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Cong chief Kharge urges PM Modi, HM Shah to respond on reports of Chinese aggression in Arunachal Pradesh

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the country stands firmly with its soldiers and remains united against Chinese aggression, while urging the Modi government to respond to the reports.

New Delhi. (Agency)

The Congress on Friday demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah clarify reports that China has prevented Indian troops from patrolling certain areas of Arunachal Pradesh.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the country stands firmly with its soldiers and remains united against Chinese aggression, while urging the Modi government to respond to the reports. "After Galwan, now Arunachal Pradesh? Disturbing reports suggest that China is attempting to push further into areas in Arunachal Pradesh, an inalienable part of our nation. This demands immediate answers from the Modi Government," Kharge said on X.

There has been no immediate reaction from the government on the claims and no official word on any such development in Arunachal Pradesh.

"Let us not forget that after 20 of our brave soldiers made the supreme sacrifice in Galwan in 2020, none less than PM Modi gave China a 'CLEAN CHIT', emboldening their transgressions! That record inspires no confidence," the Congress chief said, citing the violent clashes between India-China troops in 2020 in Galwan.

"The Prime Minister, Defence Minister and Home Minister must answer the nation. "We have complete faith in the courage and capability of the Indian Armed Forces.

Mayawati condemns Kharge stage 'purification' act, urges RSS chief to take note

Lucknow. (Agency)

BSP chief Mayawati on Friday condemned the alleged "purification" of a stage in Haldwani after Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, a Dalit, addressed a gathering there. She called the incident highly condemnable and deeply concerning, and demanded action against those responsible.

She also described Thursday's attack on Shiromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal in Nanded, Maharashtra, as deeply distressing and a matter of concern. Mayawati said the Central and Maharashtra governments should deal with the incident with the utmost seriousness and take strict legal action against the attackers.

The alleged "purification" took place at Ramila Maidan in Uttarakhand, where Kharge had addressed a gathering on August 8. Referring to the issue in a post on X, Mayawati said, "The nation was apprised of this incident yesterday through Parliament. This matter is highly condemnable and deeply concerning."

She also said the state government should act against the casteist and feudal elements behind it. In the Rajya Sabha, Kharge said people linked to the BJP had carried out the "purification" and demanded that they be booked under the Untouchability Act and jailed.

Union Minister JP Nadda also condemned the act, he said. Mayawati further said the RSS chief, who advocates taking away reservation benefits from Dalits who have become somewhat economically stronger, should also take cognisance of the incident and think seriously about it. On the attack on Badal, Mayawati said, "The Central and Maharashtra governments should treat this incident with the utmost seriousness and take strict legal action against the perpetrators." Badal, a former Punjab deputy chief minister, was attacked with a knife and suffered an injury to his hand at a gurdwara in Nanded. Nanded SP Neelabh Rohan told PTI that a Nihang attacked him with a kirpan. He said the assailant had been taken into custody.

From Pakistan to US: 36-nation survey reveals how world views India

The Pew survey, which was conducted between February and May this year, revealed that people in 36 countries view India more positively than negatively. While Pakistan's view is a foregone conclusion, opinion about India is split in the US.

Nanded. (Agency)

How does the world see India? Ahead of Independence Day, a new survey by the Pew Research Centre of 36 countries offers a sharply contrasting picture. While India is loved by Sri Lanka the most, there are no surprises in guessing who is at the other extreme-Pakistan. In the United States, meanwhile, opinion about India is almost evenly split. Overall, the survey, which was conducted between February and May this year and included over 42,000 people, revealed that people in 36 countries view India more positively than negatively. Across these countries, a median of 45% had a favourable view of India, as against 41% who view it unfavourably.

WHAT SURVEY REVEALS ON INDIA'S

GLOBAL IMAGE?

The survey revealed that Sri Lanka, at 79%, had the most favourable perception of India among all the countries surveyed.



Around 63% of the Sri Lankan respondents also identified India as the country's key ally. Only 11% view India unfavourably. It is a significant leg-up from 2024, when 65% of the Sri Lankans surveyed had a positive view. The favourable view of India comes against

the backdrop of a reset in Delhi-Colombo ties. Following the 2022 unrest in Sri Lanka due to an economic crisis, India has helped rebuild the island nation through credit lines and financial aid exceeding USD 7.5 billion.

India also commands a favourable perception in Kenya (71%), the UK (71%), Israel (60%), Germany (63%), Italy (56%) and Sweden (55%).

INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD STORY

The picture is more mixed in India's neighbourhood, where several countries like Nepal and Bangladesh have been through turbulent periods and uprisings.

In Bangladesh, 42% have a favourable view of India, as against 51% who have an unfavourable perception. Ties between the neighbours have been turbulent of late over India giving shelter to deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is beyond politics and Bengal BJP has shot itself in the foot

The BJP has spent decades attacking the Congress and the Trinamool Congress for not celebrating the legacy of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose enough. Now, the Bengal BJP has come under attack for anti-Netaji remarks and actions. West Bengal CM Suwendu Adhikari was forced to firefight, and an MP's award has been withdrawn.

New Delhi. (Agency)

The BJP, which has spent decades attacking the Congress and the Trinamool Congress for ignoring the legacy of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, has found itself in hot water in West Bengal over the celebrated freedom fighter. The BJP, which swept to power in the state in May, is now under attack over remarks and actions by members of the party. The controversy comes just ahead of the country celebrating its 80th Independence Day, and the backlash has forced Chief

Minister Suwendu Adhikari to get into a damage-control mode.

There has been a series of faux



pas by Bengal BJP leaders related to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, one of India's most celebrated freedom fighters, the leader of Azad Hind Fauj and founder of

Forward Bloc. One was a remark by the BJP's state chief Samik Bhattacharya on the members of the Forward Bloc. Then, a BJP MP said "Bose was a war criminal", and the Azad Hind Fauj didn't do much. Then a road in Bankura district, named after Bose, was renamed after Syama Prasad Mukherjee, a founding member of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the BJP's predecessor. These remarks and actions have been highly criticised, with the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress.

Union Health Minister JP Nadda was admitted to AIIMS Delhi after experiencing uneasiness and underwent coronary angiography on August 13.

JP Nadda undergoes angiography at AIIMS Delhi after uneasiness complaint

New Delhi. (Agency)

Union Health Minister JP Nadda was admitted to AIIMS Delhi after he experienced uneasiness, the hospital said on Friday. Nadda underwent a coronary angiography after being admitted on Thursday evening, August 13. He is currently stable and remains admitted for observation in the Department of Cardiology at AIIMS. "Union Health Minister JP Nadda was evaluated for uneasiness with tests, including a coronary angiography on the evening of August 13, 2026. He is currently stable and admitted

for observation in the Dept of Cardiology, AIIMS," the hospital said in an official statement regarding his health status. The



statement said Nadda was evaluated for uneasiness, including through a coronary angiography, on the evening of August 13.

He continues to remain under observation in the cardiology department at AIIMS Delhi.

Originally hailing from Himachal Pradesh, JP Nadda was born on December 2, 1960, in Patna, Bihar. He completed his BA from Patna University and later studied LLB at Himachal Pradesh University.

During his young age, Nadda actively participated in various movements run by Jai Prakash Narayan. He was associated with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and was elected the organisation's National Secretary in 1989.

Relief for Vijay govt, SC pauses order cancelling jobs for Karur victims' families

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the Madras High Court order cancelling the Tamil Nadu government's decision to provide compassionate jobs to families of the 41 Karur stampede victims.

New Delhi. (Agency)

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the Madras High Court's recent decision to cancel the Tamil Nadu government's decision to give jobs on compassionate grounds to the family members of the 41 persons killed in the September 2025 Karur stampede.

A bench of Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice K Vinod Chandran passed the interim order on a petition moved by the state government.

"Issue notice. Judgment passed by the High Court shall remain



stayed," the top court said. The Supreme Court also issued notice to the Tamil Nadu chief secretary and others on the petition challenging the High Court's judgment.

The apex court observed that an unfortunate incident had led the government to offer employment to the victim's families.

"Stampede took place. An unfortunate incident happened.

The government has decided to compensate them. Should the government not give employment?" the bench remarked.

The Supreme Court also questioned the challenge to the state government's decision to provide employment to the victims' families. "What is the problem with the State giving employment to the victims of a tragedy?" the bench asked. The bench said, "A stampede happened, people died."

Kejriwal, Sisodia move Delhi HC, seek rejection of CBI appeal in excise case

The applications have been moved in the revision plea filed by the CBI against the order passed by the trial court on February 27, 2026.

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia have filed applications before the Delhi High Court seeking rejection of the CBI appeal against their discharge in the excise policy case. In their application, the politicians have raised preliminary objections to the maintainability of the CBI's case, alleging that the revision plea was filed within four hours of the trial court judgment with "unprecedented haste" and in the "most unserious manner". They have claimed that the CBI's revision petition does not point out any specific



illegality or discrepancies in the trial court judgment. "That the present omnibus CBI petition failed to even plead against each accused person specifically as to how the discharge order is an order passed without any evidence or that material evidence is ignored qua the specific accused, or which finding, in which para, for which accused, amounts to judicial discretion is exercised arbitrarily or perversely," their application claimed. It claimed that the CBI has also failed to produce any evidence, material or documents, with the present revision petition to show the perversity in the order of discharge.

News box

Body of missing woman found in Dhankot canal

Gurgaon.(Agency)

A decomposed body of a woman who had been missing for three days was recovered from Dhankot canal near Dwarka Expressway on Thursday morning. According to the complaint filed by the family at New Colony police station, the deceased, Monam, had gone missing from her home in Devlal Colony around 2 pm on Aug 10. Police said Monam had got married in 2022 and around eight months ago, her husband died after accidentally falling from the roof of a house in Rajeev Nagar. Her family members told police that she had been deeply affected by his death and was also undergoing treatment for her deteriorating mental condition. "On Thursday, some passersby alerted the police control room (PCR) about a body of a woman floating in the canal." Soon after, a PCR team and personnel from Rajendra Park police station reached the spot and pulled the body out of the canal with the help of divers and local residents. Police said th body had decomposed considerably, indicating that it may have remained in the water for two to three days. It was subsequently identified as Monam.

Police have sent the decomposed body to the hospital for a post-mortem examination. Officials said the cause and circumstances of her death would be clear after the post-mortem examination. They are now recording statements of family members and investigating whether she died after falling in the canal herself or whether there were other reasons behind her death.

FIR after gun goes off in Gurgaon society lift, armed visitors to society under lens

Gurgaon.(Agency)

An FIR has been registered at Sector 53 police station after the president of a housing society in Sector 52 had alleged that there had been a firing incident inside one of the lifts in his society. He had also claimed that people carrying weapons have been visiting a flat in the complex frequently. Prashant Co-operative Group Housing Society president Narender Singh had submitted the complaint against unidentified persons on Aug 12, along with the CCTV footage of the firing. He told TOI that he was out of station on the night of firing but when he returned, his neighbours informed him that around 1am a gun had been fired inside the lift of Plot GH-26 on Aug 9. "Residents were afraid to take up the matter with the police, but they approached me, following which I checked the CCTV and submitted all the available evidence with the cops. It seems that they fired one or two rounds," he said. The residents noticed that the lift had been damaged when they came across it, he added. Singh, in his complaint, has sought a police inquiry into the armed men visiting a flat in the society. Singh said the incident has caused fear among residents, particularly women, children and elderly people. SHO of Sector 53 police station, inspector Narender Sharma, said, "We are investigating the complaint and will take appropriate legal action in the case accordingly." While the police have registered a case under the Arms Act against an unknown person, sources said a suspect has been identified.

Before Independence Day, schools race to get Vande Mataram right

Noida.(Agency)

Across schools in NCR, "sujalam, suphalam..." is rolling off classroom screens, echoing through assemblies and being replayed on teachers' phones on a loop. These last couple of weeks, students have devoted their music classes to a singular objective — mastering six stanzas of Vande Mataram before Independence Day. While learning isn't a problem, it's the 'who can teach it' question that has seen schools scramble to find experts fluent with the song. While the first two stanzas of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Vande Mataram are widely known, few are conversant with the full version — and fewer still with the right pronunciation of the Sanskrit verse. With govt now making the full rendition of Vande Mataram mandatory, the decision coinciding with the national song's 150th-year celebrations, some schools have borrowed Bengali teachers from other institutions while others are circulating recordings, putting lyrics on giant screens or turning to YouTube. Vande Mataram, according to rules, has to be sung before the national anthem at all events, such as Independence Day celebrations, where both need to be sung. The rules also specify the duration of the full rendition of Vande Mataram at approximately 3 minutes and 10 seconds. At Grads International School in Noida, teacher Sanchari Bhattacharya — who is pursuing a PhD in music — recorded the complete song and shared it with principals across the city.

4,500 cops on guard for I-Day, checks at 11 points

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Around 4,500 police personnel, including traffic cops, have been deployed across the district and checkpoints have been set up at 11 major locations as part of the security arrangement for Independence Day. Checks will be carried out at Sirhaal border, DLF Phase 3, Bakhtawar Chowk, Dundahera, Kaliawas and six other locations till celebrations conclude on Aug 15, an officer said, adding that screening will also be done at hotels, malls, clubs and spots which attract crowds. Five major events will be held across the district as part of the celebrations. The main district-level Independence Day function will be held at Tau Devi Lal Stadium in Sector 38, where Haryana assembly deputy speaker Krishan Lal Middha will hoist the national flag.

At New Grain Market in Haileymandi-Pataudi, Pataudi MLA Bimla Chaudhary will unfurl the national flag while Faridabad NIT MLA Satish Kumar will attend a function as chief guest at Govt Model Sanskriti Senior Secondary School in Sector 43. Two other events will be at Shaheed and Freedom Fighters Memorial Stadium in Nakhrola-Manesar and Tau Devi Lal Stadium in Sohna, which will be attended by Gurgaon MLA Mukesh Sharma and Sohna MLA Tejpal Tanwar respectively. Security arrangements will cover the five main celebration venues, VIP routes, entry and exit points, parking areas and adjoining locations. Separate entry arrangements will be maintained for VIPs and the general public," police spokesperson Sandeep Turan said, adding that cops will also be deployed on rooftops of high-rise buildings

around the celebration venues.

Visitors will be screened using door-frame metal detectors and hand-held metal detectors. Women visitors will be screened by women police personnel, with dedicated frisking cabins at the venues, he added.

