women are in scintillating form in the Asia Cup being played there and have qualified to play their semi-final match against Bangladesh.

The Indian women's team looks head and shoulders above the rest of the Asian sides and are the favourite to win the trophy. The Indian men's T20 World Cup win has somehow put that extra pep into the women as well. A stamp of authority is what one sees in their approach and both the batters and bowlers have been in pristine form.

A win in the Asia Cup, a trophy that the Indian women's side has won in 8 of the 9 editions, should hold them in good stead for the T20 World Cup to follow in October 2024 in Bangladesh. The Indian side

looks a formidable one having beaten Bangladesh convincingly in a 5 match T20 series and South Africa in the Test and One Day International encounters. A Test match victory earlier in the year against a strong Australian side should also augur well for the growing confidence of the Indian women players.

India winning both the men and the women's ICC T20 World Cups would truly be a feather in their cap. One can just imagine the repeat of the men's welcome celebration bestowed now upon the women, leading through Marine Drive, the famous Queen's necklace. It would be an ideal setting to anoint the King and Queen of world cricket.

The women's side under the guidance of their coach, Amol

Muzumdar, have a difficult task at hand, but the way Smriti Mandhana, Harmanpreet Kaur, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Richa Gosh, Jemima Rodrigues and the others are performing, India looks like a very forceful side for any of their opponents to beat.

Meanwhile, the Indian men's side under the newly appointed captain Suryakumar Yadav and the coach, Gautam Gambhir, will be transforming into a new beginning without 3 of their legendary T20 stalwarts, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja. India are the World Champions and even without them, they have the bench strength to do well. Although, the selectors have appointed Shubman Gill as the vice captain, one felt that with the next T20

World Cup 2 years away and the T20 cricket in the Olympics in 2028, appointing a younger player as a captain would have been far more beneficial.

Sri Lanka, after their disastrous outing in the T20 World Cup '24, will be itching to get back on their feet. For them to not qualify for the "Super 8", of the T20 WC must have been a nightmare that needs to be forgotten. A T20 series win against India, would definitely give their reputation a big boost. They now have nothing to lose and playing at home could be just the tonic for them to do well.

Sri Lanka is not only active on the cricket ground, but behind the closed-doors as well. The ICC meeting, with 108 members attending it got

over yesterday. The next T20 World Cup, as announced, will have 8 regional qualifying zones. This is great news, as cricket is gradually spreading far and wide. One gathers that cricket in the Olympics was the major topic of discussion. Los Angeles will finally have cricket in the Olympics after 128 years and one hopes it continues to be there for years to come.

The Olympics is the ultimate sporting platform for a sportsman representing one's country. Hearing one's national anthem after a podium finish, along with a medal, is the glory that one aspires for. Both the Indian men's and women's cricket teams have this goal to achieve and one that will warm the hearts of the millions of their supporters if they do so.

The BCCI's financial contribution towards the Indian Olympic squad is a wonderful gesture. The hours of dedicated and, at most times the painful hard-work that go into being an international competitive sportsman are tough and arduous. To give them support in any way one can is the only way to appreciate them.

One hopes for a glorious Olympics for India. The women's Asia Cup win and the Men's T20 and ODI series wins would be just the icing on the cake.

The eyeballs of sports lovers will be glued to the cricket in Sri Lanka and the Olympics in France. / IANS /

YAJURVINDRA SINGH is a former India cricketer. The views expressed are personal.

## EAST, WEST &amp; SOUTH

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## Briefly

## EX-BJP MP RAJDEEP ROY NAMED PARTY IN-CHARGE OF TRIPURA UNIT

AGARTALA Former BJP MP from the Silchar Lok Sabha constituency, Rajdeep Roy, has been appointed as the in-charge of the party's Tripura unit, officials said. The development comes ahead of the panchayat elections on August 8. Roy replaces Mahesh Sharma, a party release said. "Grateful to the Hon'ble National President of Bharatiya Janata Party #JPNadda Ji for appointing me as the Prabhari of Tripura state," Roy said. Chief Minister Manik Saha, BJP state president Rajib Bhattacharjee and former Union minister Pratima Bhoumik were among those who congratulated Roy. "Congratulations and greetings to Rajdeep Roy for being appointed as the party's state in-charge," Saha said in a post on Facebook. Bhattacharjee, in his message, said: "BJP national president J P Nadda has appointed party in-charges for various states. Congratulations to former Silchar MP Rajdeep Roy for being appointed as the party prabhari for Tripura." /PTI/

## MANGROVE PLANTATION DRIVE CARRIED OUT IN 3 COASTAL DISTRICTS OF ODISHA

BHUBANESWAR People in three coastal districts of Odisha on Friday planted mangroves to regenerate denuded coastal forest cover. On the occasion of International Day for Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystem, efforts involving mangrove plantations in cyclone-vulnerable areas of Odisha are being stepped up and awareness campaigns, especially for youths and school children, have been organised by the Reliance Foundation and its partnering organisations. Mangrove ecosystem provides not just livelihood security to coastal communities, but also ecological security along the coastline, officials said. Around 55,000 mangrove plants were planted with Reliance Foundation's support in vulnerable areas in Balasore, Jagatsinghpur and Ganjam districts in the last one year, a statement by the foundation said. More than 50 residents of Kharasapur village in Balasore district were involved in planting mangroves across a one-kilometre stretch of the coastline. /PTI/

## POLICE FILE CHARGESHEET IN PORSCHE CRASH THAT KILLED 2 TECHIES; PUNE TEEN'S PARENTS AMONG 7 NAMED

PUNE Police have filed a chargesheet against seven accused in connection with the Porsche car accident case, including the parents of a minor boy who was allegedly behind the wheel, in a Pune court, more than two months after the fatal crash, an official said on Friday. The 900-page chargesheet, submitted on Thursday in a sessions court, has excluded the 17-year-old boy, whose case is being handled separately by the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB), while the seven accused have been charged under IPC sections related to criminal conspiracy and causing disappearance of evidence, among others. The high-end car allegedly driven by the minor under the influence of alcohol knocked down two motorbike-borne IT professionals originally hailing from Madhya Pradesh, one of them a woman, in Pune's Kalyani Nagar area in the wee hours of May 19, killing them. The boy's father, Vishal Agarwal, is a prominent builder. "We have filed a 900-page chargesheet against seven accused, including the parents of the minor, two doctors and a staffer from Sassoon General Hospital and two middlemen, in a Pune court on Thursday." /PTI/

## ED ATTACHES ASSETS IN MINING-LINKED PMLA CASE AGAINST TN MINISTER PONMUDY, FAMILY

NEW DELHI The Enforcement Directorate on Friday said it has attached assets worth more than Rs 14 crore in an alleged illegal mining-linked money laundering case against Tamil Nadu minister and DMK leader K Ponmudy, his ex-MP son P Gautham Sigamani and some family members. The central agency had raided the premises of the 73-year-old Minister for Higher Education and his son in Chennai and Villupuram in July last year as part of the investigation. Tamil Nadu chief minister M K Stalin, after these raids, had said that the action was a "political vendetta of the Union BJP government." The money laundering case related to alleged illegal red earth mining stems from a state police (crime branch) FIR. /PTI/

## Mamata to attend NITI Aayog meeting to protest 'budget bias, states division'



West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee with the party's National General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee addresses the media at the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport before leaving for Delhi, in Kolkata, Friday, July 26, 2024. /PTI/

KOLKATA West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee confirmed on Friday that she would participate in the central think-tank NITI Aayog meeting scheduled on July 27 in Delhi. Banerjee's statement came amid uncertainty on whether she, too, would skip the meet like most other CMs of the INDIA bloc.

Talking to reporters at the Kolkata airport before leaving for Delhi, Banerjee said she would join the meeting and use the opportunity to register her protest against a "discriminatory budget" and the "conspiracy to divide West Bengal and other opposition-ruled states".

The chief minister said she was asked to send her written speech seven days ahead of the meeting which she did and that was before the Union budget was tabled. "I will stay at the meeting for a while. If I get an opportunity to deliver my speech at the meeting and register my protest against the discrimination and political

bias against the opposition-ruled states in the budget besides the conspiracy that is being hatched to divide West Bengal and its neighbouring states, I will do so. Else, I will walk out of the meeting," the chief minister said.

Banerjee, accompanied by her nephew and the party's national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, left for Delhi on Friday afternoon after postponing her trip to the national capital by a day. The postponement had stirred speculations on whether Banerjee, who had earlier expressed her intention to attend the NITI Aayog meeting, would join the bandwagon of opposition party chief ministers.

Several INDIA bloc CMs had announced their decision to skip the meeting as a mark of protest against the Union budget which, they alleged, was "anti-federal" in spirit and "extremely discriminatory" towards their states.

The list includes Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin of the DMK, Kerala

Chief Minister and CPI (M) leader Pinarayi Vijayan, Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann of the Aam Aadmi Party and all three Congress chief ministers -- Karnataka's Siddaramaiah, Himachal Pradesh's Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and Telangana's Revanth Reddy.

Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren of the JMM is, however, likely to join the meeting despite earlier reports that he, too, had chosen to give it a miss.

"All opposition-ruled states, including West Bengal, have been totally deprived in this budget. The Centre has shown a step-motherly attitude towards these states. I cannot accept such discrimination and political bias against us," Banerjee said.

Referring to West Bengal BJP president and Union minister Sukanta Majumdar's proposal to integrate north Bengal with the northeastern states but without directly naming him, Banerjee said she "strongly condemned such statements" coming at

a time when Parliament is in session. "There's a conspiracy to divide West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam. While the minister is making his own statements, the demand to divide these states is now coming from various other quarters of the BJP. Dividing West Bengal means dividing India," she alleged.

Calling the "conspiracy" a "geographical and political blockade besides the economic blockade that the Centre has already imposed on West Bengal", Banerjee said she would stick to her earlier position of attending the NITI Aayog meeting but only have her voice of protest on record.

"Hemant (Soren) and I will be present at the meeting. We will speak on behalf of the others (who won't be present)," she said.

The opposition in West Bengal took the chief minister's statements with a pinch of salt, stating that the move was calibrated to her "political gains". /PTI/

## Rajnath Singh's positive response to defence corridor in Assam: Himanta



GUWAHATI Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has responded positively to the proposal of setting up the country's third defence corridor in the state. Sarma met Singh during his recent visit to New Delhi and discussed the issue of setting up of the defence corridor in the state after Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

"After the setting up of a semiconductor unit in the state, we are keen that it becomes a defence production hub and Singh has responded positively to the proposal", Sarma said at a press conference here.

Sarma asserted that the proposal is under "advanced consideration" but it may take some time due to its sensitivity. The Chief Minister pointed out that several factors need to be evaluated before a final decision is made, but establishing a defence corridor would significantly impact the state's economic landscape.

Sarma also noted that, for the first time, the Union Budget acknowledged that Assam's floods are exacerbated by water from outside the country. He highlighted that the Centre has expressed its readiness to provide comprehensive support to address this issue.

Sarma also met Union Fi-

nance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to discuss funding for a satellite township near Guwahati, expansion of the Brahmaputra Valley Fertiliser Corporation in Namrup, and the commissioning of its fourth unit. The Chief Minister also met Union Home Minister Amit Shah who assured him that the issue of Aadhaar cards, which were blocked while taking the biometrics for updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC), will be resolved at the earliest.

He said 9.23 lakh Aadhaar cards were blocked and this was causing immense inconvenience to people, particularly to students.

The Chief Minister said during his meeting with Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, he requested a special train service from Guwahati to Lucknow to facilitate pilgrimages to the Ram Temple.

He noted that over one lakh pilgrims from the state are eager to visit the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya but are currently inconvenienced by the lack of a direct train service.

Additionally, the Chief Minister announced that the state government will soon introduce a domicile policy to ensure that local residents who are proficient in the state's language are given preference in recruitment. /PTI/

## RJD MLC Sunil Kumar Singh expelled for 'insulting' CM Nitish Kumar



PATNA RJD leader Sunil Kumar Singh was expelled from the Bihar Legislative Council on Friday, following an incident of unruly behaviour in the House earlier this year. The motion for Singh's expulsion was passed by voice vote, a day after the Ethics Committee submitted its report to acting chairman Awadhesh Narain Singh.

Singh, considered close to RJD president Lalu Prasad and his family, was charged with raising slogans against Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on February 13, during a heated exchange in the House. He has also been charged with "insulting the Chief Minister by mimicking his body language" and, upon appearing before the Committee last month, had questioned the competence of its members.

In addition to Singh's expulsion, another RJD Member of the Legislative Council (MLC), Mohd Qari Sohaib, who also engaged in disruptive behaviour on the same day, has been suspended for two days. The report revealed that Sohaib had expressed regret for his actions during the inquiry, whereas Singh remained defiant.

This decision came on the final day of the monsoon session, and Singh's suspension will take effect when the House reconvenes.

Anticipating trouble for Singh, who also heads Bihar State Cooperative Marketing Union (BISCOMAUN), RJD legislators, including Opposition Leader Rabri Devi, arrived at the House wearing black badges to protest. Talking to reporters outside

the House prior to his expulsion, Singh criticised the chief minister, calling him a "vindictive" person who hounded out his critics even if they happened to be his allies.

"You need to look no further than Samrat Choudhary," said the RJD leader, citing the example of the Deputy CM who has been replaced as state BJP chief by a cabinet colleague Dilip Kumar Jaiswal.

However, BJP national media co-convenor Sanjay Mayukh, who is also an MLC, claimed that Choudhary's replacement was "in line with the party's policy of one person being allowed to hold only one post".

Following Singh's expulsion, Rabri Devi, a former CM, denounced the action as a "murder of democracy"

and a "dark chapter in history".

She questioned whether the House would dare take action against Kumar, who had allegedly threatened to "destroy" Singh during the heated exchange.

Ashok Kumar Pandey, an RJD MLC and Ethics Committee member, claimed that although the report stated unanimous recommendations, the proceedings were never shared with the committee despite repeated requests. Chairman Ram Bachan Rai, a JDU MLC, was unavailable for comment on this allegation. Replying to a query on the way forward, Rabri Devi said a decision will be taken by the RJD supreme, who is her husband, and son Tejashwi Yadav, who is the leader of the opposition in the assembly. /PTI/

## K'taka CM rebuts opposition charge over MUDA 'scam', denies role

BENGALURU Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday strongly defended himself in connection with the alleged fraudulent allotment of sites to land losers by Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA), including to his wife Parvathi, and asserted that neither he or his family has any role in it. He accused the opposition BJP and JD(S) of making politically motivated allegations against him out of "hate and revenge", with an intention to "put a black mark on his image", as they are unable to digest that he has become Chief Minister for the second time.

Siddaramaiah also said that the Governor Thaaawar Chand Gehlot has sought a report from the government regarding the alleged irregularities in MUDA and a report will be sent "as everything is totally and absolutely legal."

"Is there any role of either mine or my wife or my brother-in-law in this? Our land was taken (by MUDA), sites were made and they were allocated to others. So MUDA gave us

(alternate sites) as given to others, after accepting their mistake. What is illegality in this? " Siddaramaiah asked while giving a detailed statement to the allegations made against him by BJP-JD(S).

Speaking to reporters here, he said: "Absolutely my role is not there. It is totally and absolutely legal. BJP and JD(S) are indulging in false propaganda for the sake of politics and trying to defame me personally, unable to digest that I have become the Chief Minister for the second time, and as they have lost the 2023 assembly polls and faced a setback in 2024 Lok Sabha polls."

It is alleged that compensatory sites were allotted to Siddaramaiah's wife in an up-market area in Mysuru, which had higher property value as compared to the location of her land which had been "acquired" by the MUDA.

The MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under a 50:50 ratio scheme in lieu of 3.16 acres of her land, where MUDA developed a residential layout. The controversial scheme envis-

ages allotting 50 per cent of developed land to the land loser in lieu of undeveloped land acquired for forming layouts.

Urban Development Minister Byrathi Suresh said several leaders from the opposition parties or their family members or supporters have also been given alternative sites, and they included Union Minister and JD(S) state chief H D Kumaraswamy, BJP MLC Manje Gowda, JD(S) MLA and former Minister G T Deve Gowda, BJP MLC and former Minister H Vishwanath, former JD(S) MLA Sa Ra Mahesh.

"I'm not saying all of this was done wrongly, it has been done in accordance with law, as given in this case (to CM's wife).... We will give these documents to the judicial commission and they will look into these allotments," he said, adding that Kumaraswamy has even sought for more alternative sites recently stating that his lands were acquired, and it is being looked into.

Pointing out that he first

became MLA in 1983 and Minister in 1984, Siddaramaiah said: "as legislator, Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and Chief Minister, I have been in politics for more than 40 years, it is 40 years since I became Minister first, so far there is no single black spot on my name (image). My political life is an open book." Responding to charges questioning the legality of 3.16 acres of his wife's land that was acquired by MUDA, he said, BJP and JD(S) say this land attracts provisions of Karnataka Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prohibition of Transfer of Certain Lands) Act, known as the PTCL Act, which is "totally false", as Ninga alias Jawara, the earlier owner of the land, had purchased it through auction in 1935.

The 3.16 acres is a "self acquired" property, which later came to Ninga's third son Devaraj and he became the absolute owner of the property with the consent of other family members and siblings, he said. From him, Mallikarjuna Swamy (CM's wife Parvathi's brother) acquired this land. "As this is a self acquired property and not a grant by the government, it doesn't attract PTCL Act." /PTI/

## Jagan hits back 'Was Escobar Chandrababu Naidu's friend'

AMARAVATI YSRCP chief Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy whom Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu compared to Pablo Escobar, threw the ball back into the TDP chief's court on Friday when he asked mockingly if Naidu had been a friend of the late Colombian drug lord. While presenting a white paper yesterday on the law-and-order situation and the alleged drug menace in the state under YSRCP rule between 2019 and 2024, Naidu had claimed that Reddy had aimed at emulating Escobar.

On Friday, Reddy addressed a press conference responding to Naidu's allegations and asked, "Is he Chandrababu's friend that he knows his name so well? He must be. Otherwise, I don't know his name (Escobar) itself. On the other hand, Chandrababu Naidu is repetitively speaking about a particular person (Escobar)." Speaking over the alleged atrocities being committed against his party cadres since the TDP-led NDA took over the reins of power, Reddy reflected on the absence of the Congress party during

YSRCP's recent protest held in New Delhi over the matter. He said the Congress party should be questioned about this. The former CM asserted that the YSRCP had invited all the parties, including the Congress and the BJP, for the protest and a photo exhibition.

He also said the Congress party should be questioned over its alleged ties with Naidu and how Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy is being used as a point of contact to reach Congress elders.

However, he declared that the YSRCP would work with any party joins it in fighting against the "injustices" in the state.

According to Reddy, Naidu allegedly has a knack of engaging in "diversion politics" using the might of the media to discredit and defame any person he wants to target.

Referring to the seven white papers released by Naidu, he called them "erroneous papers" and alleged that the TDP-led government failed to convince the public that the state's debt is as high as Rs 14 lakh crore, and so it was revised down to Rs 10 lakh crore. /PTI/

**SRI LANKA HITS BACK AT CANADIAN PM OVER 'BLACK JULY GENOCIDE' CHARGE**

Sri Lanka has once again rejected allegations of the Tamil minority 'genocide' charge by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and claimed the accusation was 'arising from local domestic vote bank politics.' Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry on Thursday rejected the allegation made by the Canadian Prime Minister in a statement issued on July 23 to mark the 1983 alleged "anti-Tamil violence" day in Sri Lanka. "Sri Lanka vehemently reiterates its rejection of the allegation of genocide in their country in the statement issued.

**INDONESIA LAUNCHES GOLDEN VISA FOR FOREIGN INVESTORS, GLOBAL TALENTS**

Indonesian President Joko Widodo launched the Golden Visa Indonesia programme on Thursday, aimed at simplifying the process for foreigners seeking residence permits to invest and work in Indonesia. In his remarks at the launching ceremony in Jakarta, Widodo said the Golden Visa would allow more good quality travelers to invest and be productive while staying in the Southeast Asian country. Indonesia should be a promising investment destination, a destination for global talents to work.

**OVER 6,20,000 AFFECTED BY TYPHOON GAEMI IN CHINA**

About 6,28,600 people in east China's Fujian Province had been affected by Gaemi, the third typhoon of this year, with some 2,90,000 residents relocated so far, said local authorities. With a maximum wind speed of 118.8 km per hour at its centre, the typhoon made its second landfall in the country on Thursday evening, at Xiuyu District in the city of Putian, Fujian, Xinhua news agency reported. At 6 a.m. on Friday, its centre was located within Youxi County, the city of Nanming, packing winds of up to 100.8 km per hour near the centre.

**Briefly****'SPECIAL' TIES WITH MALDIVES BASED ON SHARED DEMOCRATIC VALUES: INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION**

**MALE** India's "special relationship" with the Maldives is based on shared democratic values, the Indian mission here has said, expressing confidence in intensifying Parliamentary linkages with the archipelago nation. The Indian High Commissioner to the Maldives, Munu Mahawar, paid a courtesy call to Speaker of the Parliament Abdul Raheem Abdulla on Thursday. "The High Commissioner of India to the Maldives, H.E. Shri Munu Mahawar, paid a courtesy call on Hon. Abdul Raheem Abdulla, Speaker of the People's Majlis," the Maldivian Parliament's official account said in a post on X on Thursday. "India's special relationship with the Maldives is based on shared democratic values. We look forward to intensifying our Parliamentary linkages," the Indian High Commission said, reposting it. Earlier this month, Mahawar called on President Mohamed Muizzu at the President's Office, and the two nations reiterated the "unwavering" commitment to fostering "continued close relations" and enhancing bilateral cooperation, agreeing to work together towards maintaining peace and stability in the Indian Ocean. /PTI/

**WATER LEVEL OF MAJOR RIVERS IN MYANMAR EXCEEDS WARNING MARK AMID HEAVY RAINS**

**YANGON** Water level of major rivers in Myanmar has exceeded the warning mark in 12 towns across the country, Myanmar's weather agency reported on Friday. Myanmar's Department of Meteorology and Hydrology said that the water level of the rivers, including Aeyarwady river, Sittaung river and Ngawun river, has risen above the warning mark. The weather agency has urged residents living near riverbanks and in low-lying areas to take precautionary measures, Xinhua news agency reported. Heavy rains have been hitting parts of the Southeast Asian country in recent days, causing floods in many areas. /IANS/

**SOUTH KOREA, US, UK ISSUE JOINT ADVISORY ON NORTH KOREAN CYBER GROUP ACTIVITIES**

**SEOUL** South Korea's cybersecurity authority has issued a joint advisory with its US and UK counterparts against a North Korean cyber group's espionage campaign, targeting classified information in defence, aerospace, nuclear and engineering sectors. The advisory was issued by South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) and National Police Agency, the US National Security Agency, the UK's National Cyber Security Centre and other related authorities, according to the National Cyber Security Center under the NIS. The authorities said the cyber group under the North's Reconnaissance General Bureau, widely known as Andariel, has been targeting defence, aerospace, nuclear and engineering entities worldwide to obtain sensitive and classified technical information and intellectual property, Xinhua news agency reported. /IANS/

**CONSTRUCTION OF MAJOR HIGHWAY, NEW BRIDGE STARTS IN AFGHANISTAN**

**KABUL** Afghan authorities have launched the construction of a major highway and a bridge in south Afghanistan's Helmand province to link the provincial capital Lashkar Gah and the western Herat city, state-run news agency Bakhtar reported on Friday. The project, having an estimated cost of 177.5 million afghani (\$2.51 million) for the highway's first section with a length of 27.5 kilometres and a 350-metre bridge, is expected to be funded by the Ministry of Public Works, Xinhua news agency reported. Afghanistan's infrastructure facilities, including roads and bridges, have been badly damaged or destroyed due to more than four decades of war and civil strife. The Afghan caretaker government has launched a variety of construction projects to boost the economy and rebuild the country. /IANS/

**Southeast Asian diplomats meet with China amid tensions over maritime claims**

**VIENTIANE (LAOS)** Top diplomats from Southeast Asia met Friday morning in Vientiane with China's Foreign Minister for talks that come as friction continues to escalate over Beijing's growing effort to press its sweeping maritime claims in the South China Sea.

Several members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nation have disputes with China, which has led to direct confrontations that many worry could lead to broader conflict. "One wrong step in the South China Sea will turn a small fire into a terrible firestorm," said Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi ahead of the talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

ASEAN members Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei all have conflicts with China over its claims of sovereignty over virtually all of the South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping. Indonesia has also expressed concern about what it sees as Beijing's encroachment on its exclusive economic zone. The United States and its allies, meanwhile, have been regularly conducting military exercises and patrols in the area to assert their "free and open Indo-Pacific" policy, including the right to navigate international waters - drawing criticism from China. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was to arrive Saturday to attend the ASEAN meetings and was expected to meet with Wang on the sidelines for bilateral talks.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is also attending the meetings, and already held direct talks with Wang. China



South Korea's Minister of Foreign Affairs Cho Tae-yul, fifth from left, poses for a group photo with ASEAN ministers and delegates before the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference with South Korea at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, Laos, Friday, July 26, 2024. AP/PTI

is a key ally of Russia's in its war against Ukraine, and Wang emphasized the "deepening strategic coordination" between the two nations, China's Xinhua news agency reported.

This year, tensions between the Philippines - an American treaty ally - and China have escalated. In June, a Chinese vessel and a Philippine supply ship collided near the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, sparking alarm.

The ASEAN countries - Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brunei and Laos - emphasised in their

opening meetings Thursday that it's important they don't get drawn in as both China and the US look to expand their influence.

Following the talks, Marsudi said the group stressed that the ten-member regional bloc should not be a proxy for any power, otherwise "it will be difficult for ASEAN to become an anchor for regional stability and peace." There were no immediate details available about Friday morning's talks between Wang and the ASEAN foreign ministers. After Thursday night's talks, however, Thai foreign minister Maris Sangiampongsa

said the group had discussed the importance of producing the South China Sea code of conduct that it has been working on for some time with China, and planned further talks with China on the matter. He said that the Philippines informed in the meeting that they have been trying to engage with China, which is considered a good sign.

China and the Philippines said Sunday they had reached a deal that they hope will end the confrontations, aiming to establish a mutually acceptable arrangement for the disputed area without conceding either side's territorial claims. There

are divisions within ASEAN on how to deal with China's maritime claims and the Philippines has been critical over a perceived lack of support from the bloc.

In Thursday's talks, the Philippines pushed for the inclusion of June's collision in the joint communique to be issued at the end of the meetings. Cambodia and Laos, which are close to China, opposed the wording, according to a senior South-east Asian diplomat who was involved in closed-door negotiations and spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter freely. /AP/

**Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe to run for re-election as independent**

**COLOMBO** Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Friday declared his candidacy to contest the presidential election in September as an independent candidate by depositing money to contest the upcoming polls.

Earlier in the day, the island nation's election commission announced that presidential polls would be held on September 21, ending the months-long speculation over the key contest, which will likely determine the future



of economic reforms in the cash-strapped country.

This will be the first election in Sri Lanka after it plunged into economic bankruptcy in 2022.

President's Counsel Ronald Perera placed a cash deposit on behalf of Wickremesinghe, 75, as an independent candidate for the presidential election, the state-run Daily News newspaper reported. The president will contest as an independent candidate, Perera told the media

after placing the bonds on Wickremesinghe's behalf, the NewsFirst news portal reported.

Wickremesinghe, who has spearheaded the island nation's recovery from the worst economic crisis, opened a political office some weeks ago. With the deposit, he appears to have laid to rest speculation that he may opt out of contesting the presidential race. The Election Commission announced that the deposit money for the presiden-

tial election could be deposited from 8:30 am on Friday until noon on August 14, the day before the calling of nominations for the election, themorning.lk news portal reported. The nominations to contest the election would take place on August 15.

Wickremesinghe's candidacy was in doubt as he was without a solid party, with his United National Party decimated by the split in 2020. By offering himself as an independent candidate,

Wickremesinghe attempts to cash in on the economic turnaround, which he has successfully engineered since the island declared bankruptcy in 2022.