Quick reaction teams will be positioned at VIP stages and other strategic points. Five fire tenders and five ambulances will remain stationed at different celebration venues for emergency response.

During VIP movement, traffic personnel will be positioned at road cuts, traffic signals, T-points, flyovers and underpasses to regulate traffic.

Police personnel deployed at the checkpoints will be equipped with reflective jackets, torches and wireless communication sets and will check suspicious persons and

vehicles. "Additional checkpoints may be set up depending on the requirement. Ahead of Independence Day, police teams will also check hotels, inns, dharamshalas, restaurants, malls and clubs. The checks will focus on suspicious persons and objects. Anti-sabotage teams will conduct checks at the major celebration venues and along VIP routes. Suspicious bags, luggage and unidentified articles will not be allowed inside the venues," Turan said. Police said senior police officers will supervise security arrangements at each of the major celebration venues and appeal to the residents attending Independence Day events to follow designated entry and parking arrangements. They also asked residents to remain alert and inform them about any suspicious person, object or activity.

Vietnam: Asia's New Economic Powerhouse – Atul Sachdeva, Senior Journalist

Mahanagar Metro Desk

Atul Sachdeva (New Delhi): Vietnam has achieved remarkable growth over the past 10–15 years. It is now being referred to as "Factory of the World 2.0." What developments have taken place in Vietnam? A. Infrastructure- Ports: Cat Lai and Hai Phong ports rank among the world's top 20; shipping operations are highly efficient.- Roads & Metro: New metro lines and highways are being constructed in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.- Electricity: Power outages are minimal; the government has invested \$15 billion in solar and wind energy. B. Technology and Cities- Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang have emerged as "startup hubs"; Fintech and E-commerce sectors are booming.- R&D centers for companies like Samsung and Intel are now opening here. 2. What are the key industries and businesses? Industry | Activities | Global Rank- Electronics | Manufacturing phones, laptops, chips, batteries | #2 in phone exports- Textiles & Footwear | Apparel for Nike, Zara, Uniqlo | #3 in exports- Furniture & Wood | Sofas, tables for the US and EU | #2 in exports- Agriculture | Coffee, rice, cashews, black pepper | #2 in coffee, #1 in cashews- New Industries | EV batteries, solar panels, semi-

conductors | Rapidly growing Domestic businesses are also booming— VinGroup (automobiles), VNG (gaming & tech), and Viettel (telecom). 3. What are the government's policies? Government policy is the real reason behind Vietnam's success. 1. Doi Moi Reforms (since 1986) It is a communist country, yet the economy is fully open, allowing complete freedom for private companies and foreign investment. 2. Red carpet for FDI- Tax exemptions for foreign companies for up to 4 years- Land available at low rates for a 50-year lease- Single-window system: Factory permits granted within 45 days 3. Web of Free Trade Agreements CPTPP, EVFTA, RCEP, India-ASEAN FTA—totaling 17 deals. This means goods can be sold tax-free in over 60 countries. 4. "China + 1" Policy The government is actively inviting companies from the US, Japan, and Korea to help them reduce their reliance on China. 5. Human Resources Technical education in schools; the government is opening engineering colleges. The workforce is disciplined and educated. 4. Key figures for 2026- GDP Growth: 6.5% – 7% (Top in Asia)- FDI: \$36 billion/year- Exports: \$380 billion- Poverty: Was 60% in 1990; now less than 5% In simple

terms Vietnam got three things right: 1. Low-cost labor + discipline 2. Global free trade 3. Government did not hinder business That is why companies today speak of "China + Vietnam." Challenge: Currently, Vietnam mostly handles assembly. It needs to learn "design and chip manufacturing." It also requires more power infrastructure and ports.



Transformer snag causes outages, industries in Gurgaon flag losses

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Repeated power outages over the past three days are disrupting production in industrial areas in sectors 33, 34 and 37. Manufacturers said two to three outages of about an hour each have been reported daily due to a transformer failure at the 220kV power house in Sector 33. According to the manufacturers, the sudden cuts are not only delaying deliveries but also raising concerns over damage to machinery and equipment. They said the lack of advance information from the power authorities was making it difficult to plan production cycles and safely shut down equipment. The disruption began after a transformer at the HVPNL power house in Sector 33 failed. While HVPNL manages the transmission infrastructure, DHBVN distributes power to consumers. Industrialists said the prolonged disruption reflected a lack of coordination between the two agencies.

A DHBVN official denied any coordination issue between the two agencies. "We are working to fix the issue and supply will be normalised soon," the official said.

Industrialists said the outages were affecting units that depend on uninterrupted supply, forcing them to halt production midway and spend additional time restarting machines and processes.

"Production comes to a halt whenever the power goes off suddenly. Restarting the machines takes time, and in some cases, there is also a risk of damage to tooling," said Deepak Maini, chairperson of Progressive Federation of Trade and Industry (PFTI). Maini said the outages were causing production losses and affecting delivery schedules. "The biggest problem is that we are not told when the power will be cut or how long the outage will last. If industries are informed in advance, we can adjust our production schedules and secure machines before the supply is disconnected," he said. Industrialists



said the impact extended beyond the duration of the outages. They said that when the production lines stop abruptly, they can take considerably longer to stabilise after power is restored. "An outage of an hour does not necessarily mean that we lose only one hour of production.

Depending on the machine and manufacturing process, restarting and

bringing the line back to normal can take considerably longer," said an industrialist from the Sector 37 belt. Another manufacturer said sudden outages were particularly disruptive for units involved in precision manufacturing and automated processes. "We need to know in advance if there is going to be a shutdown. It allows us to complete a production cycle, switch off machines properly and protect material and equipment. Sudden outages increase both downtime and the risk of damage," he said. The uncertainty has also affected manpower planning, movement of raw materials and dispatch schedules, industry representatives said. Delays in production can affect downstream suppliers and customers, particularly for units working on fixed delivery timelines. "Industries pay their electricity bills in full and on time. There should also be accountability for ensuring reliable supply and timely communication about disruptions," the industrialist said.

Haryana amends building code, allows maximum four dwelling units per plot

Panchkula. (Agency)

The Haryana Government has amended the Haryana Building Code, 2017, allowing only one dwelling unit per floor, up to a maximum of four units per plot, subject to compliance with the applicable zoning plan or architectural control sheets and conditions set by the competent authority.

The Town and Country Planning Department issued the amendment on August 13, 2026, under the powers granted by Code 13.2 of the Haryana Building Code, 2017. The revised provision stipulates that a building must comply with the restrictions set out in the zoning plan or architectural control sheets for the relevant sector or site.

It further states that only one dwelling unit per floor, up to a maximum of four units per plot, is permissible, subject to the terms and conditions specified by the competent authority. It also omits the existing Preface of the Haryana Building Code, 2017.

Defence Ministry revises remuneration of contractual medical staff at ECHS polyclinics

Panchkula. (Agency)

The Ministry of Defence has revised the monthly remuneration of Medical Officers, Specialists and Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of ECHS polyclinics engaged on a contractual basis, with the revised rates ranging from Rs 95,000 to Rs 1.30 lakh per month.

According to a letter issued by the Directorate of Ex-Servicemen Welfare, the remuneration of the OIC, Polyclinic, Medical Office Officer, and Dental Officer has been revised from Rs 75,000 to Rs 95,000 per month.

The remuneration of Medical Specialists, Gynaecologists, and Radiologists has been increased from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1.30 lakh per month. The letter also specifies the terms relating to remuneration, allowances and leave of re-engaged retired contractual staff.

A fixed monthly amount will be admissible as remuneration during the contract period, arrived at by deducting the basic pension from the pay drawn at the time of retirement. The amount of remuneration so fixed will remain unchanged for the term of the contract.

JK: Jammu Div Comm hoists Tricolour, takes salute at full dress march past rehearsal

Jammu. (Agency)

The Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Ramesh Kumar today hoisted the National Flag and took the salute from marching contingents during the full-dress rehearsal of the Independence Day Celebrations conducted here at Maulana Azad Stadium. In his address, the Divisional Commissioner congratulated the participants and urged them to uphold the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the nation.

He encouraged them to imbibe the spirit of patriotism and selfless service in their daily lives. He further appealed to the citizens to participate enthusiastically in the Independence Day celebrations and reaffirm their commitment towards nation-building, while paying homage to the freedom fighters whose sacrifices made the nation's independence possible. Deputy Commissioner Jammu, Dr Rakesh Minhas, SSP Jammu Joginder Singh and other senior sectoral officers were present on the occasion.

The full dress rehearsal began with the recitation of the National Song, followed by flag hoisting, singing of the National Anthem, inspection of the parade, the chief guest's address and the full-dress march past.

Heavy rain forecast over Haryana, Punjab and Delhi during August 14-19; Himachal faces very heavy spells

Panchkula. (Agency)

Northwest India is set for a prolonged wet spell, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasting isolated heavy rainfall over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Punjab throughout August 14-19, while Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are likely to experience spells of heavy to very heavy rainfall.

According to the All India Weather Summary and Forecast Bulletin issued by the National Weather Forecasting Centre at 8.27 am on August 14, fairly widespread to widespread rainfall is likely over Himachal Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir-Ladakh and Uttarakhand during August 14-19. Punjab is likely to receive fairly widespread to widespread rainfall on August 14-15, while Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi

are forecast to receive similar rainfall on August 14-15 and again on August 17. The IMD has forecast isolated heavy rainfall over Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi as well as Punjab during August 14-19. Jammu-Kashmir-Ladakh is likely to receive isolated heavy rainfall on August 14 and during August 16-19. The hill states face a more intense spell. Himachal Pradesh is likely to receive heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places on August 14 and again during August 17-18, while Uttarakhand is likely to receive heavy to very heavy rainfall on August 14 and during August 16-17. For August 14, the IMD has forecast heavy rainfall at isolated places over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Punjab and Jammu-Kashmir-Ladakh. Heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely at isolated

places over Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. On August 15, isolated heavy rainfall is likely over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar



Pradesh. The rain spell is expected to continue on August 16, with isolated heavy rainfall forecast over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu-Kashmir-Ladakh.

Uttarakhand is likely to receive heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places.

On August 17, heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, while isolated heavy rainfall is forecast over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Punjab and Jammu-Kashmir-Ladakh.

The IMD's day-wise warning shows heavy to very heavy rainfall over Himachal Pradesh on August 18, with isolated heavy rainfall also likely over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Punjab, Jammu-Kashmir-Ladakh and

Uttarakhand. On August 19, isolated heavy rainfall is likely over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir-Ladakh and Uttarakhand.

Accused of cattle theft, slaughter, six of 'Badam Gang' booked under GUJCTOC

The action was taken following a probe by the Local Crime Branch into the alleged organised criminal activities of the group, police said in a statement issued on Thursday.

Vadodara. (Agency)

Panchmahal police have invoked the Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime (GUJCTOC) Act against six alleged members of the "Badam Gang". The police cited a record of 18 serious offences, including cattle theft and trafficking, illegal slaughter, offences against persons and property, and attacks on police.

The action was taken following a probe by the Local Crime Branch into the alleged organised criminal activities of the group, police said in a statement issued on Thursday. Anas Abdulgani Badam, a resident of Godhra, has been arrested in the GUJCTOC case. Police are seeking custody of five other accused through transfer warrants as

they are currently lodged in jail in other cases, according to the police. The five are Nisar Ahmed Abdulgani Badam, Umar Abdulgani Badam, Sajid Ilyas



police stations and involved cattle theft, transportation and slaughter, besides serious offences against people. The six men were individually booked in 29 alleged cases including attempted murder, murder, animal-related offences, theft, threats and rioting.

While Sajid Ilyas was booked in a murder case, the record against Owais alias Junaid includes attempted murder and rioting, police said. The GUJCTOC case registered at Godhra B Division police station is the third major such action in Panchmahal involving alleged organised cattle crime in recent years. In June, police invoked the law against six members of the Bhopli Gang, which is allegedly linked to 19 cases involving cow slaughter and illegal beef trade.

Failed exam, bought fake certificates: 3 'doctors' arrested in Rajasthan

Jaipur. (Agency)

Three men have been arrested in Rajasthan for using forged Foreign Medical Graduate (FMG) screening certificates to obtain medical registration and practise as doctors despite failing the mandatory exam. The three accused paid between Rs 25 lakh and Rs 29 lakh to obtain fake FMG screening certificates after repeatedly failing the examination conducted by the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS).

One of them went on to treat patients in an emergency ward without registration with the Rajasthan Medical Council (RMC). The arrests are part of a wider investigation into a suspected



racket involving foreign medical graduates, brokers and others who allegedly helped candidates obtain forged FMG certificates and use them to secure internships and medical registrations.

According to the police, more than 100

foreign medical graduates have so far come under the scanner, while 30 accused have been arrested in connection with the case. The case, registered in Jaipur on February 4, 2026, involves allegations of cheating, forgery and criminal conspiracy.

'Make public transport safer, laws stricter': Women pursuing higher education in Ahmedabad

Many say men staring at them is also one of the very common problems they encounter. A student says workers should undergo background verification, and that people should not employ without proper checks.

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

For many young women pursuing their education here, the alleged rape of a 23-year-old design student in an apartment building where she shared a flat with her friends has forced them to question how safe they feel in the city.

Several say they feel the most unsafe when using public transport. Nupur, an 18-year-old student who pursues management studies at a private institute, doesn't feel comfortable at the hostel she stays in. Her daily bus journey to and from college also worries her. "I don't think it is safe to travel from my college to the hostel by bus."

Another student from the same institute, who has lived in a girls' hostel for about a year, said on the condition of anonymity that she too feels unsafe when using public transport. She says she has had no issues at the hostel she resides in.

At a paying guest or PG accommodation, the residents, who are 19-year-olds and students at a private technology institute in Gota, say living away from home made them feel vulnerable when they go out. They say their accommodation, which has a warden and helpers, makes them feel safe. Many say men staring at them is also one of the very common

problems they encounter. A student says workers should undergo



background verification, and that people should not employ without

proper checks. At another PG, the warden says every resident is registered. Residents need parents' permission to attend college function, and they are not allowed to leave the premises after 11 pm, she says. "No delivery personnel are permitted to go in".

"While there is no security guard, we have CCTV cameras. No male visitors, including family members, are allowed to go upstairs. Maintenance personnel complete their job under supervision. The PG has been operating for nine years without any safety-related incident," the warden declares.