In April 2022, the island nation declared its first-ever sovereign default since gaining independence from Britain in 1948. The unprecedented financial crisis led President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to quit office in 2022 amid civil unrest over his inability to handle the crisis. /PTI/

**Sri Lanka's presidential election to be held on Sept 21**

**COLOMBO** Sri Lanka will hold the presidential poll on September 21, the election commission announced on Friday, ending the months-long speculation over the key contest which is likely to determine the future of economic reforms in the cash-strapped country. This will be the first election to be held in Sri Lanka after it plunged into economic bankruptcy in 2022.

The government gazette issued on Friday said in terms of Article 31 (3) of the Constitution the election would take place on September 21 while the nominations would be accepted on August 15. The announcement of the much-awaited election ended months-long speculation that the election would be postponed to extend the term of the incumbent Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Opposition parties had expressed concern that the election might not be held at all. The government, however, repeatedly insisted that the election would be held on time. The election announcement set to end the balance term of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was ousted in mid-2022 in a popular public uprising. Rajapaksa had been elected with a record near 7 million votes in November 2019 when the last presidential election was held.

Tens of thousands, who took to the streets, in early 2022 demanded Rajapaksa step down for his failure to tackle the island's gravest economic crisis since 1948. Rajapaksa was forced to flee the country on July 9, 2022, and incumbent Wickremesinghe, who was the crisis prime minister at that time, was elected through parliament to succeed Rajapaksa. /PTI/

**Vietnam Communist Party chief's funeral draws thousands of mourners, World leaders attend**

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval attends the state funeral of General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong in Hanoi. /PTI

**HANOI** Thousands of mourners gathered in Hanoi on Friday for the second day of the funeral of the man who dominated Vietnamese politics for over a decade, Communist Party general secretary Nguyen Phu Trong.

His death, at 80, last week in Hanoi marked the start of a succession struggle within the party that will likely to continue until the all-important National Party Congress of Vietnam's Communist Party in 2026.

Trong's coffin, draped in the red and yellow of Vietnam's flag, was laid beneath his smiling portrait and dozens of medals at the Na-

tional Funeral House in Hanoi on Thursday. All flags in the southeast Asian nation flew at half mast during the two-day period of national mourning, while all sports and entertainment were suspended.

He will be buried at Mai Dich cemetery, the final resting place for military heroes and senior party officials, later on Friday.

Top Communist Party officials paid tribute, including President To Lam, who took over as caretaker general secretary a day before Trong's death was announced. Thousands of people, many of whom who had travelled from far-flung provinces, queued up in

Hanoi late into Thursday to light incense and pay their respects.

Politburo member Luong Cuong said Thursday that his death was "an extremely huge, irreparable loss to the Party, the state, the people and his family." South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo; Wang Huning, the fourth-ranked leader in the Chinese Communist Party; former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga; Cuban National Assembly President Esteban Lazo Hernandez; and Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval were among those in attendance on Thursday.

US president Joe Biden had said earlier that Trong was a "champion of the deep ties" between Americans and the Vietnamese.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in a statement on Telegram that Trong would be remembered as a "true friend" of Russia who made a "great personal contribution" to the improvement of ties between the two nations.

Trong, who studied in the Soviet Union from 1981 to 1983, was the first Vietnamese Communist Party chief to visit the White House. He advocated a pragmatic foreign policy of "bamboo diplomacy," a phrase he coined that refers to the plant's flexibility, bending but not breaking in the shifting headwinds of geopolitics. /AP/

**STUDY REVEALS HUMAN IMPACT ON INCREASED RAINFALL VARIABILITY OVER**

**BEIJING** A new study has provided evidence showing that human activities have made global rainfall more volatile over the past century.

Published on Friday in the journal Science, the study was conducted by researchers from the Institute of Atmospheric Physics (IAP) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the UK Met Office.

The study reveals a systematic increase in rainfall variability since the 1900s, ranging from global to regional scales and from daily to intraseasonal timescales. Rainfall variability refers to unevenness in the timing and amount of rainfall. Higher variability means that precipitation is more unevenly distributed over time, resulting in wetter wet periods and drier dry periods.

For example, some places may receive a year's worth of rain in just a few days, have long dry spells followed by heavy downpours, or alternate rapidly between drought and flooding, Xinhua news agency reported. /IANS/



## EUROPE &amp; AUSTRALIA

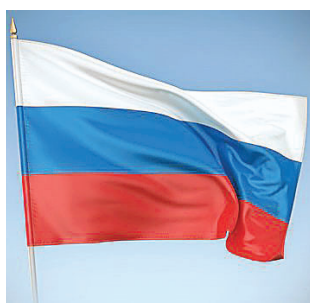
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Newsmakers

## RUSSIA'S CENTRAL BANK RAISES KEY INTEREST RATE TO 18 PER CENT

Russia's central bank has raised its key interest rate by 200 basis points from 16 to 18 per cent, it said in a statement Friday. Inflation continues to rise and currently surpasses the bank's April forecast, the bank said, adding that domestic demand continues to grow faster than the capacity to expand supply. The central bank has revised its inflation forecast for 2024, raising it to 6.5-7.0 per cent. It said that annual inflation would decline to 4.0-4.5 per cent in 2025 and stay close to 4 percent further on, Xinhua news agency reported.



## NETHERLANDS TO DELIVER 14 TANKS TO UKRAINE BY END OF SUMMER

The Netherlands, in collaboration with Denmark, will deliver 14 Leopard 2A4 tanks to Ukraine by the end of this summer, the Dutch Ministry of Defence said on Wednesday. The two countries purchased 14 Leopard 2A4 tanks last year, sharing the cost of about 165 million euros (about 178 million U.S. dollars). Though previously used, these tanks have undergone extensive refurbishment and testing over the past few months.



## WORLD BANK APPROVES DEVELOPMENT LOAN FOR ROMANIA

The World Bank Group's Board of Executive Directors has approved a development loan totalling 599.1 million euros (\$650.5 million) for Romania to support its economic and environmental sustainability. The loan is aimed at helping Romania promote fiscal consolidation and sustainability and increase pension system equity, said the bank group in a statement on Thursday. The loan will also introduce incentives to decarbonize Romania's transport sector and support its first green bond issuance to boost public investment, Xinhua news agency reported.

## Jaishankar meets Russian FM Lavrov in Laos; discuss boosting bilateral ties



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, left chats with Indian Foreign Minister Subramanyam Jaishankar at the sideline of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers Meeting in Vientiane, Laos, Friday, July 26, 2024. AP/PTI

VIENTIANE (LAOS) External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday met his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov and leaders from South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Laos and others and discussed various aspects of bilateral collaboration, including education and agriculture technology. Jaishankar is in the capital of the Laos People's Democratic Republic to participate in the meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

He met Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov on the sidelines of the meeting.

"Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Foreign Minister of India Dr Subrahmanya Jaishankar met on the sidelines of #ASEAN events Vientiane, July 26, 2024 #RussiaIndia #Druzhdostii," the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a post

on X, attaching a picture of the two ministers.

Jaishankar held a bilateral meeting with his counterpart from South Korea and had a wide-ranging conversation on Special Strategic Partnership.

"A pleasure to meet RoK @FM-ChoTaeyul today in Vientiane. Wide-ranging conversation on Special Strategic Partnership. Our shared convergences in the Indo-Pacific region is also opening new avenues of cooperation," Jaishankar posted on X.

He also met the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission.

"Delighted to meet EU HRPV @JosepBorrellF, this time in Vientiane. Spoke of India and European Union's potential to augment partnership in trade, clean

energy transition and advanced technologies. Exchanged perspectives on regional and global issues. Thank HRPV Borrell for his friendship and staunch support for strengthening India-EU ties," Jaishankar posted.

He also met and had great conversations with his counterpart and "dear friend" from Singapore.

"Great conversation with dear friend FM @VivianBala of Singapore. Thank Singapore for steering ASEAN-India relations in the last three years as Country Coordinator. We spoke about creating a new agenda for our bilateral ties. Also appreciated his thoughts on the current geopolitical situation," Jaishankar posted on X.

He also met his Indonesian counterpart. "Always good to see my friend FM @Menlu\_RI of Indonesia. Congratulated her

on a great stint as Foreign Minister. Her contribution towards India-Indonesia and India-ASEAN relations are notable. Enjoyed working with her during our G20 Presidencies." Jaishankar also met his Malaysian counterpart.

"A warm conversation with Malaysian FM @tokmatn9 today in Vientiane. Discussed ongoing initiatives in our bilateral relationship. Look forward to enhancing our ties in the second decade of our Enhanced Strategic Partnership," Jaishankar posted on X.

Jaishankar held a bilateral meeting with his counterpart from New Zealand, Winston Peters, also the country's deputy prime minister.

"Always enjoy meeting DPM & FM @winstonpeters of New Zealand. Discussed education, agriculture technology, Pacific Islands & cricket," Jaishankar said in a post on X. /PTI/

## Briefly

## FORMER PM IMRAN KHAN SET TO RUN FOR OXFORD UNIVERSITY CHANCELLOR POSITION



LONDON Oxford-educated former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan is likely to run for the position of the chancellor of his alma mater in the UK from his prison cell through an online ballot, according to his close aide and media reports. Since August 2023, Khan, 71, has been incarcerated after he was arrested under several cases and convicted for some of them, the longest sentence among them being nine years as of date. Founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, Khan was the prime minister of Pakistan from August 2018 to April 2022. Khan studied Economics and Politics at Keble College, Oxford in 1972. He made a Test debut for Pakistan in 1971 and also captained the cricket team of Oxford University. In 2005, Khan became the chancellor of Bradford University and served in the post till 2014. "Imran Khan will run for chancellor of Oxford University from his prison cell in Pakistan. The former Pakistani prime minister and cricket star will enter an online ballot, despite serving a 10-year jail sentence," The Telegraph, UK reported. /PTI/

## AFRICA CDC INKS DEAL WITH LOBBY GROUP TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS

NAIROBI The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) announced that it had signed an agreement with Africa Public Health Foundation (APHF), a Nairobi-based health lobby, to enhance the resilience of public health systems across the continent amid multiple challenges. The two organisations said in a joint statement issued in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, that the partnership will revolve resource mobilization, advocate for improved policies, and foster private sector engagement to revitalise Africa's public health systems. /IANS/

## A RUSSIAN MAN ACCUSED OF STAGING A CAR BOMBING ON UKRAINIAN ORDERS

MOSCOW Russia's top security agency said on Friday that it arrested a man accused of staging a car bombing on Ukrainian orders. The Federal Security Service, or FSB, showed a video of the handcuffed suspect walking off a plane from Turkey escorted by masked officers. Turkish authorities said that they detained the suspect, Yevgeniy Serebryakov, on Russia's request on Wednesday. He arrived in Turkey's resort of Bodrum hours after a car bomb went off in Moscow. Russian authorities said that two people were injured by the bomb that detonated after they got into the car in northern Moscow. Russian media said that the car belonged to a senior military intelligence officer. The FSB said the suspect was acting on orders from Ukraine's spy agency and released a video of his confessions. It was impossible to verify the claims that he made under duress. Ukrainian officials have denied involvement. /AP/

## OPERATIONS RESUME HOURS AFTER BOMB THREAT FORCES EVACUATION AT FRANCO AIRPORT

PARIS The Franco-Swiss international airport of Basel-Mulhouse, situated in France, was evacuated Friday morning due to "security reasons," according to the airport authorities. However, air traffic resumed at midday after a thorough security check, Xinhua news agency reported. "For security reasons, the terminal had to be evacuated and is currently closed. Further information will follow," the airport announced earlier in the day. /IANS/

## UK drops plans to challenge ICC arrest warrant request against Benjamin Netanyahu

LONDON British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's office said on Friday that the UK will not interfere with the International Criminal Court's request for an arrest warrant against Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The announcement is reversal of plans announced by former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who was ousted earlier this month when Starmer's Labour Party swept Conservatives from office in a landslide. "This was a proposal by the previous government which was not submitted before the election, and which I can confirm the government will not be pursuing in line with our long-standing position that this is a matter for the court to decide," a Starmer spokesperson said.

The court's prosecutor, Karim Khan, accused Netanyahu, Gallant, and three Hamas leaders - Yehya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh - of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders condemned the move as disgraceful and antisemitic.

US President Joe Biden also criticised the prosecutor and supported Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas - as did Sunak.

ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan sought warrants for Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant in May over Israel's war in Gaza, a symbolic blow that deepened Israel's isolation over the war in Gaza.

Israel is not a member of the court. Even if warrants are issued, Netanyahu and Gallant do not face any immediate risk of prosecution. But the threat of arrest could make it harder for them to travel.

The ICC had set a deadline for Friday for the government to file a challenge.

Starmer's decision puts the UK at odds with America, though his office on Friday described the decision as based in a strong belief in the separation of powers and the rule of law domestically and internationally.

The issue is a tricky one for Starmer and his party.

Starmer, a former human rights lawyer, has been under pressure from his party to take

a tougher stand on the ongoing crisis in Gaza. London has also been the scene of huge protests decrying Israel's actions intended to root out Hamas militants and has also reported record levels of antisemitic incidents.

Labour lost support and seats they had been expected to win after Starmer initially refused to call for a cease fire shortly after Israel retaliated for the October 7 attack by Hamas militants. The party is still recovering from the stain of a scandal involving antisemitism allegations against the leadership of his predecessor, Jeremy Corbyn.

Starmer recently restored funding for the United Nations' Palestine relief agency UNRWA, which had been suspended by Sunak's government in January.

He has also said the Palestinian state has an "undeniable right" to be recognised as part of a peace process.

Sacha Deshmukh, Amnesty International U.K.'s chief executive applauded Starmer's decision not to challenge the action at the Hague court. /AP/

## Czech Republic to begin high-speed rail construction in 2025

PRAGUE The Czech Republic is set to embark on the construction of high-speed railway (HSR) lines next year, Transport Minister Martin Kupka announced on Friday. The first phase of the HSR project will connect Brno, the country's second-largest city, with Prerov in the east, starting in 2025. Construction of the second phase, linking Brno with the southeastern border town of Breclav, is scheduled to begin in 2026, Kupka revealed at a conference in Prague.