Morbi: Water tank demolition goes wrong, damages house



Ahmedabad. (Agency)

A controlled demolition of an old overhead water tank went awry as the structure collapsed near a house, damaging one of its walls, in a Morbi village on Thursday. No person was injured in the mishap, the village sarpanch said.

The incident occurred around noon at Hirapara village in Tankara taluka of Morbi. The village panchayat had planned and carried out the demolition of the 25-year-old water tank since it was in a derelict condition. The decision to bring it down in a controlled demolition was taken because locals feared that it might collapse on its own in severe weather conditions, Praveen Manji Sephar, the sarpanch of Hirapara Gram Panchayat, said.

In a video sourced from the village, the water tank can be seen being tied with ropes. As the bottom of the structure collapses, the tank swings towards a nearby residential colony and comes crashing down on the house closest to it, causing one of its walls to collapse.

Sephar said: "We decided to demolish a 25-year-old unused water tank before it collapsed on its own and hurt somebody. While we were doing it today, it fell in a direction other than intended and hit a house." Sephar added that the gram panchayat would repair the damage caused to the house owned by farmer Rajni Savji Savsani, and the repair would begin on Friday.

Reposing faith in the hands on Cauvery spigot

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay's unusual gesture of seeking a meeting with his Karnataka counterpart, D K Shivakumar, to address the Cauvery dispute's latest episode must be applauded. Sharing the river's water in a distress year is otherwise a fertile ground for posturing, and can quickly turn into a theatre of spectacle for antagonistic politics. It is unfortunate that circumstances in either state meant that an opportunity was lost to manage the dispute without further escalation and costs. The states would do well to avoid adversarial litigation and pursue deliberative means to coordinate the sharing. The current escalation is the second once since the Supreme Court gave its decision on Cauvery water sharing in 2018. In an unprecedented intervention, the court exercised appellate jurisdiction over an inter-state dispute and modified the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal's 2007 award. The court's decision led to the creation of the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) to give effect to its decision, with support of its technical arm, the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC). The Supreme Court's allocation, at 50 percent dependability of the long-term median availability at the river basin, requires Karnataka to release 177.25 thousand million cubic feet in a 'water year' (May 31 to June 1) at Biligundlu—the boundary point where the releases are monitored. Since the 2018 order, the institutional architecture of the CWMA has not had to deal with allocation in a distress year (below 50 percent dependability), except in 2023. The Cauvery basin had an unusually good run with the monsoon over the past decade. The 2023 episode followed the usual trajectory of protests and political mobilisation in both states and challenges to the decisions of the CWMA in the Supreme Court—all despite established mechanisms of technical assessment, institutional deliberation and timely directions to share the limited waters during a distress year. The court ultimately declined to interfere with the regulatory authorities' assessment and directions, underscoring the institutional competence of the CWMA and CWRC. Importantly, these bodies do not operate in isolation from the states: the Cauvery management architecture brings together representatives of the basin states and the Centre, with their deliberations informed by technical inputs from agencies such as the Central Water Commission and the Indian Meteorological Department. The costs of such escalation are not only legal and administrative; they impose wider economic costs and deepen political antagonisms. The political posturing shrinks the space for coordinated and collective efforts to deal with deficit resources and manage the crisis. The current episode is following a similar trajectory. The CWRC has directed Karnataka to ensure 12,000 cusecs of water released daily at Biligundlu for a period of 15 days, revised upwards on August 11 after improved rainfall from an earlier order for 3,500 cusecs. This follows the established institutional process rather than an ad hoc one. They involve repeated assessments of rainfall, forecasts, reservoir storage, inflows and the competing requirements of the basin states, with directions revised as conditions change. Given the uncertainties involved in predicting rainfall and water availability over space and time, no amount of institutional process or litigation can eliminate such uncertainty. It must instead be managed, and that is possible only through collective and coordinated responses. This is the most crucial takeaway here. The legal and institutional architecture, by design, cannot create the political trust needed to address uncertainty collectively. The institutions can respond to hydrological uncertainty, but cannot eliminate it. These uncertainties are likely to grow with climate change.

North-East forests under siege

States are handing over large tracts of land to private contractors for oil palm cultivation

THE North-East has the last remaining dense and virgin forests in India, and these are falling prey to unrelenting destruction through commercial exploitation. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura are in a race to hand over large tracts of land to private contractors to grow oil palm and manufacture palm oil, replacing relatively expensive imports. While the government claims that these plantations are only using degraded land or "Jhum" (slash and burn) residual plots, there are reliable reports that the region's rich and variegated forests are being cut down to make way for ecologically destructive oil palm plantations. Under the National Mission on Edible Oils — Oil Palm (NMEO-OP), adopted in 2021, the current national cumulative acreage under oil palm of 640,000 hectares (ha) will be scaled up to 1 million ha by 2029 and the total potential footprint is estimated at 2.8 million ha. Currently, the acreage is largely concentrated in the southern states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, but further expansion is likely to come from the North-East. According to official figures, the oil palm acreage in the region is 68,324 hectares, with Mizoram in the lead with 30,000 ha and Arunachal Pradesh with 25,000 ha. The immediate target for 2026 is 92,543 ha. The longer-term target for the North-East is 962,000 ha.

Under the NMEO-OP, the Union government is aggressively promoting oil palm cultivation and processing in the North-East through a public-private template. The mission pays Rs 20,000/ha for plantations using domestic seedlings and Rs 29,000/ha for those using imported seedlings. After planting, there is a gestation period of four years before the first yield, during which a subsidy of Rs 50,000/ha is payable. There is also a guaranteed floor price of Rs 15,400 per tonne for the output. Thanks to such generosity, state governments are actively plotting and allocating tracts of land to private contractors to grow oil palm. The land thus allocated is ostensibly degraded, but peer-reviewed studies tell a different story. Using satellite surveys, Global Forest Watch, an international NGO, claims that five northeastern states (Assam, Mizoram, Arunachal, Nagaland and Manipur) accounted for about 60% of India's total tree-cover loss between 2001 and 2023. It was found that the Dampa Tiger Reserve in Mizoram had

been encroached upon for the planting of oil palm.

There are three major companies engaged in oil palm cultivation in the North-East. These are Patanjali, Godrej Agrovet and 3F Oil Palm Private Ltd, which is already a major player in South India. How have we come to this when government figures claim that India's forest cover is 24.5% of its geographical area and is expanding? In the latest Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) that the government has submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the target

normally fall in the category of forest. This is what enables the State to pass off an oil palm plantation which has replaced a virgin forest as "no change in land use" and "no loss of forest". There is more. The Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023, restricted the definition of forests only to those which were registered in government land records, as per the Indian Forest Act of 1927 or officially entered in government records on or after October 25, 1980. These records left out of purview forests on tribal lands or those maintained as community forests. This was

the case with forests in the North-East, which were not registered during the colonial period, and this continued after Independence. However, a Supreme Court ruling in 1996 protected forests on tribal and community land by bringing them under India's forest conservation laws. The court held that all forests that match the dictionary definition of "forest", regardless of who may own them and irrespective of whether they were officially recorded, are entitled to protection by the State.

It is this ruling which is being sought to be changed by the amendment of 2021, since most of the forests in the North-East do not figure as such in official records. They do not qualify as "forest" at all. It is through this unseemly sleight of hand that the oil palm story in the region has taken wing. On a public interest litigation filed by conservationists, the Supreme Court has put a temporary halt to

all commercial exploitation in forest areas, as spelt out in its earlier judgement. The government is contesting this decision. The development imperative and the national security compulsion are being put out to defend the amendment, but they lack credibility. One hopes that the court will stand its ground because the little that is left of our invaluable forest resources belongs to the generations to come. The Union government seeks to revive ancient Indian culture and traditions and yet seems disconnected from the ancient wisdom which considers our forests to be sacred and sees divinity in trees, mountains and rivers. The tattered garment of green that still covers Mother Nature in the hills and valleys of the North-East must never be violated.



for increasing the carbon sink in the form of forests is to be raised to 3.5-4 billion tonnes of oil equivalent between 2031 and 2035, on the back of the expected achievement, ahead of schedule, of the previous target of a 2.5-3 billion tonnes for 2026-30. These figures are with reference to the base year of 2005. The 4 billion-tonne figure translates into an additional forest cover of 18.7 million ha according to the methodology used by the Forest Survey of India (FSI). Is this realistic?

For years now, the FSI has been using a definition of forest which does not conform to international standards. It defines a forest as an acreage of at least 1 ha with a tree density of 10/ha and with a tree size of at least 2 metres on maturity. More importantly, this covers orchards, bamboo and oil palm plantations, which would not

Difficult to digest top hotel brands failing the sniff test

Raids by Karnataka's Food Safety and Drug Administration exposed dangerous cost-cutting methods adopted in kitchens presumed to be serving the finest and freshest dishes

What food safety officials discovered in Bengaluru's luxury hotels over the past week strips away the notion that fine dining and hygiene are synonymous. Rotten meat, expired dairy and bakery products and mouldy vegetables were found in five- and three-star restaurants. The 30 teams deployed by Karnataka's Food Safety and Drug Administration (FDA) to inspect 60 hotels in the state capital seized 640 kg of meat, chicken and fish, 276 kg of vegetables, 49 litres of used oil, and large amounts of cereals, milk products and sauces past their use-by dates. Other serious violations included unhygienic storage, inadequate segregation of vegetarian and non-vegetarian items and wrong labelling. Officials sent at least 77 samples for testing and destroyed over a tonne of foodstuff. Supply centres were inspected, kitchens shut, licences suspended and notices issued.

Big brands like Taj Hotels, Shangri-La and Atria were caught in the net, leaving their regular patrons with uncomfortable questions about what their meals might have contained. The raids exposed dangerous cost-cutting



methods adopted in kitchens presumed to be serving the finest and freshest dishes. They also exposed dishonesty in the management of upper-crust hotels, whose exorbitant prices make the betrayal even more difficult to digest. It is baffling that well-known restaurants do not have strict procurement and monitoring systems, or

regular quality checks. The industry is trying to pass off the raids as unwarranted, with arguments on shelf-life under certain temperatures. Whether that or reliance on quick-commerce led to the slack practices, rotten food is unacceptable. Similar drives are being conducted in other states, too. Maharashtra's FDA has cracked down on restaurants, bakeries, dairies and canteens—including at the high court, secretariat and IIT—and suspended some licences over handling and storage. Inspections have also begun at warehouses of online retailers Amazon and Blinkit. Gujarat, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh have banned cheaper imitations of paneer, cheese and butter.

It is worrying that these are not isolated cases. When luxury restaurants violate the rulebook, it's harsh to point the finger at smaller restaurants. But star hotel or street vendor, this is a serious matter about health and trust. When the voice of Indian consumers, who are largely unaware of their own rights, is treated as insignificant, strict food safety checks are an imperative. Let's make a healthy habit of it.

Picking the top global diplomat

As the race to succeed António Guterres as the next UN secretary-general gets into gear, Ugandan diplomat Olara Otunnu, one of the seven candidates, could end up being judged by a voting system he himself devised decades ago. It's been a long journey for someone who witnessed the descent of Idi Amin's regime into terror

Forty-five years ago, Ugandan diplomat Olara Otunnu devised an informal voting system to break a bitter deadlock over the appointment of a United Nations secretary-general. Now, in one of diplomacy's more intriguing ironies, the same 'Otunnu Formula' is being used to determine whether he should occupy the world's highest diplomatic office. Otunnu is one of seven candidates seeking to succeed António Guterres. The field includes Costa Rica's Rebeca Grynspan, who emerged as the early favourite after the first informal Security Council straw poll, alongside former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Grossi, former Senegalese President Macky Sall, Ecuador's Maria Fernanda Espinosa and Guyana's Carolyn Rodrigues Birkett. Yet, every experienced diplomat knows that the eventual winner must not only impress the wider UN membership but also avoid a veto from one of the Security Council's five permanent members. For the former Ugandan foreign minister and UN undersecretary-general, however, the contest is about more than personal ambition. Wars in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo have exposed the limitations of the international system. The next secretary-general, he argues, must restore the organisation's ability to persuade, mediate and command international trust. Otunnu says he entered the race only after repeated encouragement from world leaders and former colleagues convinced him his experience was needed at a difficult moment for the UN. "The UN's moral authority is not lost, but it has been seriously eroded," he explains in an exclusive interview, arguing that the secretary-general's greatest strength lies not in military power but in leadership rooted in the

principles of the UN Charter. His convictions were forged long before he entered international diplomacy. As a student leader in Uganda, Otunnu witnessed the descent of Idi Amin's regime into terror. "I experienced first-hand the nature and magnitude of evil," he recalls. The experience taught him how easily brutality can become accepted as normal, how institutions crumble under political pressure and how dictators seek either to eliminate opponents or buy them off. "This searing experience was the beginning of my lifelong commitment to human rights." During our conversation he also reflected on Amin's ability to charm those he wished to recruit before turning ruthlessly against anyone who resisted. It was, he believes, a lasting lesson in the corrupting nature of unchecked power.

Exile eventually took him to St John's College, Oxford, which he describes as "my first United Nations". Suddenly, he found himself among what he calls "all the tribes under the sun", forging friendships with fellow students including Tony Blair, Benazir Bhutto and future political leaders from Africa, Asia and Australia. Oxford, followed by Harvard, convinced him that successful diplomacy begins with understanding cultures long before negotiations start. His career subsequently took him through virtually every level of the UN—as ambassador,

president of the Security Council, foreign minister, president of the International Peace Academy and, perhaps most memorably, Special Representative for

than political leaders.

He believes the next secretary-general must also confront challenges scarcely imagined when the UN was founded.

Artificial intelligence, he says, requires an international framework bringing together governments, technology companies and experts to establish shared rules before the technology outpaces regulation. One of his first priorities would be convening a global round table on AI. Otunnu also offered a striking perspective on Idi Amin's expulsion of Uganda's Asian community. While describing it as a "horror and catastrophe", he believes many who left ultimately escaped the even greater bloodshed that later engulfed those who remained. Uganda, he says, has never fully recovered from the destruction of much of its professional and intellectual class. He is under no illusion about the political mountain he faces. Although Grynspan has emerged as the early frontrunner, UN leadership contests often change dramatically as governments seek a consensus candidate acceptable to the major powers. Whatever the outcome, Otunnu has already shaped the office he now seeks. Four-and-a-half decades after devising the

informal straw-poll system that transformed the selection of secretaries-general, he now finds himself subject to the very process he created—a fitting twist in a diplomatic career that has taken him from the terror of Idi Amin's Uganda to the threshold of the world's most demanding international post.



Children and Armed Conflict. Among his strongest memories is a visit to a refugee settlement in Sudan, where Muslim elders asked the UN to help build a church for their Christian neighbours because they already had a mosque. Deeply moved by the request, Otunnu found private donors to help. For him, it remains a powerful reminder that ordinary people often show more wisdom

Nestled in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal's capital has long been a favourite with backpackers and a base camp for adventurers heading to the Himalayas. Part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Kathmandu also abounds in artistic and cultural wealth. Whether it's the peaceful Buddhist stupas, the bustling temples or the historic monuments, Kathmandu offers a multitude of experiences.

Mountain flights

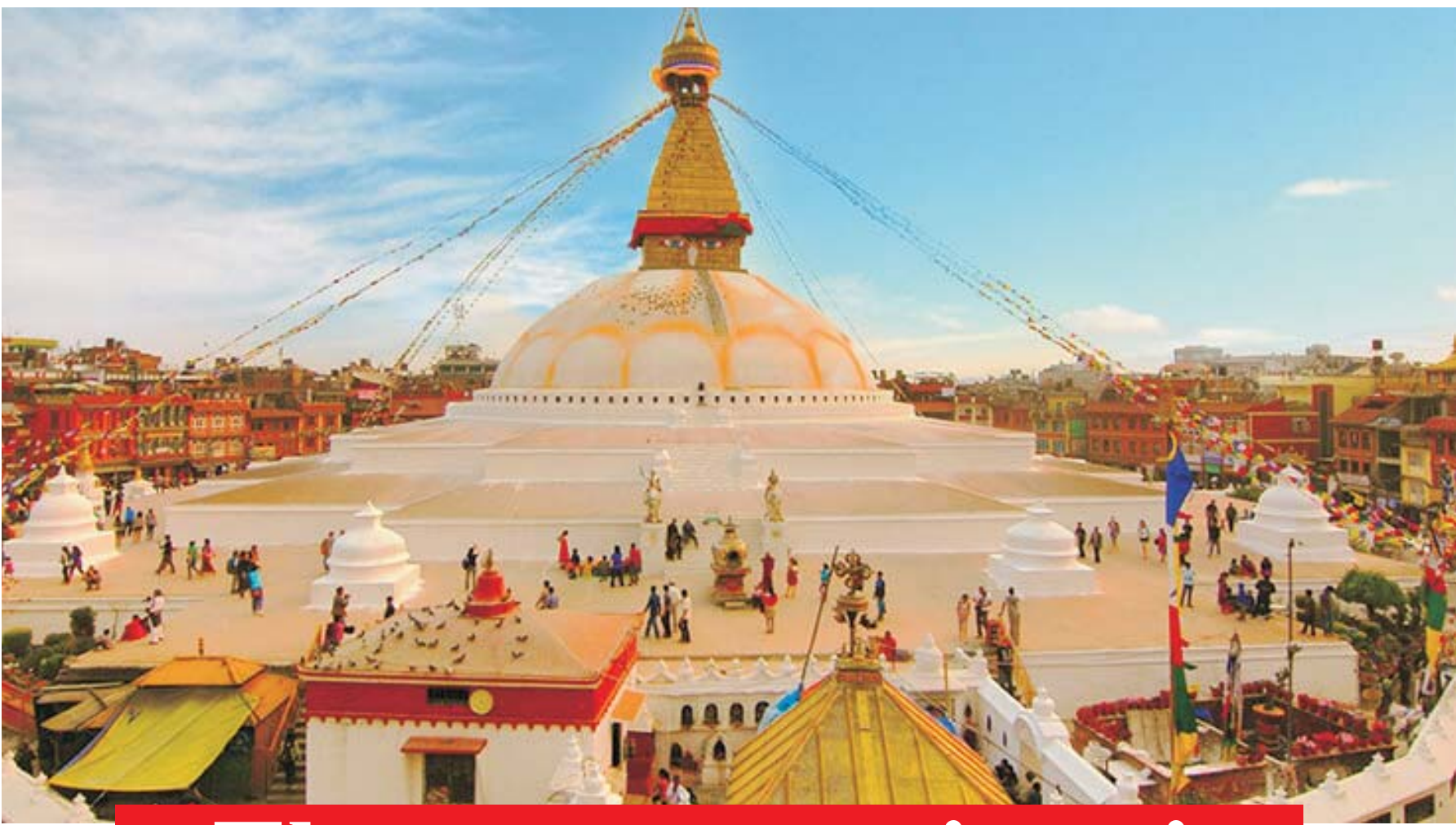
The world's highest peak Mount Everest is also Nepal's central attraction. Don't be disheartened if you can't make the arduous trek—there are several convenient flights that offer close-up views of Everest and surrounding peaks such as Shisha Pangma, Gauri Shankar and Melungtse. Most local airlines offer daily hour-long flights from Kathmandu in small aircrafts, with all passengers getting window seats. Clearer weather guarantees better views, and the best season for flying is between February and March, and October to November.

Everest Skydive

The Everest Skydive in Nepal is guaranteed to give you an adventurous high. Divers are taken aboard an aircraft, and then allowed to jump from 29,500 feet (higher than Everest) for a free-fall past the world's tallest peak. An attached parachute ensures a smooth descent and soft landing. Both solo and guided skydives can be arranged.

Boudhnath Stupa

Situated on the north-eastern edge of Kathmandu, this large white stupa is a major centre of Tibetan Buddhism. It lies on an ancient trade route between Lhasa and Kathmandu, and was an important stop for Tibetan traders travelling to the higher reaches of the Himalayas. Believed to house



The top attractions in

Kathmandu



Buddha's relics, it is also among the largest stupas in Asia. The best times to visit are early morning and dusk, when you can observe

monks chanting their prayers and butter lamps being lit.

Patan Durbar Square

The former capital of an independent kingdom, Kathmandu's neighbouring town Patan lies across the Bagmati River. Situated in the heart of Patan, this

Durbar Square is worth visiting for its beautiful Newari architecture. It is dominated by the medieval Royal Palace, as well as numerous old religious structures such as the Krishna Temple, Bhimsen Temple and the Golden Temple of Haryana Varma. Constructed in the second half of the 17th century, the Royal Palace consists of three beautifully-decorated wings. It also houses the well-maintained Patan Museum, which has a good collection of wood carvings, old photographs, bronze and stone sculptures, and other artefacts.

Durbar Square

Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this medieval square constitutes the core of Kathmandu's old town. Built between the 12th and the 18th centuries, this is the best place to admire traditional Nepalese architecture. It comprises of three squares, with Hanuman Dhoka or the Old Royal Palace being the major landmark. Dating to the 17th century, the palace encloses a series of residential quarters, temples and a museum built around chowks or courtyards. The Durbar Square is also dotted with a series of temples,

statues and other historic buildings; such as Kumari Chowk, the home of Kathmandu's living goddess; and Kasthamandap, believed to be the oldest building in Kathmandu.

Swayambhunath Temple

Perched on top of a hill, this Buddhist stupa lies on the outskirts of the city. Thanks to the presence of a large number of monkeys, it also known as the monkey temple. The central white stupa is topped by a golden spire that depicts Buddha's eyes in all the four directions. It is surrounded by beautifully-carved temples, statues of deities, fluttering prayer flags and Buddhist prayer wheels.



Pashupatinath Temple

Situated on the banks of the Bagmati River, the massive Pashupatinath complex is one of the holiest pilgrimage spots in Nepal. It's best-known for housing a major temple of the Hindu god Shiva, also known as Pashupati. While the present temple was constructed in the 17th century, its history dates back to 400 AD. It has been built in the pagoda style of architecture, with a two-tiered roof rising above the central shrine. Only Hindus are allowed to enter the temple premises. The central point of interest is the black four-headed idol of Pashupati, and a golden statue of his bull, Nandi.

The largest hot desert in the world, the Sahara Desert, surprised the world early today as pictures of snowfall emerged on the internet. The captivating images were taken by amateur photographer Karim Bouchetata on December 19, from near the desert town of Ain Sefra in Algeria. This extraordinary occurrence supposedly last took place in Ain Sefra in 1979, when a snowstorm for half an hour halted traffic in the town. The second time in living memory, this year's Sahara snow happened almost after 40 years. The

incredible pictures are alluring to say the least. Bouchetata in a statement has mentioned, "Everyone was stunned to see snow falling in the desert, it is such a rare occurrence. It looked amazing as the snow settled on the sand and made a great set of photos. The snow stayed for about a day and has now melted away." Ain Sefra, which is also known as the "Gateway to the Desert," was founded in the year 1881 as a French garrison town. The place has recorded an average of 37 degree Celsius in summer, while during winter months the temperature can go as low

When snow rested on the mighty

Saharan sands

as -10.2 degree Celsius. But such an occurrence is never expected in this region. The pictures evokes a peculiar sense of

satisfaction, to see the cold winter snow rest on the sands of the mighty Sahara, mixing up in each other, creating a surreal imagery of deep orange and white. One can only

imagine the unexpected luck of people who happen to be passing by the desert during such a time. We can only hope that your travel luck is as blessed as the amateur photographer Karim Bouchetata's.



Independence Day



Independence Day of India 2026



Independence Day of India

Independence Day is an annual observance celebrated every year on 15th of August. It is a day of great significance for the people of India. At this day India got freedom from the British rule after long years of slavery. It has been declared as the National and Gazetted Holiday all across the India in order to independently commemorate the independence of country from British Empire on 15th of August in 1947.

It was not so easy for the India to get freedom from the Britishers however; various great people and freedom fighters of India made it a truth. They had sacrificed their lives in attaining the freedom for their future generations without worrying about their comfort, rest and freedom. They planned and acted upon various Independence Movements including violent and nonviolent resistance to get complete freedom. However, later independence Pakistan was partitioned from India which was accompanied by violent riots. That horrible riot was the reason of mass casualties and dislocation of people (more than 15 million) from their homes.

At this day, all the national, states and local government's offices, banks, post offices, markets, stores, businesses, organizations, etc become closed. However, public transport is totally unaffected. It is celebrated in the capital of India with big enthusiasm however it is also celebrated in the schools, colleges and other educational institutions including public community and society.

15 August 2026

On August 15, 2026, India will commemorate its 80th year of Independence. The Prime Minister of India will unfurl the Tricolour from the Red Fort in Old Delhi like every year. On this day, Indians pay tribute to all the prominent leaders of India who have heroically fought for the country's freedom in the past.

Symbol and Significance of Independence Day in India

The kite flying sport in India symbolizes the Independence Day. The sky all over India becomes full of countless kites (flown from rooftops) of various sizes, shapes, styles, and shades. Some of them become tricolor symbolize India's flag. Another symbol of independence day is the Red Fort of New Delhi where the first Indian Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, unfurled the Indian flag on 15th of August in 1947.



1947. 15th of August is the day of re-birth of the India. It is the day when Britishers left India and handed over the country to its leaders. It is the most significant day in the history of India and celebrated every year with great enthusiasm by the Indian people.

NATIONAL FLAG OF INDIA

INDIAN FLAG

The National Flag of India is a national symbol designed in horizontal rectangular shape. It is designed using three colours such as deep saffron (top most), white (middle) and India green (lower most). The middle white colour contains navy blue Ashoka Chakra (means Wheel of Law) in the centre having 24 spokes in the wheel. The present form of the national flag was adopted in the meeting of Constituent Assembly on 22nd of July in 1947. The present Indian Flag was declared as the official flag by the authority of India. As Indian Flag contains three colours, it is also called as Tiranga. It is based on Swaraj flag (means flag of Indian National Congress, designed by Pingali Venkayya).

The Flag of India means a lot to the people of India. It is of great significance and honour to the Indian public. Indian Flag is made using a special type of cloth called Khadi (hand-spun cloth popularized by the Mahatma Gandhi). Bureau of Indian Standards is responsible for the manufacturing and designing process of the flag however, Khadi Development and Village Industries Commission has right to manufacture the flag. Karnataka Khadi Gramodyoga Samyukta Sangha has been a sole manufacturer of Indian flag in 2009.

The national Flag Code of India governs the usage of Indian flag (with any other national or non-national flags) as well as laws related to the national emblems. The use of National flag is totally prohibited by the private citizens (except national days). However, on the request of Naveen Jindal (a private citizen) in 2002, the law has been altered for limited usage of Flag by the Government of India (Union Cabinet of India) on the order of Supreme Court of India. It was again amended in 2005 for some additional use of Flag.

MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIAN FLAG



The national flag of India is also known as Tricolour Flag means Tiranga as it contains tricolours. Indian flag is designed horizontally using three colour, wheel in the centre and Khadi cloth. The national flag was adopted on 22nd of July in 1947 in the wake of Indian independence from British rule. Indian Flag was designed and adopted as a symbol of the nationalism and freedom. Indian flag means a lot for us. It is our symbol of unity to lead us on one common way of Dharma even after being of different faiths and religions of Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. The tricolour and Ashoka Chakra (means Wheel of Law) of the Indian flag reveals some meanings which are as follows:

History of Independence Day of India

Indian subcontinent was outpost by some European traders during 17th century. It was again slaved by British East India Company because of his big military strength. They established their local kingdoms and effective forces all through the India during 18th century. A great independence revolution was started by the people of India against the British rule in 1857. That Indian Rebellion is called as Great Rebellion, the Revolt of 1857, the Indian Mutiny, the Uprising of 1857 and the Sepoy Mutiny. It was started against British East India Company's army at Bengal Presidency on 10th of May in 1857.

Through that Rebellion (Government of India Act 1858), Indian freedom fighters made British Crown realized to free the control over India.

The Revolt of 1857 was effective rebellion after which various civic society were emerged all across the India. One of them was the Indian National Congress Party which formed in the year 1885. The period of dissatisfaction and unhappiness has raised non-violent movements (non-cooperation and civil disobedience) all through the nation which was led by the Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

In the meeting of Indian National Congress in 1929 at Lahore, India was declared as Purna Swaraj. Earlier, 26th of January was declared as the Indian Independence Day between 1930 and 1947. Indian citizens were requested by the Indian National Congress to civil disobedience as well as follow the timely instructions issued until complete independence of India.