Trains on the new high-speed lines will reach speeds of up to 320 kilometers per hour. The overall cost of building the core HSR infrastructure across the Czech Republic is projected to be 800 billion Czech crowns (34 billion U.S. dollars). Discussions on constructing HSR in the Czech Republic have been ongoing since the 1990s, but significant progress has only been made in recent years, Xinhua news agency reported.

If the current timeline is maintained, the next major phase, including the Prague corridor, is expected to commence in 2030. A transport model from the Railway Administration predicts that the new high-speed rail between Prague and Brno will serve up to 60,000 passengers daily, reducing travel time between the two cities from nearly three hours to around 50 minutes.

"The construction of high-speed railway and increased investment in infrastructure are crucial for the Czech Republic," Kupka emphasized, highlighting the impressive economic growth in neighboring Poland. /IANS/

## AGREEMENT WITH RUSSIA IS 'DEAL WITH THE DEVIL,' ADVISER TO UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT SAYS



SIGNING an agreement with Russia to stop the war with Ukraine would amount to signing a deal with the devil, a top adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, as pressure mounts on the country to seek an end to more than two years of fighting. A deal would only buy time for Russian President Vladimir Putin to strengthen his army and usher in another, potentially more violent chapter in the war, Mykhailo Podolyak told The Associated Press in an interview Thursday. "If you want to sign a deal with the devil, who will then drag you to hell, well, go for it. This is what Russia is," Podolyak said when asked about the prospects for a peace deal for Kyiv, whose forces are locked in a bloody war of attrition with Moscow's troops in eastern Ukraine. "If you sign anything today with Russia, that will not lose the war and will not be legally responsible for mass crimes, this will mean that you have signed yourself a ticket to continue the war on a different scale, with other protagonists, with a different number of killed and tortured people," he said.

It is a view held across Zelenskyy's camp and reflected broadly among Ukrainians. But it also increasingly comes up against

the current of Western pressure, as Kyiv continues to face difficult front-line conditions against Moscow's larger, better equipped army, as

well as uncertainty over the level of future political support from Ukraine's closest ally, the U.S. War fatigue also appears to be eroding the morale of Ukrainians, who have struggled with constant bombardment, electricity outages and the loss of loved ones. A poll by the Kyiv International Institute for Sociology found that the number of Ukrainians opposed to territorial concessions to Russia in exchange for peace has continued to fall. It was 55% in July, compared with 74% in December.

Even Zelenskyy hinted at a willingness to negotiate with Russia for the first time since the 2022 full-scale invasion, suggesting Moscow should send a delegation to the next global peace summit, which is expected in November.

But Podolyak insisted that an agreement now would only delay greater violence.

"Yes, it can be a freeze of the conflict for a certain time. But this means that the Russian Federation will work on its mistakes and update its own army," he said. "An aggressor country did not come to the territory of Ukraine to sign a peace agreement. That's nonsense!" A lasting peace that works for Ukraine would ensure a steady erosion of Russian military might encompassed by the "three tools" often reiterated by Zelenskyy: increased military support, effective economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure to isolate Russia. As he spoke, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba was in China, one of Russia's closest allies, on a mission to forge closer ties. Podolyak said the goal was to provide explanations for Ukraine's positions and for why China should play a more "active intensive function in ending the war on the terms of international law." /AP/

## EU sends first USD 1.6 billion from frozen Russia assets to Ukraine

THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS) The European Union announced on Friday it had made 1.5 billion euros (USD 1.6 billion) available to support Ukraine, the first tranche of money generated from profits on frozen Russian assets.

In May, the EU's 27 member states reached an agreement to use the interest earned on some 210 billion euros (USD 225 billion) in Russian central bank assets for military support for



Ukraine and rebuilding efforts in the war-torn country.

The money, most of which is held in Belgium, was frozen as part of sanctions packages in retaliation for Moscow's full-scale invasion. Brussels estimates that the interest on those assets could provide around 3 billion euros each year.

"The EU stands with Ukraine. Today we transfer 1.5 billion euros in proceeds from immobilised Russian assets to the defence and

reconstruction of Ukraine. There is no better symbol or use for the Kremlin's money than to make Ukraine and all of Europe a safer place to live," European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement.

The move comes days after Moscow announced it had recaptured two villages in Eastern Ukraine. A recent push by Kremlin forces in eastern and northeastern Ukraine has made incremental gains and Kyiv is worried

that without financial support, Russia may advance further.

EU headquarters said that 90 per cent of the money would be put into a special fund known as the European Peace Facility that many EU countries already use to get reimbursed for arms and ammunition they send to Ukraine. The other 10 per cent would be put into the EU budget. The programmes that this money funds would help to bolster Ukraine. /AP/

## Hungary will seek solution to Ukraine oil transit impasse by September, minister says

BUDAPEST (HUNGARY) Hungary will seek to resolve a dispute with Ukraine over the transfer of Russian oil by September to avoid a potential energy crisis, an aid to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said on Friday, Orban's chief of staff, Gergely Gulyas, alleged that Kyiv was "blackmailing" Budapest by blocking the transfer of some Russian crude across its territory.

Ukraine last month adopted sanctions against Lukoil, Russia's largest non-state firm. Hungary receives most of its crude from Russia via the Druzhba or "Friendship" pipeline which runs into Central Europe through Belarus and Ukraine, about half of which it receives from Lukoil.

The move angered officials in Slovakia and Hungary, which argued the blocked supply would endanger their energy security. The two countries threatened legal action against Kyiv unless Lukoil's crude is allowed to resume its deliveries.

On Friday, Orban's chief of staff,



Gergely Gulyas, told a news conference that Ukraine was "inexplicably blackmailing Hungary and Slovakia by cutting off oil supplies." He suggested that the blocking of Lukoil crude was in response to the two Central European countries' "pro-peace stance." Orban, considered Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest partner in the European Union, has broken with other EU leaders by refusing to provide Ukraine with weapons to defend against Russia's full-scale invasion. He has routinely delayed, watered down or blocked efforts to send financial

aid to Kyiv and impose sanctions on Moscow over its war.

This week, Hungary said it would seek intervention from the EU over the blocked supplies, and Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto threatened that Hungary would block reimbursements to EU countries for their military aid to Ukraine until the conflict was resolved. Gulyas on Friday said the blocking of Lukoil deliveries could result in fuel shortages, but that there was "no reason to panic" since Hungary still has reserves.

Still, he said, "a solution must be found by September." "Hungary does not want to counter-blackmail Ukraine. We hope that the EU will help, but if not, we will need to look for other solutions," Gulyas said. The EU in 2022 passed sanctions on the import of Russian oil into the bloc in response to Putin's invasion of Ukraine, though an exception was granted to land-locked Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic to allow them time to find other crude sources. /AP/

# CANADA & USA

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News  
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## AS HEAT RECORDS TUMBLED 3 DAYS IN ROW, GUTERRES CALLS FOR GLOBAL ACTION TO SAVE LIVES

As global temperature records tumbled three days in a row this week, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for international action to limit the impact of heat and save lives. "Billions of people are facing an extreme heat epidemic -- wilting under increasingly deadly heatwaves, with temperatures topping 50 degrees Celsius around the world. That's 122 degrees Fahrenheit -- and halfway to boiling," he said at a news conference here on Thursday.



## MASSIVE WILDFIRES TRIGGER EVACUATIONS, HEALTH ALERTS IN US

Fire crews in California and Oregon battled the largest active wildfires in their respective states this year as thousands of residents were under evacuation orders, while smoke from the blazes triggered health alerts across the western United States. In California, the Park Fire exploded to become the state's largest wildfire of the year in 24 hours on Thursday, Xinhua news agency reported. The blaze, which started Wednesday afternoon near Chico in Butte County, grew dramatically overnight.



## INDIAN-ORIGIN MAN CHARGED WITH STEALING \$1 MN LOTTERY TICKET IN US

An Indian-origin man has been charged with stealing a \$1 million-winning lottery ticket from the buyer at the petrol bunk he was working in, according to local officials. Meer Patel, 23, was arrested and charged with the theft on Monday and the buyer of the ticket was notified of his winning, Rutherford County Sheriff's Office said. The alleged theft had taken place in the petrol bunk in Murfreesboro in Tennessee state where Patel was employed.

## Kamala Harris urges Benjamin Netanyahu to end devastating war in Gaza



LALIT K JHA / WASHINGTON

US Vice President Kamala Harris has urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to quickly conclude a ceasefire deal with Hamas and reach a "durable end" to the devastating war in Gaza, amidst mounting civilian casualties and the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian enclave. "Israel has a right to defend itself and how it does so matters. What has happened in Gaza over the past nine months is devastating," Harris, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, told reporters after her meeting with Netanyahu at the White House on Thursday.

"The images of dead children and desperate hungry people fleeing for safety, sometimes displaced for the second, third or fourth time. We cannot look away in the face of these tragedies. We cannot allow ourselves to become numb to the suffering and I will not be silent," she said.

Harris also stressed the need for a path to a two-state solution, while calling on Americans to be aware of the "nuance" on the conflict.

Earlier on Thursday, Netanyahu met President Joe Biden, who stepped down from his re-election campaign on Sunday. Netanyahu's meetings at the White House came a day after he gave a fiery speech to Congress, vowing "total victory" against Hamas, as thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrated outside.

The Israeli prime minister faces pressure both at home and abroad to bring an end to the Israel-Gaza war, now in its ninth month.

"I've said it many times, but it bears repeating. Israel has a right to defend itself, and how it does so matters. Hamas is a brutal terrorist organisation. On October 7, Hamas triggered this war when it massacred 1,200 innocent people, including 44 Americans, Harris said. /PTI/



Family members of American hostages by Hamas after their meeting with President Joe Biden and Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House. /PTI/

## UN ASKS NATIONS TO BETTER PREPARE, COOL THE VULNERABLE AS "EXTREME HEAT EPIDEMIC" BREAKS RECORDS



UNITED NATIONS After three of Earth's hottest days ever measured, the United Nations called for a flurry of efforts to try to reduce the human toll from soaring and searing temperatures, calling it "an extreme heat epidemic." "If there is one thing that unites our divided world, it's that we're all increasingly feeling the heat," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Thursday at a news conference where he highlighted that Monday was the hottest day on record, surpassing the mark set just a day earlier. "Earth is becoming hotter and more dangerous for everyone, everywhere." Nearly half a million people a year die worldwide from heat related deaths, far more than other weather extremes such as hurricanes, and this is likely an underestimate, a new report by 10 U.N. agencies said.

"Billions of people are facing an extreme heat epidemic -- wilting under increasingly deadly heat waves, with temperatures topping 50 degrees Celsius around the world," Guterres said. "That's 122 degrees Fahrenheit and halfway to boiling." The dire warnings came after a barely noticeable respite in back-to-back record global heat.

The European climate service Copernicus calculated that Tuesday's global average temperature was 0.01 Celsius (0.01 Fahrenheit) lower than Monday's all-time high of 17.16 degrees Celsius (62.8 degrees Fahrenheit), which was .06 degrees Celsius hotter (0.1 degrees Fahrenheit) than Sunday.

All three days were hotter than Earth's previous hottest day in 2023. "We are not prepared," the U.N. report said.

Guterres urged countries of the world to adopt several proposals aimed at reducing heat deaths, starting with help to cool and care for the most vulnerable people -- the poor, elderly, young and sick. The UN also called for better heat wave warnings, expanding "passive cooling," improved urban design, stronger protections. /AP/

## US arrests 2 leaders of Mexico's Sinaloa cartel: 'El Mayo' Zambada, son of 'El Chapo'

WASHINGTON Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, a longtime leader of Mexico's Sinaloa cartel, and Joaquín Guzmán López, a son of another infamous cartel leader, were arrested by US authorities in Texas on Thursday, the US Justice Department said.

A leader of the powerful Sinaloa cartel for decades alongside Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, Zambada is one of the most notorious drug traffickers in the world and known for running the cartel's smuggling operations while keeping a lower profile.

A Mexican federal official told The Associated Press that Zambada and Guzmán López arrived in the United States on a private plane and turned themselves in

to authorities. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to discuss the matter. The US government had offered a reward of up to USD 15 million for information leading to the capture of Zambada, who eluded authorities for decades.

Zambada and Guzmán López oversaw the trafficking of "tens of thousands of pounds of drugs into the United States, along with related violence", FBI Director Christopher Wray said, adding that now they will "face justice in the United States".

"Fentanyl is the deadliest drug threat our country has ever faced, and the Justice Department will not rest until every single cartel leader,

member, and associate responsible for poisoning our communities is held accountable," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement. Mexican authorities didn't immediately comment on the arrests.

US officials have been seeking Zambada's capture for years, and he has been charged in a number of US cases. He was charged in February in the Eastern District of New York with conspiring to manufacture and distribute the synthetic opioid. Prosecutors said he was continuing to lead the Sinaloa cartel, "one of the most violent and powerful drug trafficking organizations in the world". Zambada, one of the longest-surviving capos in Mexico, was consid-

ered the cartel's strategist, more involved in day-to-day operations than his flashier and better-known boss, "El Chapo" Guzmán, who was sentenced to life in prison in the US in 2019 and is the father of Guzmán López.

Zambada is an old-fashioned capo in an era of younger kingpins known for their flamboyant lifestyles of club-hopping and brutal tactics of beheading, dismembering and even skinning their rivals. While Zambada has fought those who challenged him, he is known for concentrating on the business side of trafficking and avoiding gruesome cartel violence that would draw attention.

In an April 2010 interview with the Mexican magazine

Proceso, he acknowledged that he lived in constant fear of going to prison and would contemplate suicide rather than be captured.

"I'm terrified of being incarcerated," Zambada said. "I'd like to think that, yes, I would kill myself." The interview was surprising for a kingpin known for keeping his head down, but he gave strict instructions on where and when the encounter would take place, and the article gave no hint of his whereabouts.

Zambada reputedly won the loyalty of locals in his home state of Sinaloa and neighbouring Durango through his largess, sponsoring local farmers and distributing money and beer in his birthplace of El Alamo. /AP/

## Briefly

### IRAN SLAMS US CONGRESS FOR APPLAUDING ISRAEL'S NETANYAHU

TEHRAN Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani has criticised the US Congress for hosting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and applauding his speech amid ongoing Israeli actions against Palestinians. Kanaani made the remarks on Thursday on social media platform X, reacting to Netanyahu's visit and his address to the US Congress on Wednesday, where Netanyahu pledged to achieve "total victory" against Hamas and labelled Americans opposing Israel's military operation in Gaza as "idiots". Netanyahu's speech received applause and a stand ovation from some Congress members, Xinhua news agency reported. Kanaani lamented that while Palestinians were being killed daily by Israel, the US government and Congress welcomed the Israeli Prime Minister with "cheering and applauding despite all such crimes". He said that by welcoming Netanyahu into the US Congress, the West's efforts to portray itself as "innocent and humanitarian" were failing, exposing what he described as violent of US policies. /IANS/

### ROCKETS HIT AIRBASE HOUSING US FORCES IN IRAQ

BAGHDAD Four rockets attacked the Ayn al-Asad Airbase in Iraq's western Anbar province, where US troops are stationed, an Iraqi army officer said on Friday. The attack occurred late Thursday night when an unknown armed group fired the rockets, two of which landed inside the airbase and the other two landed outside without causing casualties, Saad al-Obaidi from Anbar Operations Command told Xinhua news agency. Iraqi security forces launched a search operation in the areas around the airbase looking for the attackers, al-Obaidi said. /IANS/

## MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA

### 'The human suffering is unacceptable,' Canada, New Zealand and Australia say in a joint call for an urgent cease-fire in Gaza

CANBERRA Canada, Australia and New Zealand issued a joint statement Friday on the need for an urgent cease-fire in Gaza and the risk of expanded conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. "The situation in Gaza is catastrophic. The human suffering is unacceptable. It cannot continue," the statement from the three prime ministers said.

"Israel must listen to the concerns of the international community. The protection of civilians is paramount and a requirement under international humanitarian law. Palestinian civilians cannot be made to pay the price of defeating Hamas. It must end," the statement said.

The prime ministers said they were "gravely concerned" about the prospect of further escalation across the region and condemned Iran's mid-April attack on Israel. They also called on Iran to refrain from further destabilizing actions in the Middle East and demanded that Iran and its affiliated groups, including Hezbollah, cease their attacks.

Hezbollah began firing rockets shortly after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, saying it aimed to ease pressure on Gaza. The exchange of fire and airstrikes, which has been limited to a few kilometers (miles) on each side of the border, has displaced tens of thousands of people in both countries. A West Bank Hamas leader dies in Israeli custody

Ramallah (West Bank) -- A Hamas leader in the occupied West Bank died in Israeli custody Thursday evening after a deterioration in his health, according to a Palestinian prisoners rights group. Sheikh Mustafa Abu Arra, 63, was arrested in October and was recently transferred from Ramon Prison to Soroka hospital where he died, the Palestinian Prisoners Club said. /AP/

### Ancient site in Palestine gets UNESCO tag amid conflict in Gaza

NEW DELHI Amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza, the ancient heritage site of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer in Palestine on Friday received the UNESCO tag and was simultaneously put on the List of World Heritage in Danger after an "emergency nomination". The announcement was made during the ongoing 46th session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) in Delhi. India is hosting the key UNESCO event for the first time.

Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer in Palestine has been inscribed on the World Heritage List and List of World Heritage in Danger, it was announced in the plenary meeting of the session.

Israel has been carrying out a massive military offensive in Gaza following the unprecedented and multi-pronged attacks on Israeli cities by Hamas militants on October 7.

India in November had urged both the sides to eschew violence, de-escalate the situation and create conditions for an early resumption of direct peace negotiations towards a two-state solution to the Palestine issue. Friday's inscription has raised hopes about protection of such heritage sites.

The UNESCO in a statement later said that "this decision recognises both the site's value and the need to protect it from danger".

"In view of the threats to this heritage site posed by the ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip, the World Heritage Committee used the emergency inscription procedure provided for in the World Heritage Convention," it said. In accordance with the terms of the

Convention, "its 195 States Parties are committed to avoid taking any deliberate measures likely to cause direct or indirect damage to this site, which is now inscribed on the World Heritage List, and to assist in its protection", the world body said.

The UNESCO said inclusion on the List of World Heritage in Danger automatically opens the door to "enhanced international technical and financial assistance mechanisms to guarantee the protection of the property and, if necessary, to help facilitate its rehabilitation".

The monastery of Saint Hilarion/Tell Umm Amer, one of the oldest sites in the Middle East, was founded by Saint Hilarion and was home to the first monastic community in the Holy Land.

Situated at the crossroads of the main routes of trade and exchange between Asia and Africa, it was a centre for religious, cultural and economic exchanges, illustrating the prosperity of desert monastic sites in the Byzantine period, the statement said. In December 2023, at its 18th session, the UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict had already decided to grant "provisional enhanced protection" to the monastery under the 1954 Hague Convention and its Second Protocol. The Palestinian delegation which included Mounir Anastas, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Palestine to UNESCO, thanked UNESCO for this dual inscription which seeks to bring a protective cover and world's attention to the heritage

site located in areas facing conflicts.

"I am honoured to have this inscription taking place in the greatest democracy in the world. Thank you, India. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all Committee members for their valuable support for this inscription," Anastas said in his statement made in the session right after the inscription.

He also thanked ICOMOS, an advisory body of the UNESCO, and the Secretariat of the UNESCO. Various state parties from Lebanon, Turkey and Kazakhstan welcomed the UNESCO inscription of the heritage site in Palestine, with some of them underlining the need for cultural heritage preservation in times of armed conflicts.

The nomination for the site of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer was an "emergency nomination".

Paris-based International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) also made a presentation on this site. The nomination dossier was submitted in June 2024 followed by a "desk review".

"Situated on the coastal dunes in Nuseirat Municipality, the ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer represent one of the earliest monastic sites in the Middle East, dating back to the 4th century," according to the UNESCO website.

"Founded by Saint Hilarion, the monastery began with solitary hermits and evolved into a coenobitic community. It was the first monastic community in the Holy Land, laying the groundwork for the spread of monastic practices in the region. /PTI/

### WITH PALESTINIAN DEAL AND UKRAINIAN FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT, CHINA SHOWS ITS RISING INFLUENCE

BEIJING In consecutive days this week, China brokered a deal between rival Palestinian factions and hosted Ukraine's foreign minister at a moment when pressure is mounting on the country to negotiate an end to the grinding war there. While it's unclear if the agreement between Hamas and Fatah will succeed where others have failed and there is little concrete progress towards peace in Ukraine, China emerged a winner, further cementing its role as a diplomatic force on the global stage, not just an economic powerhouse.

As Beijing and Washington vie for influence around the world, China is increasingly playing a role that has previously been the domain of world powers like the US and Russia. Earlier this month, Western countries called some of China's activities worrying and labelled Beijing a troublemaker. But the events of this week -- and the China-brokered deal last year to reestablish relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia -- show that international players are seeking Beijing's help, an acknowledgment that it is a diplomatic force to reckon with. "China is now offering itself as a broker on the global stage, and countries are responding," said Carla Freeman, a senior expert for China at the United States Institute of Peace. "It's a recognition -- one much sought after by Beijing -- that China has international influence and could play a role in improving the outcomes of a diplomatic process."

On Tuesday, Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah agreed in principle to form a government, the latest attempt at resolving a longstanding rivalry that looms over Gaza's future after the war with Israel. Previous similar declarations have failed, but even just getting the parties together in a room was an achievement, said Jon Alterman, senior vice president and director of the Middle East programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies. "They say, we did what nobody else could do, nobody saw was possible, and that, by itself, represents a victory," he said. /AP/

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New MD and CEO of Bandhan Bank, Ratan Kumar Kesh addresses the media, in Kolkata, Friday, July 26, 2024. / PTI

## IndiGo quarterly profit slides 12 per cent to Rs 2,729 crore

NEW DELHI The country's largest airline IndiGo on Friday reported a nearly 12 per cent fall in profit after tax to Rs 2,728.8 crore for the three months ended June as higher fuel and other expenses took a toll on the bottom line. The budget carrier, which is set to complete 18 years of flying and introduce business class seats, said network expansion, including the addition of new destinations, will continue but flagged a higher inflationary environment.

While the total income shot up 18 per cent to Rs 20,248.9 crore in the first quarter of the current financial year, the overall expenses, mainly driven by higher fuel costs, jumped 24 per cent to Rs 17,444.9 crore. In the 2023 June quarter, IndiGo's parent InterGlobe Aviation had a profit after tax of Rs 3,090.6 crore.

Excluding the impact of foreign exchange, the carrier's profit after tax in the latest June quarter was Rs 2,786.3 crore, according to a release. The total income in the year-ago period stood at Rs 17,160.9 crore.

The airline's total expenses surged 24 per cent to Rs 17,444.9 crore, with fuel costs rising 22.7 per cent to Rs 6,416.5 crore in the three months ended June 2024.

In the same period a year ago, total expenses were Rs 14,070.2 crore.

According to the company, aircraft and engine rentals also went up to Rs

624.1 crore in the latest June quarter from Rs 194.6 crore in the year-ago period. The load factor, which refers to seat occupancy in a flight, dropped to 86.7 per cent in the quarter under review from 88.6 per cent in the same period a year ago.

During an analysts call to discuss the latest quarterly results, IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers said the airline has now been profitable for seven straight quarters, and that network expansion is a key part of its strategy.

IndiGo Chief Financial Officer Gaurav Negi said there is an escalation in fuel prices as some states have started increasing the Value Added Tax (VAT) on jet fuel.

Airport charges have also started to climb upwards, and the airline is monitoring it as well as having discussions with airport partners. Further, maintenance works are going through a bit of an inflationary cycle, he said during an analysts' call to discuss the latest quarterly results. "Currently, we are experiencing a higher inflationary environment... it is across the board we are experiencing, nonetheless, we are looking at ways on how to control the costs," Negi said and added that an increase in capacity is helping offset higher costs.

For the current fiscal ending March 2025, the airline has a capacity guidance of early double digits, and for the

second quarter, the capacity addition is anticipated to be in the high single digits.

It has a domestic market share of nearly 61 per cent and around 975 planes on order. At the end of June, the airline had 382 planes, including 18 aircraft on wet lease. Among others, the airline plans to induct six aircraft from Qatar Airways on damp lease in the coming quarters, subject to regulatory approvals.

Meanwhile, Negi said the grounded aircraft is in the mid-70s and expects the grounding to reduce towards the start of next year.

The airline has grounded planes due to the Pratt & Whitney (P&W) engine woes, and as part of mitigating measures, it has also taken planes on wet lease.

"We are working with P&W towards constant supply of spare engines, and basis the current estimates, we expect the grounding to start reducing towards the start of next year," Negi said. In the June quarter, IndiGo finalised an amendment to the existing agreement with P&W for customised compensation in relation to the grounding of aircraft due to spare engine unavailability.

Elbers also said IndiGo will be getting A321 XLR aircraft next year, and that will allow the airline to reach the Southern parts of Europe. Shares of the company gained 1.37 per cent to close at Rs 4,491.25 apiece on the BSE. / PTI /

## SC rejects Maran's plea against Delhi HC verdict in Spicejet arbitral award case

NEW DELHI In a relief to Spicejet, the Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea of Kalanithi Maran and Kal Airways against the Delhi High Court order that had set aside an arbitral award asking the low-cost carrier to refund Rs 579 crore with interest to the media baron and his firm. A single judge bench of the Delhi High Court had on July 31, 2023 upheld the arbitral award asking Spicejet promoter Ajay Singh to refund Rs 579 crore plus interest to Maran and his company Kal Airways. The award was granted by the arbitration tribunal on July 20, 2018.

However, on May 17 this year, a division bench of the Delhi High Court, while dealing with an intra-court appeal against the order, set aside the single judge bench order that had upheld the arbitral award.

The division bench allowed the appeals of Singh and Spicejet against the single judge bench order and remanded the matter back to the court concerned to consider the petitions challenging the arbitral award afresh.

Maran and Kal Airways moved the top court against the decision.

"No, no...we will not interfere. Let it go back (to the high court)," a bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala said while refusing to accept the submissions of senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Maran and his firm.

The top court was also critical of the single judge bench judgement of the high court.

"Come to the single judge order first...all that we can say about single judge is filling up 250 pages is not writing a judgment under section 34 (of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act). "This is atrocious. Just a number of the Supreme Court judgements (is cited) saying (scope of) interference is limited. Let us not make any observations about this single judge. Where has he even applied his mind?" the CJ observed when Singhvi tried to refer to legal points of the case.

Section 34 of the Act deals with applications for setting aside the arbitral awards. Refusing to interfere with the high court's order, the top court said it was in agreement with the reasoning of the division bench sending it back to single judge for deciding the case afresh.

"The order has to be carefully articulated. On the other hand,

the judge must apply mind to the grounds of challenge and then decide if interference is warranted," the CJ said.

"The Delhi High Court should now assign the case to a judge other than the single judge who was assigned the case," the bench said, trashing the plea of Maran.

Spicejet hailed the apex court's decision. "Spicejet Ltd. welcomes the Supreme Court's decision to dismiss an appeal filed by Kalanithi Maran and Kal Airways challenging a Delhi High Court division bench ruling in favour of the airline," the low-cost carrier said in a statement.

On July 31, 2023, the single judge had upheld the award announced by the arbitration tribunal on July 20, 2018 in favour of Maran and Kal Airways, saying the court was barred from entering into the merits of an award unless there was an error that was apparent on the face of the record or an illegality that goes to the root of the matter.

Singh had approached the single judge bench of the high court challenging the arbitral award.

The case dates to January 2015, when Singh, who owned the airline earlier, bought it back from Maran after it was grounded for months due to resource crunch. While the arbitral tribunal had asked Maran, who also owns the Sun Group and several publications, to pay Singh and the airline Rs 29 crore in penal interest, while Singh was asked to refund Rs 579 crore plus interest to Maran.