After World War II, in 1947 British government get ensured that it no longer could show its power on the India. Indian freedom fighter

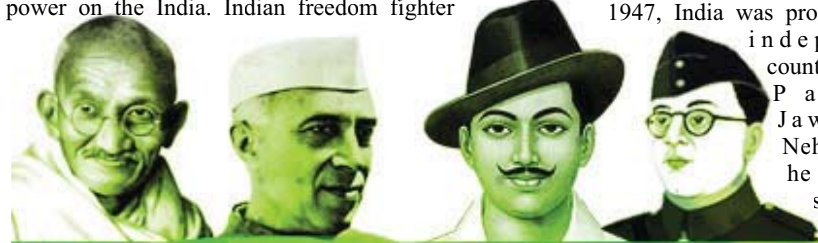


"Tryst with destiny". He said during his speech that "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we will redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes, but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. We end today a period of ill fortune, and India discovers herself again." Speech on 15 August 1947 by Nehru

were continued fighting and then Britain decided to free India from the rule however Hindu Muslim violence took place after the independence of India (on August 15, 1947) which separated India and Pakistan. Muhammad Ali Jinnah became the first Governor General in Karachi Pakistan. However, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru became the first prime minister of independent India. An official ceremony was held in the capital of country, Delhi where all the great leaders and freedom fighters (Abul Kalam Azad, B. R. Ambedkar, Master Tara Singh, etc) took part to celebrate freedom.

During violence of partition mass of people from both sides were died while people in other regions were celebrating Independence Day. The fifth meeting of the Constituent Assembly was held at 11 pm on 14th of August at Constitution Hall, New Delhi under the leadership of president, Rajendra Prasad where Jawaharlal Nehru proclaimed his speech.

In the midnight of 15 August 1947, India was proclaimed as independent country by the Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru where he gave his speech over



Hindu and Muslim Independence Day Celebration



Independence Day is celebrated all over the India as a National holiday of India. It is observed every year in every Indian states and union territories with great enthusiasm. President of India gives a speech every year in order to "Address to the Nation" on the evening of a day before the Independence Day. It is celebrated with big passion in the Capital of country on 15th of August where the prime minister of India hoists the Indian flag on the Red Fort, Delhi. After the flag hoisting, National Anthem song is sung and twenty-one gun shots are fired to salute and honour the Indian flag and solemn occasion.

The prime minister of India highlights over all the achievements of past year, important social issues and solutions, further development in the country, educational matters, etc during his speech on the Independence Day after paying tribute to the freedom fighter and leaders of the Indian independence movement who had sacrificed their lives. A grand march past takes place by the Indian Armed Forces and paramilitary forces. The celebration of independence day takes place in different states of diverse cultural traditions where Chief Ministers of individual states hoist the national flag flowed by various cultural activities by the participants.

Flag hoisting, National Anthem song play and parade ceremonies including other cultural programmes takes place in almost all the governmental and non-

governmental institutions, educational institutions, some of the private institutions all through the country. In the schools and colleges the national flag is hoisted by the school or college Principal and parade and cultural events are carried out by the students. At this day, government offices, buildings, etc gets adorned with the electric lights, flowers and other decorative things. Different sizes of the national flags are used by the people to symbolise faithfulness and commitment to the country.

There is a big risk of terrorist attacks while celebrating the Independence Day especially in the major cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Jammu and Kashmir. That's why no-fly zone is declared around the Red Fort to prevent aerial attacks. For more security reasons additional police forces are positioned all over the cities. Live broadcasting and webcasting is carried out by the media and government websites in order to provide live casting of the celebration of the event to the people



all over the country. It is also celebrated by the people with family members, friends and neighbours by going at dinner, picnic, park, garden, mall for shopping or seeing film, etc. Some people do flying or sing patriotic songs. At this day, kids of the home take a small flag in their hand and go outside by saying "jai Hind", "Jai Jawan or Jai Kisan" and other popular saying.

Caste, Covid vaccination centre: What citizens have to answer in Census 2027

This will mark the first time caste information is being collected as part of the decennial Census, which was originally scheduled for 2021 but was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Union Cabinet has approved Rs 11,718 crore for conducting Census 2027.

Delhi. (Agency)

Caste, religion, Covid-19 vaccination details, Aadhaar and mobile phone numbers are among the 40 questions citizens will be asked during Census 2027 as the Centre has finalised the questionnaire.

According to an order issued by the Registrar General of India, the questionnaire will seek details including whether a respondent belongs to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, as well as their caste. This will mark the first time caste

information is being collected as part of the decennial Census, which was originally scheduled for 2021 but was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Union Cabinet has approved Rs 11,718 crore for conducting Census 2027.

The population enumeration phase will begin on September 1 in Ladakh and snow-bound areas of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The exercise in these areas will continue until September 30.

An online self-enumeration facility will be available from August 17 to 31, ahead

of the door-to-door exercise. For the rest of the country, population enumeration will be carried out next year.

CASTE, RELIGION, FAMILY DETAILS

The 40-point questionnaire will seek a range of demographic and personal information. Respondents will be asked about their age, marital status, age at marriage, spouse, nationality and religion.

Details of parents, mother tongue and other languages known, literacy and digital literacy will also be recorded. For women who are currently married, widowed, divorced or separated, the



questionnaire will include questions on the number of surviving children, children from the current marriage and children born alive during the previous year.

The caste question is a major addition to

the Census exercise.

The questionnaire is not expected to provide a predefined list of castes; instead, respondents will state their caste and the information will be recorded accordingly, according to sources. The decision to include caste in the Census was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April last year.

COVID-19 JABS, BANK ACCOUNTS, AADHAAR

The questionnaire will also touch on several areas of everyday life and documentation.

400 ventilators, 910 oxygen concentrators unused at GTB hospital; Delhi HC upset

Delhi. (Agency)

The Delhi High Court has taken note of expensive equipment lying unused in government hospitals in Delhi. It expressed "shock" on 400 ventilators and 910 oxygen concentrators reportedly lying unused at Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) Hospital.

A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora are hearing a suo motu case, in which it routinely monitors healthcare services in the city's government hospitals.

The situation at the Delhi State Cancer Institute is no different, where a very large number of equipment meant for cancer diagnosis and treatment lied unused, the court was informed. It noted that Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital and Chaudhary Brahm Prakash Ayurved Charak Sansthan also faced a similar situation, in which all their equipment and machines were reported to be lying unused.

The court was informed by GTB Hospital that the ventilators and oxygen concentrators were procured or donated during Covid-19 and were now surplus. They are part of a wider list of critical medical equipment lying idle in 26 government hospitals, the bench was told.

Machines from top firms

The division bench of the High Court observed, "Equipment appears to be manufactured by globally well-known companies, and it is unclear as to why such equipment is being permitted to lie unused."

Two boys drown in rainwater-filled pit in Delhi's Narela

New Delhi. (Agency)

Two minor boys, aged nine and 11, drowned in a rainwater-filled pit near DDA flats in Delhi's Narela area on Thursday, police said. According to police, the two children, residents of Bawana, had gone to the area to play and entered the pit, which was filled with rainwater.

Police received information about the drowning and rushed to the spot. The children were pulled out with the help of local residents and taken to Satyawadi Raja Harish Chandra Hospital in Narela, where doctors declared them brought dead, a senior police officer said. The bodies were sent for medico-legal proceedings and further investigation is underway.

A family member said one of the boys had left home around 10 am after taking money from his father, who works as a labourer, to buy candies. The boy was a Class 5 student.

The mother of the other child said she was away at work when she received a call from local residents informing her that her son had drowned. "He went for tuition at around 10 am. I was calling to find out whether he had returned from tuition. I don't know why he went there," she said.

The incident took place at 100 Foota in Narela, on vacant land near the DDA flats. Local residents alleged that the pit had been created during construction work and subsequently filled with rainwater. Police said the exact circumstances in which the children entered the pit and the sequence of events leading to their drowning are being ascertained. They also appealed to parents and guardians to keep a close watch on children during the monsoon and prevent them from playing near open pits, drains and water bodies.

60 aircraft, Rs 1 lakh crore: Air Force's big push to modernise transport fleet

The IAF is set to acquire around 60 multi-role transport aircraft in a nearly Rs 1 lakh crore programme, with Indian firms leading global partnerships to replace ageing platforms.

New Delhi. (Agency)

The Indian Air Force is set for a major overhaul of its transport fleet, with the Defence Ministry set to acquire around 60 multi-role transport aircraft in a programme estimated at nearly 1 lakh crore, according to defence officials.

The proposed acquisition is aimed at replacing ageing transport platforms and strengthening the IAF's ability to rapidly move troops, equipment and supplies.

Indian defence companies are expected to play the lead role in the programme, with multiple firms being considered for partnerships

with global aircraft manufacturers. According to defence sources, the tender has already been issued to multiple Indian companies,



including Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, Tata and Mahindra. Mahindra Defence has partnered with Brazilian aerospace major Embraer to offer the C-390

Millennium, while Tata is working with US-based Lockheed Martin to pitch the C-130J Super Hercules. The C-130J is already operated by the IAF, which has 12 aircraft in its fleet.

The proposed programme is expected to have a strong indigenous manufacturing component. Around 20 per cent of the aircraft could be delivered in fly-away condition, while the remaining platforms are envisaged to be manufactured in India with more than 60 per cent indigenous content through joint ventures between Indian companies and the original equipment manufacturers.

Sonam Wangchuk calls for 'second Independence movement' to reshape Indian politics

Delhi. (Agency)

Climate activist and education reformer Sonam Wangchuk has called for a "peaceful revolution" in India, arguing that the country needs a fundamental change in the way it chooses its political leaders if it is to remain a "respectable nation" and emerge as a developed country by 2047. In a video message posted ahead of Independence Day on Thursday, Wangchuk called for "India's second Independence movement" and urged citizens to suggest "selfless, fearless men and women of character and substance" who could help shape the country's future.

Wangchuk said he had been unwell over the past few days and had spent time thinking about India, its progress and its future. "Fifty years ago, the neighbouring countries that were behind us, or were

equal to us, have now gone miles away from us," he said, naming Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh while referring to per capita



GDP.

Wangchuk warned that if the current trajectory continued, India would not become a developed country by 2047, the centenary of its Independence, and could struggle to hold its place in the global economy.

He said India needed a major change if it

wanted to remain a "respectable nation" by 2047.

'NOT ABOUT ANY ONE POLITICAL PARTY'

Wangchuk congratulated people who had sought change and protested over the past two months. He said the agitation had also led to a change in the Union education ministry, referring to the resignation of the Education Minister. "I would like to congratulate you on one hand, that you wanted change and you protested in the last two months. And even though there was change... the Minister of Education resigned. But the next Minister of Education, I don't see any miracle from him either," he said.

Wangchuk said India's progress remained closely linked to its education system. "As long as education is behind, the future of the country will also be behind," he said.

Discoms given permission to impose extra surcharge for fuel cost increase in Delhi

New Delhi. (Agency)

The capital's power regulator, the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC), has allowed three discoms to levy an additional Fuel and Power Purchase Adjustment Surcharge (FPPAS) of more than 7-8% for June, adding to consumers' electricity bills.

The additional surcharge will be levied over and above the existing 10% cap on FPPAS and will be reflected in consumers' bills in the next billing cycle. The DERC now revises the surcharge on a monthly basis.

The power discoms, BRPL (BSES Rajdhani Power Limited), BYPL (BSES Yamuna Power Limited) and TPDDL (Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited), through their separate representations, sought relaxation on the ground that the actual power purchase cost for June increased "significantly" as compared to the approved base power purchase cost.

Seeking relaxation, the discoms claimed FPPAS for June at the rates of 31.64%, 24.02% and 23.71%, respectively.

The Commission, in its August 10 order, said that the discoms will be permitted to recover an additional surcharge of 7.94% (BRPL), 7.43% (BYPL) and 8.50% (TPDDL) for June.

Accordingly, the total FPPAS permitted to be recovered is 17.94% in the case of BRPL, 17.43% in the case of BYPL and 18.50% in the case of TPDDL, said the order. The additional FPPAS has been allowed to enable power discoms to recover at least the reasonable part of the increase in the power purchase cost, the DERC order added.

The FPPAS, determined by the regulatory commissions, is employed to pass the changes in fuel and power procurement costs to the consumers. The surcharge is the percentage of the fixed charge and energy charge (units consumed) components of the electricity bill.

'Power purchase cost for June increased'

The power discoms, BRPL (BSES Rajdhani Power Limited), BYPL (BSES Yamuna Power Limited) and TPDDL (Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited), sought relaxation citing actual power purchase cost for June increased "significantly" as compared to the approved base power purchase cost.

7 seconds of horror in Air India Phuket-Delhi cockpit, Airbus's interim report reveals

The Air India Airbus A320 aircraft, which was en route to Delhi from Phuket on August 4, experienced a sudden altitude drop of about 300 feet. The airline had initially attributed the incident to severe turbulence.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Initial findings by Airbus have revealed the seven seconds of horror on the Air India Phuket-Delhi flight that suddenly lost around 300 feet of altitude on August 4. Following an analysis of the flight data recorder, Airbus revealed that flight controls on AI 2379 were lost for four seconds after all three hydraulic systems stopped working within about two seconds.

This affected several important controls used to manoeuvre the aircraft, explaining why it might have lost altitude. The incident happened on August 4 when the Air India Airbus A320 aircraft was headed to Delhi from Phuket.

It left 20 passengers and four cabin crew members severely injured. Seventeen people had to be hospitalised. The

aircraft, which had 137 passengers, later stabilised and landed safely in Delhi.

WHAT AIRBUS FOUND IN ITS PROBE?

Air India had initially attributed the incident to severe turbulence. Airbus, which is the manufacturer of the aircraft, and the French aviation accident investigation authority are assisting the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) in the investigation.

Citing the post-flight maintenance report, sources said 11 system alerts were recorded within a span of two to three minutes.

The issue began around 4.02.44, according to Airbus's analysis. For about four seconds, the aircraft lost the use of important flight controls, including the ailerons, elevators and spoilers.

Ailerons essentially allow pilots to make the aircraft turn left or right. The elevators help control the aircraft's nose. Spoilers,



located on the wings, help in controlling the aircraft's movement and speed.