The tribunal, created in 2016 on the orders of the Delhi High Court to adjudicate the share transfer dispute, had held that there was no breach of a share sale and purchase agreement reached between Maran and current promoter Singh in late January 2015. In a relief to Singh, the tribunal had, however, rejected Maran's appeal for damages of Rs 1,323 crore from the Gurugram-based carrier.

In February 2015, Maran of the Sun Network and Kal Airways, his investment vehicle, had transferred 58.46 per cent stake in Spicejet to Singh for Rs 2 (Rs two only) along with Rs 1,500 crore debt liability, after the airline was grounded due to a severe cash crunch. Singh was the co-founder of the airline and is now its chairman and managing director. As part of the agreement, Maran and Kal Airways had claimed to have paid Spicejet Rs 679 crore for issuing warrants and preference shares. / PTI /

## Trending news

### BANDHAN BANK REPORTS 47 PC JUMP IN NET PROFIT TO RS 1,063 CRORE IN Q1FY25

KOLKATA Private lender Bandhan Bank on Friday reported a 47 per cent jump in its net profit to Rs 1,063 crore in the first quarter of financial year 2024-25. The bank had reported a net profit of Rs 721 crore during the same quarter of the previous fiscal. Bandhan Bank's interim MD & CEO Ratan Kumar Kesh said the operating profit during the quarter under review stood at Rs 1,941 crore, which was a 24 per cent growth over Rs 1,562 crore in the year-ago period. Net interest income quarter grew 24 per cent to Rs 3,005 crore during the quarter from Rs 2,491 crore in the same quarter of 2023-24. Deposits grew 23 per cent to reach Rs 1.33 lakh crore, while gross advances grew 22 per cent to Rs 1.26 lakh crore, the bank said. / PTI /

### CAPITAL GAINS TAX RATIONALISATION WAS INDUSTRY'S DEMAND: REVENUE SECY

NEW DELHI Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra on Friday said the rationalisation of the capital gains taxes on various asset classes in the FY25 Budget is a tax simplification measure as sought by the industry and not to augment revenue. Addressing members of the industry chambers CII and Assocham, he wanted to know if the industry was in favour of having different tax rates for different asset classes. The FY25 Budget has rationalised the holding period for various asset classes for short- and long-term capital gains tax. The holding period for all listed assets has now been made one year for long-term capital gains tax (LTCG). For unlisted shares, debentures and real estate, the holding period for LTCG is two years. In terms of rates, LTCG tax has been rationalised at 12.5 per cent for all asset classes without the benefit of indexation. Earlier, the rate was 20 per cent for all asset classes except STT-paid equities. For real estate, it was 20 per cent with indexation. / PTI /

### INDIA'S DIGITAL PAYMENTS RECORD DOUBLE-DIGIT GROWTH: RBI DATA

MUMBAI Digital payments in India have registered a 12.6 per cent increase year-on-year with the RBI's Digital Payments Index (RBI-DPI) rising to 445.5 at the end of March 2024 compared to 418.77 in September 2023 and 395.57 in March 2023. "The RBI-DPI index has increased across all parameters driven by significant growth in payment performance and payment infrastructure across the country over the period," the RBI said on Friday. The Reserve Bank has been publishing a composite RBI-DPI index. / IANS /

## Sensex rebounds 1,293 pts, Nifty races to record high on value buying in bluechips

MUMBAI Benchmark Sensex rebounded by 1,293 points while Nifty shot up to a record high on Friday, cutting short the five-day losing streak on heavy value buying at lower levels and a rally in bluechips like Infosys, Airtel and Reliance Industries. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,292.92 points or 1.62 per cent to settle at 81,332.72. During the day, it soared 1,387.38 points or 1.73 per cent to 81,427.18. The NSE Nifty surged 428.75 points or 1.76 per cent to settle at an all-time closing high of 24,834.85. As many as 47 of Nifty constituents closed in green while three ended lower. Sensex and Nifty had been on a decline since Friday last. Sensex tumbled 1,303.66 points or 1.60 per cent, while the Nifty declined 394.75 points or 1.59 per cent in five straight days of losses to Thursday.

All the Sensex shares except for Nestle closed in green on Friday. Bharti Airtel was the biggest gainer, rising by over 4.51 per cent. Adani Ports, Sun Pharma, Tata Steel, HCL Technologies, Infosys, JSW Steel and Mahindra & Mahindra were the other big gainers.

Nestle was the only loser, closing lower by 0.07 per cent.

"The domestic market experienced a substantial rebound on the start of the next month expiry, recovering from the recent losses incurred following the Union Budget. This upturn was driven by positive reactions to the better-than-expected US GDP, which augurs well for global demand. "Investors are adopting buy-on-dip strategy, refocusing on quarterly earnings and stock-specific trends. Notably, gains were observed across sectors, with Metals and IT leading, and midcaps outperforming," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit



### RUPEE RECOVERS FROM ALL-TIME LOW, RISES 6 PAISE TO CLOSE AT 83.72 AGAINST US DOLLAR

MUMBAI The rupee recovered from its all-time low level and appreciated 6 paise to 83.72 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, on strength in the domestic markets and expectations of fresh foreign inflows. Forex traders said the rupee traded within a narrow range, taking cues from the dollar index, which remained flat.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.72 and touched an intra-day high of 83.69 and a low of 83.73 against the dollar during the session. It finally settled at 83.72 (provisional) against the American currency, up 6 paise from its previous close.

On Thursday, the rupee dropped 7 paise to close at an all-time low of 83.78 against the US dollar.

"Market participants are focused on the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) Price Index, with significant attention on the upcoming US FED policy meeting on July 31," said Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities. Trivedi further said the anticipation of an interest rate cut in the September policy could add pressure on the dollar, especially if hints are given during the July-end policy. "The rupee is expected to continue its sideways range between 83.60 and 83.80," he said. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose 1,292.92 points, or 1.62 per cent, to settle at 81,332.72 points, and Nifty advanced 428.75 points. / PTI /

## Govt to buy all masur, urad and tur dal produced by the farmers: Agriculture minister

NEW DELHI The government will procure the entire production of tur, urad, and masur dal from farmers, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said in Rajya Sabha on Friday. Through e-Samridhi platform, on which farmers have to get themselves registered, the government will make the procurement, he said.

"The government will procure all tur, urad and masur dal produced by farmers," Chouhan said, while replying to a supplementary question in the Rajya Sabha. The minister further said

under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government had the highest purchase under MSP from farmers. Referring to data of the previous UPA government, Chauhan said between 2003-2004 and 2013-14, only 45 crore metric tonnes were purchased under the Minimum Support Price (MSP).

While the present NDA government has procured a total of 69.18 crore metric tonnes between 2014-15 and 2023-24.

He alleged that the opposition was doing politics and said the Swaminathan committee

had recommended 50 per cent profit to farmers on their cost, but it was the UPA government that ignored it.

Placing a cabinet note of previous Manmohan Singh's government, Chauhan said it refused to accept suggestions of the Swaminathan Commission saying that mechanical linkage between MSP and cost of production would distort the market.

M Shanmugam of the DMK demanded that tea and coffee growers be brought under the MSP as they, too, are facing difficulties. / PTI /

## PM to chair NITI Aayog Governing Council meet on Saturday; focus on 'Viksit Bharat @2047'

NEW DELHI Prime Minister Narendra Modi will chair NITI Aayog's 9th Governing Council meeting on July 27, which will focus on making India a developed nation by 2047, an official statement said on Friday. The council, the apex body of NITI Aayog, includes all state chief ministers, lieutenant governors of Union Territories, and several Union ministers. Modi is the chairman of NITI Aayog. According to the statement, the meeting aims to foster participative governance and collaboration between the Centre and state governments, enhancing the quality of life for both rural and urban populations by strengthening the delivery mechanisms of government interventions.

"The Governing Council Meeting on July 27, 2024 will discuss the Approach Paper for the Vision Document on Viksit Bharat @2047...The meeting will also see detailed deliberations on the role of states in achieving the goal of Viksit Bharat @2047," the statement said. The meeting will also focus on recommendations of the 3rd National Conference of Chief Secretaries held in December last year. During the conference, recommendations were made on five key themes—drinking water; access, quantity, and quality; electricity; quality, efficiency, and reliability; health; accessibility, affordability, and quality of care; schooling; access and quality and land

and property; accessibility, digitization, registration, and mutation.

Special sessions were also held to deliberate on cyber security, aspirational districts and blocks programme, role of states, and AI in governance which were also discussed during the National Conference of Chief Secretaries.

Meanwhile, chief ministers of three Congress-ruled states -- Karnataka's Siddaramaiah, Himachal Pradesh's Sukhinder Singh Sukhu and Telangana's Revanth Reddy -- have announced they will not attend the NITI Aayog meeting over alleged bias against their states in the Union Budget.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK leader M K Stalin, Kerala's CM and CPI(M) leader

Pinnarayi Vijayan as well as Aam Aadmi Party-led Punjab and Delhi governments have also boycotted the meeting.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said the government think tank brought by the Modi government should be scrapped and the Planning Commission restored.

Banerjee, who is set to attend the NITI Aayog meeting even as most INDIA bloc chief ministers have decided to give it a miss, said she felt their voices should be raised on a common platform.

Biju Janata Dal (BJD) MP Sasmit Patra has supported the decision taken by opposition parties, and accused the Centre of denying states their share in the Budget. / PTI /

# SPORTS

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### VENKATESH IYER JOINS LANCASHIRE FOR A SHORT STINT

India and Kolkata Knight Riders all-rounder Venkatesh Iyer on Friday joined Lancashire for a short stint comprising two Division One matches and One-Day Cup scheduled for next month, the English county announced. Iyer, who was a member of the IPL winning KKR side, has played two ODIs and nine T20Is for India. He has also played 20 First-Class matches, 43 List-A games. "The batting all-rounder joins the Club on an initial contract for the One-Day Cup and the following two rounds of County Championship matches in late-August," Lancashire said on their website.

### HARDIK IS AS SKILLED AS BEN STOKES, BUT NEEDS MORE CONSISTENCY: SCOTT STYRIS

Hardik Pandya's skill sets are equivalent to premier England all-rounder and captain Ben Stokes but the mercurial Indian needs to show more consistency, reckoned former New Zealand cricketer Scott Styris. Recently, Suryakumar Yadav was preferred over Pandya as India's captain in T20Is for the upcoming series against Sri Lanka, as chief selector Ajit Agarkar "wanted someone who was likely to be available more often." This champion all-rounder (Pandya) has got as many skills as anyone. He's probably in a similar ability-zone as someone like Ben Stokes.



### PUNJAB FC SIGNS CROATIAN MIDFIELDER FILIP MRZLIJAK

Indian Super League club Punjab FC on Friday announced roping in Croatian midfielder Filip Mrzljak ahead of the upcoming season. The 31-year-old Mrzljak played for Croatian club HNK Gorica last season in the Croatian Football League and will make his first appearance in India. Having begun his youth career with Dinamo Zagreb in 2008, Mrzljak made his senior professional debut with the club in 2011.

## India trounce Bangladesh by 10 wickets to reach Women's T20 Asia Cup final

DAMBULLA Pacer Renuka Singh's three-wicket burst followed by Smriti Mandhana's brisk unbeaten fifty underlined India's ruthless performance as the defending champions walloped Bangladesh by 10 wickets and marched into their record-extending ninth women's Asia Cup final, here on Friday. Defending champions India will face the winner of the second semifinal between Pakistan and Sri Lanka, in the title clash on Sunday. Shafali (26 not out, 28b, 2x4) and Mandhana (55 not out, 39b, 9x4, 1x6) were on song from the word go, as India overhauled the target of 81 without breaking a sweat. India ended up at 83 for no loss in 11 overs. Mandhana and Shafali's knocks were filled with trademark shots around the ground as India motored to 46 for no loss in the Power Play. Shafali, who was dropped on 21 off Rabeya Khan, played those powerful heaves across the line to find the fence.



India Women's S Verma and Smriti Mandhana celebrate their win against Bangladesh Women in the 1st Semi-Final of Women's Asia Cup, in Dambulla on Friday. / PTI

Mandhana, at the other end, unfurled those exquisite drives on the off-side, such as the one the left-hander played through the covers against pacer Marufa Akter. Mandhana also displayed her power while pulling pacer Jahanara Alam for a six over deep square leg as India trotted to a victory that was a long-forgone conclusion once Bangladesh were limited 80 for eight. Renuka (3/10) upfront and left-arm spinner Radha Yadav in the middle overs (3/14) rattled Bangladesh with excellent spells. In fact, Bangladesh hardly recovered from the deep wounds inflicted by Renuka in the first six overs. Renuka, who bowled four overs on the trot during her 3/10 spell, received ample support from left-arm spinner Radha Yadav (3/14) after Bangladesh elected to bat first.