The hydraulic systems eventually recovered at around 4.02.51, helping restore control of the aircraft. In an aircraft, hydraulic systems provide the

force needed to move key flight controls and other aircraft components.

Airbus also pointed to a "full nose-down input" as the flight lost altitude. It basically means the aircraft received a command to lower its nose, causing the aircraft to pitch downward.

Admitting technical glitches in connection with the incident, Airbus has asked Air India to carry out a detailed inspection of the aircraft. It is, however, yet to identify the root cause behind the incident.

"We understand that the flight encountered a sudden loss of altitude on August 4, resulting in injuries on board... checks on the plane's systems and sensors are needed to provide more information about the incident," Airbus said in its communication to Air India.

Stock markets decline in early trade; Sensex down 300 points

MUMBAI. (Agency)

Market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty declined in early trade on Friday as the prolonged US-Iran impasse weighed heavily on investors' sentiment. The 30-share BSE Sensex was down 298.75 points to 77,760.21 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 74.20 points to 24,321.90. From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel, Axis Bank, InterGlobe Aviation, Tech Mahindra, Power Grid and ITC were among the major laggards. Eternal, Titan, Adani Ports and Bajaj Finance were among the winners. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded 0.06 per cent higher at USD 87.12 per barrel. The unresolved US-Iran standoff continues to underpin crude oil prices, leaving oil-importing economies such as India more vulnerable to inflationary pressures and currency volatility, Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth-tech firm, said. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi and Japan's Nikkei 225 traded higher, while Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index quoted lower. US markets ended higher on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 510.69 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. On Thursday, fag-end buying helped the Sensex end the session in the positive territory. The 30-share index settled 113.61 points, or 0.15 per cent, higher at 78,079.96. The Nifty was marginally down 40.10 points, or 0.16 per cent, to end at 24,395.85, registering its third day of decline.

FSSAI's warning to celebrities and influencers: Why it matters

New Delhi. (Agency)

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on Thursday (August 13), issued a warning to celebrities and social media influencers over the promotion of food products through unverified or misleading claims. The regulator's message was that people who lend their public image and influence to food advertising should not simply repeat claims made by brands. They should first make reasonable efforts to establish that the product is safe, legally compliant and that claims about its health or nutritional benefits are properly supported. The warning comes at a time when celebrity advertising and influencer marketing have become an important part of the food and beverage industry. Consumers increasingly encounter food products through Instagram videos, YouTube content, social-media posts and other forms of digital promotion rather than only through traditional advertisements. A recommendation from a well-known actor, sportsperson or influencer can therefore have a powerful effect on consumer choices. "Modern food, beverages and nutritional products in today's comparatively more health conscious society grab increased attention of consumers, especially of the youth. And the role of celebrities and influencers in their marketing has become all the more critical in the digital world," says a senior creative director with a Mumbai-based marketing company, adding that; often the agencies who engage the celebrities or influencers may not be even fully aware of the products that they want to promote.

L&T to build India's largest single-cluster AI infrastructure facility in Chennai

Kolkata. (Agency)

Amid the growing adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in India, infrastructure giant Larsen & Toubro (L&T) has taken up a project that is going to be India's largest single-cluster AI infrastructure facility. It will be located in Chennai and will be built in partnership with Together AI, which is a US-based cloud platform for developers and AI researchers who want to build, train, and run open-source generative AI models. The value of the project can go up to Rs 15,000 crore. It will deploy approximately 10,000 GPUs based on NVIDIA's B300 platform.

Large-scale AI model training

This mammoth AI factory will be built for Together AI and will be utilised for large-scale AI model training, fine-tuning and inference. Simply put, this entire setup will help provide extremely fast computing power to AI companies and developers. L&T has stated that it is already working on building data centers and AI infrastructure and this project marks a significant step for the company to enter the AI Factory business. "The integrated AI Factory, with capacity of 10,000 B300 NVIDIA GPUs, will be hosted at Vyoma's Chennai data centre.

Why US called Pune, Gujarat and Chennai 'ugly sister cities' in China trade report

New Delhi. (Agency)

A new White House trade report has put manufacturing hubs in Pune, Gujarat and Chennai in an unusual comparison with Cincinnati, Dayton and Columbus in the US. The comparison is over pumps and compressors. The White House calls such foreign-US pairings "ugly sister cities" in its report, The Great Transshipment Scam: Rise, Scope, and Costs. The phrase has nothing to do with the cities being actual "sister cities". It is the White House's way of describing foreign manufacturing centres that compete with American industrial regions making similar products. But the India reference is part of a much bigger US allegation — that Chinese goods are increasingly

being routed through other countries to get around steep American tariffs.

WHAT IS THE GREAT



TRANSSHIPMENT SCAM REPORT?

The White House report looks at how Chinese goods may be reaching the US through other countries to get around tariffs imposed on Chinese imports.

The report argues that some Chinese

goods are being sent to third countries, where they may undergo limited processing, repackaging or changes to paperwork before being exported to the US as products from that country. That matters because a product entering the US from China can face a much higher tariff than the same product coming from another country. Washington says this has created an incentive to move goods through countries with lower tariff rates. Trade experts refer to this as tariff arbitrage — taking advantage of the difference between the tariff imposed on a Chinese product and the lower tariff on the same product entering from another country. It also makes an important clarification: not every shift

in production from China is suspicious. Companies have genuinely moved factories and diversified supply chains since the US began imposing tariffs on Chinese goods in 2018. The report's concern is with goods that remain essentially Chinese but are given a new route — and potentially a new country of origin — before reaching the US. It calls the broader shift in trade flows the "Great Reallocation" and the network of countries through which China-linked goods may move the "Shadow Transshipment Network".

WHY IS INDIA ON THE LIST?

India is among the countries placed in Tier 1 of the Shadow Transshipment Network, alongside Canada, the European Union, Israel, Japan, Mexico, South Korea and Taiwan.

EPFO deadline: What happens if employers miss the August 15 ECR filing deadline?

New Delhi. (Agency)

Employers have one important compliance deadline to keep in mind this week. The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has asked employers to file the Electronic Challan-cum-Return (ECR) for the July wage month and deposit the applicable PF contributions by August 15.

EPFO shared the reminder on X, asking employers to complete the process on time so that employees' provident fund contributions are credited without delay.

WHAT HAS EPFO SAID?

In its latest notice, EPFO said, "Important Notice for Employers!

File the ECR for the July wage month and deposit the due contributions by August 15."



The retirement fund body also said timely compliance will ensure that contributions reach members' accounts on time and help employers avoid penalties and compliance-related issues. The ECR is the monthly return through

which employers report employee-related PF contribution details and complete the payment process.

WHY IS THE AUGUST 15 DEADLINE IMPORTANT?

PF contributions are an important part of an employee's retirement savings. Any delay in filing the return or depositing the dues can affect the timely credit of contributions to members' accounts. For employers, completing the filing and payment within the prescribed time also helps avoid additional compliance costs. Simply put, EPFO's latest reminder is a clear nudge to employers to complete their July compliance requirements on time.

Svatantra Microfin files Rs 3,000 crore IPO papers with Sebi

New Delhi. (Agency)

Svatantra Microfin, a non-banking finance company focused on microfinance and affordable housing loans, has filed draft papers with Sebi to raise up to Rs 3,000 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The proposed IPO will comprise a fresh issue of shares worth Rs 1,500 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of shares worth another Rs 1,500 crore. The company may also consider raising up to Rs 300 crore through a pre-IPO placement. If it goes ahead with the pre-IPO round, the amount raised will be reduced from the fresh issue size. The IPO filing comes as Svatantra looks to raise fresh capital to support the growth of its lending business, while some of its existing private equity investors are also looking to sell part of their holdings.

EXISTING INVESTORS TO SELL SHARES

The Rs 1,500-crore OFS will be split between two existing investors. Advent International-controlled Violicina plans to sell shares worth Rs 1,064.8 crore, while Multiples Alternate Asset Management will sell shares worth Rs 435.2 crore. Violicina currently owns a 28.02% stake in Svatantra Microfin, while Multiples holds 11.45%. Ananya Birla and her firm Antimatter Media together hold a 59.97% stake in the company. Advent and Multiples had jointly invested Rs 1,930 crore in Svatantra Microfin in March 2024, according to the IPO documents.

WHY IS SVATANTRA RAISING MONEY?

The company plans to use the net proceeds from the fresh issue to increase its Tier I capital base. The additional capital will help it meet future capital requirements and support onward lending as its business and assets grow. Svatantra provides microfinance loans and also offers affordable housing finance through its subsidiary, Svatantra Micro Housing Finance Corporation.

Its lending business is largely focused on women in rural areas, with the company targeting households with annual incomes of up to Rs 3 lakh.

Most Asian stocks track Wall Street record as US data ease rate fears

New Delhi. (Agency)

Most Asian stocks rose Friday as another soft US inflation reading solidified expectations the Federal Reserve will hold off hiking interest rates, while a further drop in oil prices added to the upbeat mood. The advances tracked a healthy lead from Wall Street, where the S&P 500 ended at a record and the Nasdaq saw its highest close since June after data showed the producer price index slowed sharply in July and came in below forecasts.

The reading compounded bets on the Fed standing pat at its meeting next month, following the previous day's consumer price index reading that also pointed to easing inflationary pressure and last Friday's jobs report showing 23,000 positions were lost in July.

Investors are now pricing in a less than 40 percent chance of a September rate hike, compared with 50 percent last week.

"A few weeks ago, traders were being asked to justify why the Fed should not hike again," said Stephen Innes, global strategist at Quintex Intel. "After the latest run of data, the burden of proof has flipped. The market now wants to know what would actually force the Fed to tighten." "We've now had a constructive triple-header of dovish US data: softer payrolls last Friday, an obliging core CPI print, and now a risk-friendly PPI release.

"The disinflation ducks are starting to line up, and with oil also backing off, the market has steadily stripped away the case for another near-term Fed hike. However, uncertainty prevails on trading floors as inflation at more than

three per cent remains well above the Fed's two percent target, while the Middle East crisis could erupt at any time and send oil prices soaring. Meanwhile, Cleveland Fed boss Beth Hammack reiterated her view that borrowing costs need to rise despite the latest run of figures.

"I love to see that those numbers are coming in lower... but I don't have confidence that we're going to continue to see that, or that we're going to see them low enough that it's going to bring us back down to that two percent number," she said in Ohio on Thursday. I think we need to act now," she added.

That came after she told Yahoo Finance on Monday that "one 25-basis-point move probably doesn't do a whole lot for the economy. So it's probably some number of (movements)" but did not want to say where they should land.

India sitting on \$5 trillion worth of gold: Will the govt tap it with a new scheme?

A Gold Monetisation Scheme allow individuals, Hindu Undivided Families and trusts deposit idle physical gold with designated commercial banks which can generate interest for the depositors. It turns a dead asset into income generating financial tool.

Kolkata. (Agency)

India is believed to be sitting on gold worth \$5 trillion, which is far higher than the country's GDP, and the government is planning to revamp its flagship Gold Monetisation Scheme to turn this idle asset into a financial instrument, says reports. The plan comes against the

backdrop of surging crude oil prices, thanks to the continuing West Asia crisis, which is putting a lot of stress on the rupee and the stress is only rising due to gold imports. Reports state that such a monetisation scheme can be announced later in August and it will rope in jewelers for the first time to ensure this vast amount of yellow metal is rolled back into the jewellery production mill, which is the single biggest origin of demand.

"We are awaiting just one or two final approvals, and most of the approvals have been sought... Utilising this mobilised gold as raw material for the jewellery industry will directly reduce India's gold imports," Rajesh Rokde, Chairman, Gems & Jewellery Council, was quoted by the media as saying.

World Gold Council estimates on Indian gold holdings According to an estimate by the World Gold Council, households and



temples in India could be holding about 25,000 tonnes of gold. Estimates by others rise it by 5,000 tonnes. Yet others think the amount could even be 50,000 tonnes. If an individual or body (say a trust) deposits gold in this scheme, it will earn it a pre-determined interest,

turning it into a liquid economic asset.

Gold deposit schemes in India

The Centre launched the Gold Deposit Scheme in 1999 with the express objective of mobilising idle household and institutional gold. But it required one to deposit at least 500 grams of the yellow metal, a quantity that appeared too large for the scheme to become popular. Later, in 2015, scheme was revamped and merged into the modern Gold Monetisation Scheme launched in November 2015. While the medium-term and long-term government deposit components were discontinued in March 2025, banks continue to offer Short-Term Bank Deposits (STBD) at their discretion, says a post on the State bank of India website.

Changing City: No more Mahalaxmi traffic detour New bridge set to cut commute by December

Mumbai.(Agency)

For motorists negotiating Mahalaxmi’s congested roads, a long awaited missing link could be in place by the end of this year. The BMC has completed the 78.5 metre pylon of its new cable stayed bridge, which will connect Mahalaxmi ground directly with Saat Rasta and provide an alternative to the existing Mahalaxmi railway over bridge.

The civic body is now pushing to complete the remaining work and open the four lane bridge to traffic by December 31, 2026.

About the project

After a structural audit of old bridges across the city, the BMC’s standing committee cleared proposals for a new bridge in Mahalaxmi. The upcoming bridge will replace an older east-west structure that passes over the railway tracks of the Mahalaxmi railway station. The bridge will commence from the Keshavrao Khadye Marg near the racecourse in the west, surpass the western railway tracks and land near Shirin Talkies along Keshavrao Khadye Marg in the east.

The 2018 report that predicted Mumbai’s landslide this week, almost word-for-word

Mumbai.(Agency)

The Geological Survey of India (GSI) had warned the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) eight years ago that the Kurla hillside which collapsed on Wednesday, killing eight people, was likely to give way, and listed protective works that were never carried out, government records show. Documents reviewed by The Indian Express show the GSI had sought “immediate attention” to Hill No. 3 at Saki Naka, where three landslides between 2005 and 2008 killed 16 people and damaged at least 26 houses.

The GSI, the Centre’s nodal agency for landslide studies, prepared a 435-page risk assessment in 2018 after two years of field visits and technical studies across 74 landslide-prone pockets of Mumbai, and asked the BMC to frame a land-use policy for the city’s vulnerable areas. The report named Kurla among Mumbai’s five primary landslide-risk zones, along with Bhandup, Ghatkopar, Vikhroli and Chembur.