Renuka struck in the first over itself, dismissing Dilara Akter, whose slog sweep did not have enough power in it to clear Uma Chetry at deep mid-wicket. In her next over, Renuka got the better of Ishma Tanjim with a delivery that stayed close to her body and a mistimed whip across the line was grabbed by Tantuja Kanwar at short third. Renuka bagged her third wicket in as many overs with a slightly short of length delivery that Murshida Khatun slapped straight to Shafali at mid-wicket. At 25 for three inside the Power Play segment, Bangladesh were falling apart fast and their real hope for a

revival was the presence of skipper Nigar Sultana (32, 5b, 2x4), the third highest run-getter in the tournament. Sultana hung around resolutely but even she could not offer a meaningful fight to the Indian bowlers, who gave away just seven runs across overs seven and 10 while losing Rumana Ahmed to Radha's quick arm. There was also hardly any backing for Sultana and the excellent line of Indian spinners on the day meant that the right-hander could rarely play her preferred sweep shot. The Indians, on their part, fielded vastly better compared to the previous games and Shafali was particularly impressive. / PTI /

### SL EDGE OUT PAKISTAN BY 3 WICKETS, TO FACE INDIA IN WOMEN'S ASIA CUP FINAL

DAMBULLA Skipper Chamari Athapaththu's diligent fifty propelled Sri Lanka to a thrilling three-wicket win over Pakistan in the second semifinal of the women's Asia Cup here on Friday, setting up the title clash against India. In the first semifinal earlier, defending champions India had beaten Bangladesh by 10 wickets. The final will be played on Sunday. Athapaththu, who is the highest run-getter in the event with 223 runs, single-handedly guided the Lankans close to the target of 141, making a well-paced 63 off 48 balls (9x4, 1x6). Her fifty and Anushka Sanjeevanti's unbeaten 24 (22b, 1x4, 1x6) helped Lanka to reach 141 for 7 in 19.5 overs. Kalisha Dilhari (17, 18 balls) helped Athapaththu milk 61 runs for the third wicket that gave Lanka a firm hold on the match. Pakistan stayed in the fight through a brilliant spell by experienced left-arm spinner Sadia Iqbal (4/16 off 4 overs) but she did not have much support from the other end as the hosts stumbled across the line. Earlier, Pakistan relied on handy knocks by Muneeba Ali (37), Gull Feroza (25), skipper Nida Dar (23) and Fatima Sana (23 not out) to make 140 for four. All of them got the starts but none of them converted it into a bigger score as Pakistan ended up with what eventually proved to be a total that was slightly below par. / PTI /



Spectators wait for the start of the opening ceremony of the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, France on Friday. AP / PTI

## Paris Olympics: 'One of the greatest honours', says Sindhu on being India's flag-bearer for Opening Ceremony

PARIS India's ace shuttler P.V. Sindhu shared her excitement of being the flag-bearer of the country in the Paris Olympics Opening Ceremony on Friday and said it is "one of the greatest honours" of her life. Sindhu is one of the two flag-bearers of the country along with experienced table tennis player Achantia Sharath Kamal for the historic event along the river Seine in Paris. Taking to X, Sindhu also posted pictures of herself in a tricolour-inspired saree for the glittery ceremony. "Paris 2024, flag bearer—one of the greatest honours of my life to hold our country's flag in front of millions," Sindhu wrote on X, hours before the Opening Ceremony in Paris. The duo will lead 78 sportspeople and officials from 12 disciplines in the iconic

first-ever outdoor Opening Ceremony in the history of the Games. In the unique ceremony, thousands of Olympic athletes will travel on around 100 boats, cruising along the Seine and passing by some of Paris' most iconic landmarks, including the Notre Dame, Pont des Arts and Pont Neuf. India has sent a contingent of 117 sportspeople to Paris for the 2024 Olympics, aiming to surpass the historic seven medals won at the previous edition in Tokyo. Indian athletes will compete in 16 out of the 32 sports featured in this edition of the Olympic Games. As many members of the Contingent have competitions on Saturday morning, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has been respectful of their decision to prioritise preparation and not take part in the Opening Ceremony. Among those who have been exempted from participating in the Parade include rower Balraj Panwar, who has his race on Saturday morning, members of the air rifle and air pistol shooting teams, who have their events on Saturday, too have decided to skip the opening ceremony. India will be opening its campaign in shooting, badminton, tennis, rowing, archery and hockey on the first day of competitions on Saturday. Meanwhile, members of the athletics, weightlifting and wrestling squads are yet to reach Paris and therefore will miss the opening ceremony. All others who have made themselves available will be part of the Parade. / IANS /

## World champions India look to maintain dominance in new era of SKY and Gambhir

PALLEKELE India's newly-forged coach-captain combination of Gautam Gambhir and Suryakumar Yadav will look to make instant impact against a Sri Lankan team in disarray when the familiar South Asian rivals face off in a limited-overs series, starting with three T20Is, here on Saturday. Two-time World Cup winner Gambhir is now at the helm of the ship as India's head coach while the T20I reigns have been handed over to one of the best batters in the format, Suryakumar. Gambhir, who has built his coaching reputation in the corridors of IPL with three title wins

for Kolkata Knight Riders – twice as captain and once as mentor – succeeds the immensely popular Rahul Dravid. The new coach has his task cut out given that the team under his predecessor reached the final in each of the ICC events in their respective last editions. Gambhir's tenacity as well as his intense approach will make him a different coach to work along for the players, who will also have to learn the ways of the new T20I skipper Suryakumar. Suryakumar's elevation came as a slight surprise given he leapfrogged Hardik Pandya for the



India's captain Suryakumar Yadav and Sri Lanka's captain Charith Asalanka unveil the T20I cricket series trophy, in Pallekele on Friday. / PTI

job. The selectors also ignored his comparative lack of experience as captain. Ajit Agarkar and Co. made it clear that they wanted a captain who was on the park "more often than not" and went by "dressing room feedback" while hitting the reset button on the T20I side. The next T20 World Cup, to be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka in 2026, gives the selectors plenty of time to rebuild the side which has also suffered a severe talent drain. The overhaul follows the World Cup triumph last month and T20I

retirements of seasoned campaigners Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja. With the side in transition, young batting gun and vice-captain in the white-ball formats, Shubman Gill sees this as an opportunity to cement his place and others like Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rinku Singh and even Rryan Parag will look to do the same. While the like-for-like replacement Axar Patel fits in perfectly for Jadeja in the eleven, India also have riches in the all-round department given Pandya, Shivam Dube and an in-form Washington Sundar are also available. / PTI /

## We need to create more heroes to make India a sports superpower: Vijender



NEW DELHI Boxer-turned-politician Vijender Singh feels India needs more heroes beyond cricket to inspire the future generations if the country wants to become a sports superpower by 2047. These heroes, he believes, will also drive a cultural change, encouraging more young Indians to pursue sports as a profession. "We have to create heroes to change the culture," the former Olympic and world championships bronze medal-winning boxer, who is now a

"When kids see his picture on a peanut butter container, it makes an impact. When I started out, I merely wanted a government job, that's all but today, athletes want more," he added. The Bhiwani-man also said that improvement in the country's sports infrastructure is crucial to ensure the overall progress. "We don't have good infrastructure or good stadiums. If we are serious, we need to improve that. You can't just

make one cricket stadium and leave it at that. "You need to have training centres for other sports as well. Otherwise someone (in Delhi) who wants to learn boxing has no option but to go to Sonapat and train there," he said. Vijender said the change has to start at the basic level, in schools, where kids are allowed just one devoted sports or physical education period. "We aren't taught sports in school. There is only one PT period but eight periods for academics. For us, sports is time pass, not a career." Drawing a parallel with cricket, Vijender, the first boxer from the country to stand on the Olympic podium, said that even the legendary Kapil Dev was relatively unknown to the masses before he brought home the 1983 World Cup. "...how many people knew about Kapil Dev? Not many knew him before he won that World Cup." "Now, (we are at a point) where if a cricketer's finger gets hurt, you will read about it but you won't hear the same noise when a boxer's jaw is broken, that doesn't make news. / PTI /

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## Gambhir is contemporary, will come up with fresh ideas: Ravi Shastri

DUBAI Former India captain Ravi Shastri expects Gautam Gambhir to flourish in his new role as head coach, saying he is a "contemporary" mentor who has taken over the reigns of a relatively "mature and settled" team. Shastri, a former India coach, believes the 42-year-old Gambhir can make an immediate impact in his new role as he is already close to the team, having played with and mentored quite a few players. The former left-handed opener served as a team mentor for Lucknow Super Giants and Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL. "He's (Gambhir) contemporary, he just had a great season in the IPL. I think he's the right age where he's young, he'll come with fresh ideas. He knows most of the players, especially in the white-ball format, having been part of teams in the IPL. So I think it's refreshing," Shastri said on the recent episode of The ICC Review. "And we know with Gautam, he's a no-nonsense guy. He'll have

his ideas as well. And the good thing for him is he's got a mature team. He's got a settled team, a mature team. I think even though you might think you're mature, you might benefit from some fresh ideas. So I think it'll be interesting times." Shastri feels managing the workload of players, especially bowlers, will be Gambhir's biggest challenge. "Obviously, player management becomes the key as a coach. So it'll be interesting to see how he goes. I think he's got the tools, he's got the goods for the job and he's got the experience." Gambhir's first assignment as India coach is the white-ball series in Sri Lanka which starts with a three-match T20 series in Pallekele on Saturday. With stalwarts Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja retiring from the shortest format after last month's T20 World Cup triumph, Gambhir's other task would be to find replacements for the trio. / PTI /

## Briefly

### KERALA GOVT ANNOUNCES RS FIVE LAKH FUNDS FOR EACH OLYMPICS PARTICIPANT FROM STATE

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM The Kerala government on Friday announced that it would grant Rs five lakh each to the participants of the Paris Olympics from the state. State Sports Minister V Abdurahiman on Friday said Rs five lakh has been allotted to Chief Athletics Coach Radhakrishnan Nair also. "The amount has been allotted to Mohammed Anas, Mohammed Ajmal (both part of the relay team), Abdulla Aboobacker (triple jump), P R Sreejesh (hockey) and H S Prannoy (badminton)," the minister said in a release. / PTI /

### SYRIA, MAURITIUS TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERCONTINENTAL CUP

NEW DELHI Syria and Mauritius will participate in the Intercontinental Cup in Hyderabad from September 2-10, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) announced on Friday. Syria are currently ranked 93rd in the FIFA Rankings, whereas Mauritius are placed 179th. India are placed at the 124th position. It will be the fourth edition of the event with the previous iterations held in Mumbai (2018), Ahmedabad (2019) and Bhubaneswar (2023). While India won the tournament in 2018 and 2023, the 2019 edition was won by North Korea. / PTI /

### ALPINE TEAM PRINCIPAL BRUNO FAMIN TO STEP DOWN FROM ROLE AT F1 TEAM

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS (BELGIUM) Alpine team principal Bruno Famin is to step down from his role, the Formula One team said Friday. Famin will be out of his post "by the end of August," with his replacement announced "in due course." He will be in charge at the Belgian Grand Prix on Sunday. The season then goes on a summer break until the Dutch GP on Aug. 25. / AP /

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## JLo throws lavish 'Bridgerton'- themed party as she turns 55

**S**inger-actress Jennifer Lopez turned 55 and shared a video on her Instagram which showcased a montage of moments from her 'Bridgerton'-inspired birthday party.

The Bridgerton-themed party was held on July 20 in the Hamptons, New York but the legendary singer shared the video on Wednesday (Eastern Standard Time). The dramatic video montage was set to orchestral music, reports People magazine.

The video showed a collection of images of JLo throughout the night, as well as videos of guests, attendees and performers dancing as if they were at a 19th-century English ball, akin to Netflix's popular historical romance series. At one point in the video, Lopez can be seen singing into a microphone.

As per People, the video ends with the 'Atlas' star blowing out

the candles on a cake as sparkles fly behind her. "Dearest Gentle Reader... And a splendid evening was had by all," she wrote in a caption to her video.

Guests at her birthday party included her mother Guadalupe Rodriguez, who was seen arriving at the event with friends dressed in period-appropriate attire.

JLo's husband Ben Affleck did not attend the party. The pair have remained on separate coasts for much of this summer and recently spent another significant milestone apart – their second wedding anniversary, which fell on July 16.

The singer-actress has enjoyed her time in the Hamptons this summer, sometimes with Affleck's daughter Violet. The duo was spotted spending the day together in Southampton on Sunday, July 14, on a bike ride, shopping and having a meal with Violet's friend.



## Sonam Kapoor dines with business tycoon Sunil Mittal's daughter Eiesha in London

**A**ctress Sonam Kapoor shared pictures of her dinner date with Eiesha Bharti Pasricha, daughter of business tycoon Sunil Mittal, in London.

Sonam reshared Eiesha Bharti Pasricha's Instagram story, showcasing a glimpse of a sophisticated evening. The dining location's lush interiors and intimate setting added to the evening's allure.

The actress also shared pictures of exquisite delicacies laid out on the table.

Sonam has been in London for the past few days with her son Vayu and sister Rhea Kapoor, who has been sharing lovely pictures from their vacation.

The actress's husband, businessman Anand Ahuja, owns a big house in London, and she divides her time between Mumbai, Delhi, and London.

Sonam's friend in London, Eiesha Bharti Pasricha, is a well-known lifestyle investor.

Eiesha has invested in several brands and she is married to Shyam Pasricha, an Indian-born entrepreneur in London. She is quite active on social media and frequently shares glimpses of her personal and professional life.

Sonam, the daughter of actor Anil Kapoor, started her career as an assistant director with filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 'Black'.

The actress last appeared in movies like 'Pad Man', 'Veere Di Wedding', 'Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga', 'Sanju', and 'Blind'.

## AKSHAY, ANUPAM, RAKUL 'SALUTE COURAGE, SACRIFICE OF OUR SOLDIERS' ON KARGIL DIWAS

**O**n the occasion of Kargil Vijay Diwas, Bollywood celebrities like Akshay Kumar, Anupam Kher, and Rakul Preet Singh on Friday paid tribute to the brave souls who sacrificed their lives for the country's honour.

Taking to X, Bollywood's 'Khiladi' Akshay Kumar wrote: "On this occasion of Kargil Vijay Diwas, salute to the courage and sacrifice of our soldiers. Stories of their valour will be repeated year after year. Jai Hind!"

Veteran actor Anupam Kher took to Instagram and shared a video with a message: "Kargil diwas ki 25th anniversary par bhartiya sena ko badhai aur yudh me shahid hue shooveer-on ko aur unke parivaar walon ko mera natmastak naman... Jai Hind (On the 25th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas, congratulations to the Indian Army and my deepest respects to the brave soldiers who were martyred and their families. Jai Hind)."

The post was captioned: "Bhartiya sena ki jai ho #25year-sokargilvijay."

Rakul Preet Singh posted on her Instagram stories: "On this Kargil Vijay Diwas, let us pay tribute to the brave souls who stood fearlessly for our country's honour."

Celina Jaitley wrote on her Instagram stories: "Echoes of bravery. Families remembering the Kargil heroes."

Kargil Vijay Diwas, which is celebrated on July 26 every year, commemorates India's victory over Pakistan in the Kargil War. It honours the sacrifices of Indian soldiers who ousted Pakistani forces from the Northern Kargil District in Ladakh in 1999.

Meanwhile, on the work front, Akshay recently starred in 'Sarfire', directed by Sudha Kongara and produced by 2D Entertainment, Abundantia Entertainment, and Cape Of Good Films. It also features Radhika Madan.