Mumbai restaurants pull down shutters amid Maharashtra food safety crackdown

Mumbai.(Agency)

Eateries across Mumbai can be seen pulling down their shutters — for a few hours, a few days or longer — to carry out repairs, apply a fresh coat of paint, fix broken tiles or undertake deep cleaning.

The closures come as Maharashtra’s Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has sharply stepped up enforcement in the city, suspending licences and sharing photos and videos from the premises.

Vijay Shetty, president of the Indian Hotel & Restaurant Association (AHAR), said the intensity of the crackdown has pushed many of the association’s member restaurateurs into pre-emptive overhaul mode—renovating, retraining staff and hiring outside help to avoid risking a suspension.

“They are third-generation owners, their image has been built by their ancestors over decades,” Shetty said, referring to many of the association’s members. “FDA is not only suspending licences but also naming and shaming restaurants, which is causing significant financial loss as well as a lot of harm to the reputation they have built over the years. There is mental trauma alongside financial loss.”

Ambala Sikh protest turns violent; cops use tear gas, lathi charge to clear highway

A Sikh community protest over the delayed FIR against GurSimran Singh Mand led to a highway blockade in Ambala and police action. The standoff continued even after the FIR was filed, as protesters sought the release of detained youths.

Ambala.(Agency)

A protest by members of the Sikh community over the alleged delay in registering an FIR against GurSimran Singh Mand in the Panjokhra Sahib dispute turned tense in Ambala on Thursday, with police using tear gas and a lathi charge to clear a highway blockade.

A large number of Sikh protesters gathered on the highway demanding that a case be registered against Mand. The protesters had earlier held a meeting and announced that they would block the National Highway if their demand was not met. As the protesters moved towards the highway from the gurdwara, police put up barricades and used tear gas to stop them. The protesters, however, broke through and blocked the highway, leading to a long traffic jam and the deployment of

heavy police forces. Amid mounting pressure, police later registered an FIR against Mand. However, the protest did not end. The protesters then demanded



the immediate release of Sikh youths who had been detained by the police. Several rounds of talks between police officials and Sikh representatives failed to break the deadlock. As darkness fell, police presence on the highway was further

increased and protesters were asked to clear the road.

When they refused to move, police used tear gas and resorted to a lathi charge to disperse the protesters. The highway was subsequently cleared and traffic restored.

Several police personnel were injured during the operation. Haryana DGP Ajay Singhal visited the Military Hospital and Civil Hospital in Ambala to meet the injured personnel and enquire about their condition. According to preliminary information released by the Haryana Police, six to seven personnel were injured. Those injured include DSP Virender Sharma, who suffered a serious thumb injury, along with Constables Rakshit and Naveen Kumar, Head Constable Sandeep Kumar, ASI Satish and ASI Pankaj, who sustained finger injuries.

Canada work permit: Can protesting Indian students continue to stay on?

Jalandhar.(Agency)

For close to a month, Indian students in Canada have been protesting after their Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) applications were refused, leaving them with a difficult choice.

These students, who have completed nearly two years of study at Portage College and its former partner campuses in Alberta, Calgary, and Edmonton, have spent around Rs 30 lakh to Rs 50 lakh on tuition and living expenses. They said they had not anticipated a refusal of their work permits and had expected to work in Canada after completing their programmes.

The refusals have reportedly cited concerns over the eligibility of the programmes, including whether they were credit-earning and qualified for a

PGWP. Portage College has said immigration decisions are made by the Canadian federal agency Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).



It has advised affected graduates to seek independent immigration advice.

The Canadian government has made it clear that those individuals whose PGWP applications have been refused and who

do not have any other legal status to remain in Canada must leave the country. In such a situation, can these individuals maintain their legal status? Here’s what to know.

What happens after the PGWP refusal?

After a PGWP refusal, if the students do not have any other legal status to stay in Canada, they cannot continue working and have to leave the country. They may, where eligible, apply for restoration of status within 90 days of losing their status, but the refusal does not automatically give a student 90 days to remain in Canada.

According to the IRCC, the 90-day provision relates to the restoration of temporary resident status after status has been lost; it is not a 90-day grace period following a PGWP refusal.

Severe safety lapses at Chandigarh’s Sukhna Lake, finds audit

Chandigarh.(Agency)

At Chandigarh Sukhna Lake, where boat rides are one of the major attractions for visitors, a basic safety requirement of life jackets was given a “casual and lackadaisical” treatment, an inspection report has revealed.

The findings during the compliance audit of Chandigarh Industrial and Tourism Development Corporation (CITCO) left a stark mismatch at the iconic lake: 145 boats, 488 life jackets required — but only 225 available. The findings are contained in the Inspection Report of the Compliance Audit of Chandigarh Industrial and Tourism

Development Corporation (CITCO) for the period 2021-2022 to 2023-24, obtained by Chandigarh activist R K Garg from the Director General of Audit,



Delhi.

The report has also described the approach towards their specifications, purchase and maintenance as “lackadaisical” and “casual”, warning that it “may

cause danger to the life of visitors”. “Lackadaisical and casual approach in deciding specifications and purchase of life jackets has led to purchase and maintenance of life jackets for boating at Sukhna Lake, which may cause danger to the life of visitors,” the inspection report said. It called for the involvement of an expert body approved by the Government of India, like National Institute of Water Sport, Ministry of Tourism, Goa and Sports Authority of India, NDRF among others.

“Tourist footfall data for Sukhna Lake has shown a large number of tourists visiting Sukhna Lake... 90,000 (weekday) and 15,000 (weekend) approximately.

Gorakhpur teen fakes own kidnapping, uses AI to extort father for online gaming

A Gorakhpur teenager allegedly staged his own kidnapping and sent AI-generated images to demand Rs 1 lakh from his father. Police said the false ransom plot was aimed at raising money for online gaming and involved no real kidnappers.

Gorakhpur.(Agency)

In a bizarre case from Uttar Pradesh’s Gorakhpur district, a teenager allegedly staged his own kidnapping and used AI-generated images to demand Rs 1 lakh from his father to fund his online gaming activities.

The incident came to light in the Sikriganj police station area when a man informed the police that his nephew had left home and failed to return. Around the same time, several images were sent from the boy’s mobile phone to his father’s phone, accompanied by a demand for Rs 1 lakh. Treating the matter as a suspected kidnapping, police immediately registered a case and launched an investigation.

Using call detail records (CDR) and CCTV footage, police teams traced the boy and recovered him safely within two hours. He was later handed over to his family. During questioning, police uncovered an unexpected twist. According to investigators, the boy, who was allegedly addicted to online gaming, had fabricated the kidnapping story himself to obtain money for use in online games.

To make the plan appear genuine, he allegedly sent AI-generated images portraying himself as a kidnapping victim and demanded Rs 1 lakh from his father. Police said no actual kidnappers were involved and the ransom demand had been orchestrated by the boy himself. According to information gathered during the



probe, the AI-generated images were reportedly created with the help of the boy’s girlfriend, who lives in Delhi.

Khajani Circle Officer Deepanshi Rathore said police acted immediately after receiving the complaint and traced the boy within two hours with the help of technical surveillance and

CCTV footage. She said the investigation revealed that the boy had staged the kidnapping and sent AI-generated photographs to support the false claim, with the sole aim of raising money for online gaming. Police confirmed that no third party had demanded money in the case.

Two men went to confront a priest. They ended up buried beneath his temple

Lucknow.(Agency)

On July 25, Ankit (27) and his friend Israr (36) went to a temple in their village in Uttar Pradesh’s Baghpat to confront the priest. Ankit believed the priest was in a relationship with his younger sister and had allegedly warned him several times to end it.

Neither man returned home. For four days, their families tried to find out where they had gone. They repeatedly asked the priest if he knew anything about Ankit and Israr, but he denied having any information about them, police said.

They lodged a missing person’s complaint on July 29. On Thursday, police recovered their decomposing bodies from the temple premises — they were buried several feet beneath the interlocking tiles.

The priest, who police said is the main accused, and his 14-year-old son are on the run, said Rakesh Kumar Pundir, Station House Officer (SHO) of Chandi Nagar police station. Police have arrested two of his disciples in connection with the case, who allegedly revealed details of the killings during questioning.

Trail led to the temple

Ankit was physically challenged. According to the SHO, he had been unable to move his lower body since birth. Israr, his close friend, used to take wherever he wanted to go on his motorcycle.

Six Bengaluru hotels fined Rs 1.6L for food safety breach

BENGALURU.(Agency)

The Bengaluru North City Corporation (BNCC) on Thursday imposed a total fine of Rs 1.6 lakh on six hotels and food establishments for violating food safety, hygiene and solid waste management norms.

The inspections were carried out at eateries and hotels in the Byatarayanapura and Yelahanka divisions on the directions of Commissioner Pommala Sunil Kumar. Health officials found several violations, including improper waste segregation, unhygienic conditions, flies and use of single-use plastic.

Peepai Brewery & Kitchen was issued the highest penalty of Rs 80,000 after officials found expired cooking oil, improperly covered and unlabelled meat in cold storage and no invoice showing the date of purchase of the meat.

Hyatt Centric was fined Rs 40,000 for improper waste segregation and the presence of flies. The establishment was found violating FSSAI and solid waste management rules.

NEWS BOX

VVS Laxman likely to become BCCI Director of Cricket



New Delhi. (Agency)

VVS Laxman, the former India batter and current head of the BCCI Centre of Excellence, is likely to take on a much bigger responsibility within Indian cricket. The development comes as the BCCI prepares for a possible reshuffle of key positions in September.

With Ajit Agarkar's tenure as chairman of the senior selection committee set to end in September and the national team's coaching setup also under scrutiny, the board could make some significant changes. Sources have indicated to India Today that Laxman is likely to be given the role of Director of Cricket. Meanwhile, there have also been reports that the BCCI could extend Agarkar's tenure until June 2027. The proposed move would represent a significant expansion of Laxman's current responsibilities at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, where he has been overseeing player development and high-performance programmes. There is no official confirmation yet from the BCCI on the appointment or the exact structure of the proposed role. Laxman has already remained closely involved with the senior team, stepping in as interim coach when required. Most recently, he guided a young India side to a 3-0 T20I series win in Zimbabwe while Gautam Gambhir and his regular support staff were rested after the England tour.

WHAT DOES DIRECTOR OF CRICKET MEAN?

While the exact responsibilities would depend on the BCCI's eventual structure, a Director of Cricket role would potentially place Laxman at the centre of India's wider cricketing operations.

Kalyan Chaubey misleading government: Bhutia slams AIFF for snubbing FIFA event



New Delhi. (Agency)

Former India captain Bhaichung Bhutia has criticised the All India Football Federation's decision to prioritise the high-profile Brazil friendly, arguing that the reported cost could be better directed towards developing Indian football. He also accused AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey of misleading the government over the fixture.

Bhutia's comments come after the All India Football Federation confirmed that India had withdrawn from the inaugural FIFA ASEAN Cup, choosing instead to focus on the Brazil friendly scheduled for October 3 at Kolkata's Salt Lake Stadium. The AIFF had initially agreed to participate in the tournament, which was to feature India alongside Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. "Spending something between Rs 50 to 70 crores for one friendly against Brazil is uncalled-for... Especially when Indian football is currently going through so much of the financial crisis. Kalyan Chaubey is simply misleading the government."

"There wasn't even one athlete from Bengal who figured among India's medal winners in the recently concluded Commonwealth Games. The government should spend money on upcoming sportspersons and try building infrastructure. We would all love to watch Brazil, but not by paying such a large sum." The former India captain had also raised questions over the purpose of the Brazil fixture before the AIFF confirmed India's withdrawal from the ASEAN Cup, pointing to the wider problems facing Indian football.

We need to improve: Michael Carrick calls for more Manchester United signings

Michael Carrick believes Manchester United can challenge for the Premier League title but wants further reinforcements. The United boss has made it clear that strengthening the squad remains a priority before the new season.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Michael Carrick believes Manchester United have enough potential to challenge for the Premier League title but admits the squad still needs strengthening before the new season. The United head coach has called for more additions while stressing that any new arrivals must improve the team.

United have made three additions so far, with Youri Tielemans, Andrey Santos and Karl Darlow joining the squad.

Speaking from United's pre-season base in County Kildare, Carrick made it clear that recruitment remains a priority as the club looks to build on last season's third-place finish. "We've definitely got the potential to achieve something really special," Carrick said. "I'm not hiding from the fact – and we should aim to do it. I can't give you a definite answer on [winning the title] but it's certainly what we're pushing to do because we have to. That's the club we are."

"We always want to strengthen in every way. So it depends on: is it going to make us better, and is it going to help us? It [buying a player] can't be for the sake of it, but, of course, we want to improve. We need to improve." United have spent 83.3 million pounds on Tielemans, Santos and goalkeeper Darlow so far, while Carrick continues to look for a left-back and another

HAVE MANCHESTER UNITED SIGNED SO FAR?

United's 83.3 million pounds spending so far is below the amount invested by newly promoted Ipswich Town and Coventry City, who have spent 109.4 million pounds and 92.2 million pounds



respectively. Carrick, however, insists the club will not recruit simply for the sake of making signings. The manager wants additions who fit the team's requirements and can raise the level of competition within the squad. "There's one or two areas where we'd like to improve," Carrick said. "But we are pretty

clear in the messages that we need to keep pushing and there's certain things that we want to try and do, but it needs to be right." The responsibility now falls on director of football Jason Wilcox and chief executive Omar Berrada to provide Carrick with the reinforcements he believes are required.

WILL MARCUS RASHFORD STAY AT UNITED?

Another major question concerns Marcus Rashford, who is back with the squad after spells on loan at Aston Villa and Barcelona. The forward could feature against AC Milan in United's final pre-season game, potentially making his first appearance for the club since December 2024. Carrick has welcomed his return and believes Rashford can still play an important role.

"He's our player," Carrick said. "He's our player, and he's a good player, and he gives us something a little bit different in the group."