The actor next has 'Khel Khel Mein', 'Sky Force', 'Singham Again', 'Jolly LLB 3', 'Hera Pheri 3', and the Marathi film 'Vedat Marathe Veer Daudle Saat' in his kitty.

Anupam last featured in the children's fantasy action-adventure film 'Chhota Bheem and the Curse of Damsyan', directed by Rajiv Chilaka.

He next has 'The Signature' and 'Vijay 69' in the pipeline. / IANS /

## AYESHA TAKIA CONDEMNS DRESS CODE DISCRIMINATION CITING B'LURU MALL INCIDENT



**A**ctress Ayesha Takia lashed out on Friday against the discrimination faced by a farmer in Bengaluru, who was denied entry to a mall for wearing a dhoti, calling the incident "upsetting and shameful."

Ayesha, who has 1.7 million followers on Instagram, shared a viral video showing an elderly farmer, Fakirappa, being denied entry to GT World Mall on Magadi Road in Bengaluru because of his traditional attire.

Fakirappa was wearing a dhoti.

In the caption, the actress wrote: "This is so upsetting... Does western attire have more respect and value? Do we blatantly disrespect and shun our own people for wearing clothing that belongs to us, to our very own people? In a diverse, cultural nation, deeply rooted in wonderful traditions, we discriminate against our very own... Shameful."

After the incident, which happened on July 16, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike sealed the mall over non-payment of tax arrears and issued a notice seeking clarification about the farmer's incident.

The mall management was asked to submit a statement regarding the incident within 24 hours.

For the unversed, Fakirappa, who was accompanied by his son Nagaraj and wife Mallamma, was denied entry to the mall when they went to watch a Kannada movie, citing his attire.

The incident sparked outrage among netizens as the video went viral on social media. / IANS /

## Keanu overwhelmed as 'The Matrix' clocks 25 years, says 'as an artist, you hope for that'



**J**ohn Wick may be a badass but he too has his fair share of vulnerable moments, especially when Keanu Reeves in him takes over. Recently, the Hollywood star choked up as he spoke about his film 'The Matrix' clocking 25 years.

The realisation hit Reeves, as he went silent for 20 seconds while trying to find the right words to remember the film, reports Variety.

He told Stephen Colbert during an appearance on 'The Late Show': "'The Matrix' changed my life, and then over these years, it's changed so many other people's lives in really positive and great ways."

The actor mentioned as he gathered himself: "As an artist, you hope for that when you get to do a film or tell a story."

As per Variety, Reeves appeared to choke up while adding: "So when you say these years, the amount of people that I have met who have said to me and been touched by 'The Matrix' in such a positive way... It's the best."

While Reeves was already an established actor by the time 'The Matrix' came around, thanks to his roles in films like 'Speed', 'Point Break' and 'My Own Private Idaho', it was the Wachowski sisters' 1999 movie that made him a global superstar and an instant icon of the action movie genre. / IANS /



Shawn Levy, from left, Louis D'Esposito, Sebastian Stan, Chris Evans, Kathryn Hahn, David Harbour, Ke Huy Quan, Hugh Jackman, Emma Corrin, Kevin Feige, Ryan Reynolds, Simu Liu, Chris Pratt and Brie Larson attend a ceremony honoring Feige with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Thursday, July 25, 2024, in Los Angeles. AP/PTI

## Alia takes on Bobby Deol in intense gory action sequence in 'Alpha'



Actress Alia Bhatt, who is set to headline the female-led spy-universe film 'Alpha', will engage in a no-holds-barred gory action sequence where she locks horns with the film's antagonist, Bobby Deol.

The sequence is being shot on a heavily guarded set in Film City, Mumbai, and will take over four days to complete.

Bobby, who continues to bask in the success of 'Animal', will maintain his villainous streak in 'Alpha'.

Talking about the scene, a trade source revealed: "It is a ferocious action sequence. You can call it brutal. It is a no-holds-barred face-to-face action sequence between Alia Bhatt and Bobby Deol. There will be blood."



"The shoot location is impregnable. This is one of the most important scenes of the film, and even a fly cannot enter this set. I think they have at least 100 guards manning the location and covering all vantage points," the source added.

The film also stars actress Sharvari, who is fresh off the success of her horror-comedy film 'Munjya'.

Both Alia and Sharvari play super-spies in YRF Spy Universe's first female-led film.

All the films in the spy universe, such as 'Ek Tha Tiger', 'Tiger Zinda Hai', 'War', 'Pathaan', and 'Tiger 3', have been blockbusters so far. / IANS /

## HOW DOES ARJUN KAPOOR BLEND WORK WITH PLAY?



Actor Arjun Kapoor has shared a glimpse into his "workcation", showcasing how he blends work with play through a series of photos.

Taking to Instagram, Arjun posted a string of pictures featuring food, workouts, and some random clicks.

In the photos, the actor can be seen swimming in the rain, enjoying a plate of delicious lunch, working out in the gym, and spending time with a furry friend-- a dog.

The last photo is a candid shot of the actor smiling.

The actor captioned the post: "Blending work and play #workcations #workinprogress."

Arjun's sister, Anshula, commented: "That smile though."

Actor Pulkit Samrat commented: "J for jealous!" with heart-eyes emoji.

Fans were excited about the post, with one user commenting: "Last one is the best!!! Keep that smile always."

Another wrote: "Go Arjun go... keep smiling along the way," while a fan noted: "Raising temperature."

Arjun, who is the son of film producer Boney Kapoor and entrepreneur Mona Shourie, began his career as an assistant director on Nikhil Advani's 2003 romantic drama 'Kal Ho Naa Ho'. / IANS /

Actress Tamannaah Bhatia, who makes a special appearance in the song 'Aaj Ki Raat' from the upcoming comedy horror film 'Stree 2', shared a tutorial video of the viral dance steps on Friday.

Taking to Instagram, Tamannaah posted a reel video in which she effortlessly grooves to the track 'Aaj Ki Raat', sung by Madhubanti Bagchi, Divya Kumar, and Sachin-Jigar.

In the video, Tamannaah is seen wearing a black sleeveless crop top and blue leggings, practicing the dance moves.

The post is captioned: "Thank you for all the love on 'Aaj Ki Raat'. You all asked me how to do the step, so here it is. @vijayganguly made sure that Tabaaahi Pakki Hai. And now I can't wait to see you all recreate this on Reels #AajKiRaat #Stree2."

Actress Shweta Tiwari commented: "You killed it."

Sonam Bajwa wrote: "Them moves." Diana Penty dropped fire emojis in the comment section.

'Stree 2' is directed by Amar Kaushik and produced by Dinesh Vijan and Jyoti Deshpande under the banner of Maddock Films and Jio Studios.

A sequel to the 2018 movie 'Stree', it stars Shraddha Kapoor and Rajkumar Rao in the lead roles, alongside Pankaj Tripathi, Abhishek Banerjee, and Aparshakti Khurana in pivotal roles.

On the work front, Tamannaah was last seen in the Tamil comedy horror film 'Aranmanai 4', directed by Sundar C. The film stars Sundar, alongside Tamannaah, Raashii Khanna, Ramachandra Raju, Santhosh Prathap, Kovai Sarala, Yogi Babu, VTV Ganesh, and Delhi Ganesh.

The actress next has an action drama 'Vedaa', directed by Nikhil Advani and produced by Zee Studios, Emmy Entertainment, and JA Entertainment.

The film stars John Abraham, Sharvari, and Abhishek Banerjee.

Tamannaah also has the supernatural thriller film 'Odela 2', directed by Ashok Teja and created by Sampath Nandi, in the pipeline. / IANS /



Want to learn 'tabaahi' steps? Watch Tamannaah's tutorial video on 'Aaj Ki Raat'



DILJIT SAYS HIS TRACK 'MUHAMMAD ALI' CELEBRATES HUSTLE AND RESILIENCE

Punjabi superstar Diljit Dosanjh, who has released his latest track, 'Muhammad Ali', said that it celebrates resilience and empowerment.

For his latest song, Diljit has joined forces with rapper NLE Choppa. The track is touted to be an urban pop anthem, designed to be both invigorating and motivational. The track encourages listeners to dance, dream, and defy the odds, while the music video blends cultures with an infectious rhythm.

Speaking about the collaboration, Diljit said: "Muhammad Ali" celebrates the spirit of resilience and empowerment. Collaborating with NLE Choppa on this anthem has been incredibly inspiring. I'm thrilled to share another vibrant Punjabi sound with the world." Diljit has been instrumental in bringing Indian and Punjabi culture to the international stage.

Earlier, he made Ed Sheeran sing in Punjabi during the latter's tour in Mumbai.

Recently, he had a sold-out Dil-Luminati Tour spanning the US and Canada. His recent appearance on 'The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon' further solidified his international stature. / IANS /

## Divya Khosla to start shooting for 'Hero Heeroine' from Oct 5, male lead yet to be announced



Actress Divya Khosla has finalised her schedule for her upcoming movie. Originally set to begin filming for 'Hero Heeroine' on June 10, the schedule has now been updated, and shooting will commence on October 5.

The makers of the film will reveal the male lead on August 12.

'Hero Heeroine' is a Telugu original movie, and Divya is honing her skills in the language for the role.

The film also stars Esha Deol, Soni Razdan, Paresh Rawal, Ishita Chauhan, Tusshar Kapoor, Komal Nahta, and Priyanka Chahar Chaudhary.

Talking about the film, Divya said: " 'Hero Heeroine' is a grand and ambitious Telugu film, enriched by its intricate world and compelling characters. To do justice to this role, I am diligently learning Telugu and immersing myself deeply into the character. I am eagerly looking forward to bringing this unique character to life and connecting with a new audience."

The actress further mentioned that she is fully immersed in 'Hero Heeroine' and its preparation, along with the entire cast.

Divya continued: "As I delve deeply into the script, I realise it demands a great deal from an actor, especially in mastering the language. Given my recent commitment to 'Savi' and the extensive preparation required for 'Hero Heeroine', we have decided to start filming on October 5." / IANS /



Is Nia Sharma in love? Her facial expression says it all

Actress Nia Sharma, who is currently portraying the role of Nishigandha in the fantasy-thriller-romance 'Suhagan Chudail', shared a behind-the-scenes (BTS) glimpse from the set on Friday.

Her facial expressions left fans excited, hinting at her being in love.

Nia took to Instagram and shared the BTS video from the 'Suhagan Chudail' set.

In the clip, the actress is seen wearing a black outfit and sitting on a 'charpoy', with several bangles in front of her.

The video shows her smiling and blushing while candidly looking away from the camera.

Nia added the track 'Zaroor x Ishq Di Baa-jyaan' as background music to her post. The snippet is captioned: "Girls when they're in love #bts #suhaganchudail."

Fans were quick to comment, with one saying, "Simply beautiful," and another writing, "Always pyaari."

Other comments included "so adorable" and "Ye chudail bhi kitni khubsurat hai."

The show also stars Debchandrima Singha Roy and Zayn Ibad Khan. 'Suhagan Chudail' airs on Colors.

On the work front, Nia is also currently featured in the celebrity cooking show 'Laughter Chefs Unlimited Entertainment', alongside Krushna Abhishek, Rahul Vaidya, Karan Kundrra, Anika Lokhande, Vicky Jain, Jannat Zubair Rahmani, Reem Shaikh, Sudesh Lehri, and Kashmera Shah.

The show is hosted by Bharti Singh and judged by chef Harpal Singh Sokhi.

Nia is also known for her roles in 'Ek Hazaar Mein Meri Behna Hai', 'Behnein', 'Meri Durga', and 'Kaali - Ek Agni-pariksha'. In 2020, she participated in 'Khatron Ke Khiladi: Made in India' and emerged as the winner.

The actress has also appeared in web series like 'Twisted' and 'Jamai 2.0'. / IANS /



Parineeti's mantra for happy life: Throw toxic people out, find your tribe

Bollywood actress Parineeti Chopra, who was recently seen in the streaming biopic 'Amar Singh Chamkila', feels the mindset of a person shapes their perspective towards life.

The actress took to her Instagram on Thursday and shared a video of herself enjoying a serene boat ride.

She wrote in the caption, "This month, I took some time to pause and reflect on life and it has reiterated my belief... Mindset is everything. Don't give importance to unimportant things (or people). Don't waste a single second. Life is a ticking clock."

The actress also shared a mantra for a happy life, saying every moment should be a personal choice and that one should cease to live for others and start living for themselves.

"Find your tribe and be unafraid of throwing toxic people out of your life. Stop caring about what the world will think. Change the way you react to situations. Life is finite. It is happening now. Live it the way YOU want to live it," she added.

On the personal front, the actress has been enjoying marital bliss with her politician husband Raghav Chadha with whom she recently attended a Wimbledon tennis match.

The couple tied the knot on September 24 last year in an intimate ceremony at The Leela Palace in Udaipur, Rajasthan. / IANS /

## SHEKHAR KAPUR REFLECTS ON 'FILMMAKING LOSING ITS INNOCENCE', HOPES 'MASOOM...' TOUCHES HEARTS



Filmmaker Shekhar Kapur reminisced about his directorial debut 'Masoom', questioning whether filmmaking has lost its "innocence".

Reflecting on his journey, he expressed his desire to retain humility and emotional creativity as he embarks on the production of 'Masoom - The Next Generation'.

Shekhar took to Instagram and shared a throwback picture of actor Jugal Hansraj from 'Masoom' and penned a heartfelt note.

He wrote: "Has filmmaking lost its innocence? My relationship is with my audience. Masoom was my first film. I had not studied film, nor trained, nor assisted anyone. I had no experience... Yet no one questioned me. No one but my editors and my creative team asked me a single question. And so Masoom was born of pure instinct... of pure emotionality... pure story telling... And of innocence, as innocent as @thejugalhansraj is in the still above from Masoom. And of naivety. And of 'not knowing'."

He continued, "Of searching for emotional answers to shots as they were being conceived... scenes as they are being conceived... as they are being shot... Films evolve as they take shape. They are not manufactured... they are created from the heart... they are created by pain and laughter and tears from the heart... of the actors, of the director, and films that touch the audience heart are born of humility... from the acceptance of 'not knowing'. When all of this comes together... you get a film that lasts decades. That still moves audiences three generations later..." / IANS /