Tanzid Hasan becomes first Bangladesh batter to hit Test century in Australia

Asan. (Agency)

Tanzid Hasan Tamim became the first Bangladesh batter to score a Test century in Australia, completing a 188-ball hundred during the first Test against Australia in Darwin. The 25-year-old's breakthrough innings continued Bangladesh's superb start after their bowlers had dismissed the hosts for 198. Playing only his second Test, Tanzid built his innings patiently before accelerating as Bangladesh moved ahead of Australia's first-innings total. The left-hander found support from captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, with the pair looking to stretch Bangladesh's advantage after a dominant opening day. Tanzid had already brought up his maiden Test fifty earlier in the innings and reached the century mark after continuing his composed stay at the crease. His knock also took him past Hannan Sarkar's previous Bangladesh



record of 76 for the highest individual Test score by a Bangladeshi batter in Australia. The century added another highlight to what has already been a memorable Test for Bangladesh. Hasan Mahmud had earlier ripped through Australia's batting line-up with 6/55, helping dismiss a star-studded home side for 198 and putting the visitors in an excellent position to take control of the Test.

TANZID MAKES HISTORY

Tanzid's hundred has rewritten Bangladesh's record books in Tests played on Australian soil. Hannan Sarkar's 76 at Cairns in 2003 had remained the highest individual score by a Bangladesh batter in Australia for more than two decades.

Cristiano Ronaldo returns to Al Nassr with bold new golden look

New Delhi. (Agency)

Cristiano Ronaldo, the 41-year-old Portugal captain and Al Nassr forward, has returned to club duties sporting a dramatic new look. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner has swapped his familiar dark brown hair for a striking copper-yellow shade as he begins preparations for the new Saudi Pro League season. Ronaldo returned to Riyadh after spending time away following Portugal's World Cup exit against Spain on July 6. He also recently married longtime partner Georgina Rodriguez in a civil ceremony in Cascais, Portugal, adding another major milestone to his summer. Ronaldo shared a picture on his Instagram story on Thursday, posing in a black T-shirt with a necklace, watch and Gucci wash bag. The biggest change, however, was on his head, with the forward sporting a gelled crop of copper-yellow hair. The new colour stood out against his dark eyebrows and offered a very different look for the

veteran forward as he prepares for another season in Saudi Arabia.

RONALDO RETURNS TO AL NASSR

Ronaldo was back on the training pitch



with Al Nassr on Thursday as the club prepares for the opening rounds of the 2026-27 Saudi Pro League campaign. New Al Nassr manager Ange Postecoglou has described Ronaldo as someone who is "always ready", but it remains unclear whether the forward will feature in the opening match. Al Nassr begin their league campaign at home against Al Fateh on August 15

before travelling to face Al Riyadh on August 21. According to The Al Nassr Tribune, Ronaldo is expected to make his competitive debut for the new season against Al Riyadh, although the coaching staff are yet to make a final decision.

A NEW SEASON, BIG TARGETS

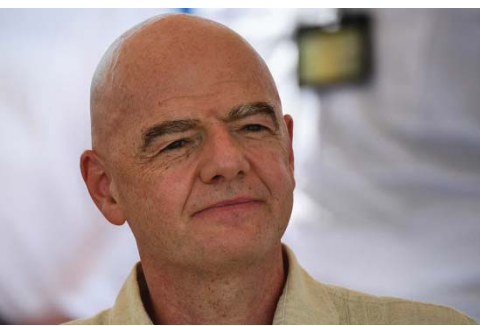
The upcoming campaign will mark Ronaldo's 25th season in club football, with the Portuguese continuing to chase one of the biggest milestones of his career:

reaching 1,000 goals. Despite the uncertainty over when he will first play, Ronaldo has continued to work on his fitness through his established training, nutrition and recovery routine. His return will also provide a boost to an Al Nassr side that has strengthened during the transfer window and is looking to mount a serious challenge for major honours.

FIFA chief Infantino receives support from 6 Arab federations amid revolt over World Cup plan

New Delhi. (Agency)

The heads of six Arab soccer federations expressed their "full support" and "confidence" in Gianni Infantino on Thursday as the embattled FIFA president fights to keep his job after his failed World Cup private investment plan. The backing came from 200 World Cup co-host Morocco, Qatar, Egypt, Mauritania, Lebanon and Sudan, with four of the signatories being FIFA council members. "We, the undersigned leaders of our respective football associations, express our full support for Mr. Gianni Infantino, President of



FIFA, and reaffirm our confidence in his leadership and continued commitment to the development of football worldwide," the statement read.

"We deeply appreciate Mr. Infantino's sustained efforts to advance football globally, expand opportunities across

all regions and strengthen the game's role in bringing people and communities together." The statement said the signatories "look forward to continuing our close cooperation with him towards a stronger and more prosperous future for world football, expanding opportunities and further enhancing Arab football's contribution to the global game." Infantino is facing a revolt after his plan to sell stakes in the World Cup to private equity investors. He withdrew the \$20 billion proposal after a furious backlash by global soccer officials, including European body UEFA, which has warned of a boycott of all FIFA games and events.

Arrive as champions: How India prepared for Hockey World Cup under Paddy Upton

New Delhi. (Agency)

What sets a champion from the rest of the field? We may say that it is his/her superior skills to overcome any situation that they find themselves in or just to breeze past their opponents with ease. But, at times, it is also about having that mental strength to overcome anything that is thrown at them. This is where Paddy Upton comes into play for the Indian men's hockey team. The South African mental conditioning coach is no stranger when it comes to guiding champion sides. He was a vital part of the Indian cricket team's backroom staff when they won the 2011 World Cup at home. When Craig Fulton came in as the coach of the men's team, he quickly roped in Upton as a part of his system. His aim was simple. To improve the team's

mental toughness.

And that has been evident since Upton collaborated with the Indian team. Since the South African has been a part of things, India won the bronze medal at the Paris Olympics and the 2025 Asia Cup. These were tournaments where India was tested. In Paris, India played with 10 men for more than 40 minutes during the quarterfinal against Great Britain. They were able to push the game into the shoot-out and secure a famous win. During the Asia Cup, India had tough outings against China and Korea early on, but the second time they faced them, the players seemed to be at the peak of their powers. Maybe that's why Hockey India sent the team to the Swiss Alps for a three-day camp, reviving a formula they used in

2024 to get the Olympic bronze. The three-day camp took place at mental conditioning expert Upton's training



facility, located at adventurer Mike Horn's base in the Swiss Alps.

And the quarterfinal result was the perfect example of Upton and the lesson

he taught this side to achieve success.

"In the quarterfinal against Britain, India won the match from a situation no other team could have won, because we had prepared for situations like that in the Swiss camp," said Upton to PTI. The camp at his facility, according to Upton, wasn't created to address weakness. Rather, it is a team-building exercise and to push the limits of the players to go beyond their fears.

"It wasn't drive by addressing weaknesses. It was about creating even more team-building and perspective about challenges and fears. Most of the teams would prepare for the World Cup on a hockey pitch, but we had gone for a much more challenging situation physically and mentally," Upton said.



Akansha Ranjan

Reveals What Went Wrong Before Her Wedding: 'A Storm Sweeping The City...'

Actress Akansha Ranjan and filmmaker Sharan Sharma married on July 11, 2026, in Mumbai. They chose this date for their wedding as it marked the exact fourth anniversary of when they first started dating. While the much-in-love couple's intimate wedding looked every bit dreamy, the actress has now revealed that the celebrations came together amid quite a bit of last-minute chaos.

Akansha recently shared a glimpse of the unexpected hurdles she faced ahead of her wedding day. A last-minute change of venue, no teams in place and a storm hitting the city left the celebrations hanging in the balance, but everything eventually came together beautifully.

Even though the plans kept changing, Akansha said the day ended up being "absolutely perfect". She credited the people around her for stepping in at the right time and making sure everything fell into place. From turning her home into a lovely venue to sorting out the food, catering and other details, she thanked everyone who helped make the intimate celebration special.

Akansha shared, "A last-minute venue change, no teams in place, a storm sweeping the city... and yet, this day turned out to be absolutely perfect. Only because I had the most incredible people by my side." Akansha and Sharan tied the knot on July 11 in an intimate ceremony held at their apartment building in Mumbai. The couple, who had reportedly been dating for four years, chose to skip traditional wedding rituals and instead opted for a registered marriage at home. News18 Showsha had earlier exclusively reported that the couple would not be having traditional pheras or elaborate religious ceremonies. A source had shared that Akansha and Sharan wanted the focus to remain on their union and the presence of loved ones, rather than conventional wedding customs.

On the professional front, Akansha Ranjan has been receiving praise for her work in Gram Chikitsalaya Season 2 and Ikka. The actress is now set to appear in an upcoming South project, although details about the film are yet to be revealed.



Khushi Kapoor Gets Delhi HC Protection, Court Orders Takedown Of Allegedly Pornographic Content



The Delhi High Court has ordered social media platforms to remove allegedly obscene and pornographic content concerning actor Khushi Kapoor. The court has also directed the takedown of material linked to the unauthorised sale of merchandise using her name and personality attributes.

As per Free Press Journal, Justice Jyoti Singh passed the directions on Wednesday while hearing Khushi's suit seeking protection of her personality and publicity rights. The court also indicated that it would issue a John Doe order in her favour as part of other plea for interim protection.

Khushi Kapoor Seeks Protection Of Her Personality Rights

A John Doe order allows a court to protect a person against unidentified individuals who may be involved in the unauthorised use or exploitation of their identity. In Khushi's case, the protection relates to the alleged misuse of her identity through online content and merchandise.

Khushi was represented by India Law, through partners Asav Rajan and Abha Shah, during the proceedings. The court's directions cover allegedly obscene and pornographic material shared on social media as well as merchandise that allegedly uses Khushi's personality attributes without authorisation.

Janhvi Kapoor Also Gets Similar Court Protection

The order comes just a day after the Delhi High Court passed similar directions concerning Khushi's sister, actor Janhvi Kapoor. A coordinate bench had ordered the removal of allegedly objectionable content involving Janhvi and directed action against the unauthorised exploitation of her personality rights. The developments involving the two sisters have come within a wider series of cases concerning the misuse of celebrity identities online.

Why Celebrity Personality Rights Are Becoming A Legal Issue

The Delhi High Court has dealt with an increasing number of cases involving the unauthorised use of celebrities' names, photographs, voices, likenesses and other recognisable personality.

Mallika Sherawat Claims Tom Cruise Messages Her in DMs: 'He Has a Crush on Me'



Mallika Sherawat has once again grabbed everyone's attention with one of her big claims. In a recent episode of The Traitors 2, she opened up about her equation with Hollywood superstar Tom Cruise. Mallika claimed that Tom personally messages her on social media and even suggested that the Mission: Impossible star has a crush on her.

It all started after co-contestant Aditya Kulshrestha asked Mallika, "Have you ever had a crush on anyone? No. Or everyone has had a crush on you?". To this, actress responded, "Everyone has had a crush on me. Tom Cruise has had a crush on me recently. I'm not lying. If I had a phone, I would've shown you his videos". Asked what type of videos is he sending her, Mallika added, "No, when we were partying together and all. He's fabulous".

However, it should be noted that remain the actress's claims and there is no independent confirmation from Tom Cruise or his representatives regarding the nature of their alleged conversations.

About The Traitors 2

The Traitors Season 2 will begin streaming on August 13, 2026, exclusively on Prime Video. The new season follows the success of the show's debut edition, with Karan Johar returning as the host.

The contestant line-up includes Mallika Sherawat, Munawar Faruqui, Shweta Tiwari, Ranveer Brar, Rhea Chakraborty, Krystle D'Souza, Dalip Tahir, Parul Gulati, Soundous Moufakir, Shahneel Gill, Harman Singha, Ikka, Sahil Salathia and Abhishek Malhan. The contestants come from diverse backgrounds spanning films, television, music, food, reality shows and social media.

The remaining contestants are Aditya Kulshrestha (Kullu), Tanya Puri, Karan Singh, Rida Tharana, Ansh Chopra and Prish. They bring experience in comedy, content creation, private investigation, mentalism and fashion and beauty content to the strategy-based competition.



Rhea Chakraborty

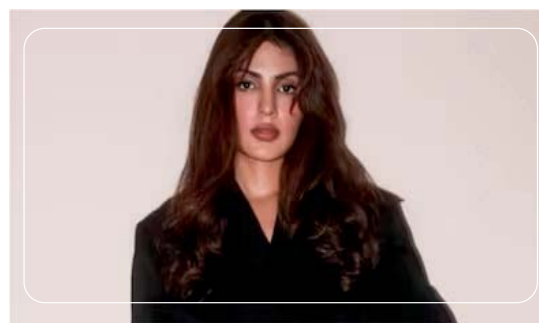
Says 'People Inside Jail Are Better', Teases Book On Her Prison Days: 'Chudail Ka Badla'

More than five years after Sushant Singh Rajput's death, the impact of the case continues to affect Rhea Chakraborty despite getting a clean chit from the CBI. The actress and entrepreneur was at the centre of intense public scrutiny following Rajput's death in June 2020 and spent nearly a month in Mumbai's Byculla Jail after being arrested by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) in a separate drug-related case. She was arrested by the NCB in September 2020 and was granted bail by the Bombay High Court in October that year. While the CBI investigation has since moved towards closure, the experience of the case and the intense media and public scrutiny surrounding it have continued to feature in Rhea's conversations about her life and healing. In a recent conversation, she spoke about still dealing with the emotional impact of what happened.

While speaking to Tanmay Bhat on his YouTube channel, Rhea Chakraborty spoke about the people she met inside the jail. She said, "I feel people inside jail are better than people outside jail. Because most people in the undertrial prison, at least for women, are innocent. And there's no hierarchy. Everyone's equal, everyone's a number, there's no name."

Rhea also recalled how undertrials would often spend their time in prison, saying they

would sing, dance and even make thecha, a spicy Maharashtrian preparation. When she was asked about the food in jail, Rhea replied, "Guys, I am writing this book, padh lena." When asked about the name of the book, she quipped, "The book is called Chudail ka badla." The actress also joked about the food in jail and said, "You get sushi, champagne, vada pao, and chaat."



Following the CBI's closure report in the Sushant Singh Rajput case, Rhea also got her passport back. Speaking about the same, she shared, "I went on a holiday with my parents. It felt strange to not be stopped at immigration, and being told, 'Okay ma'am, you can go.' I was like, 'What do you mean?'"

Rhea also recalled how the atmosphere would change when she walked into a room after her time in jail, saying people from the film industry would suddenly become noticeably serious in her presence.

NEWS BOX

Israeli settlers' siege of Palestinian homes draws a sharp US rebuke

QUSRA.(Agency)

For five nights, Israeli settlers surrounded three Palestinian homes on the outskirts of a town in the occupied West Bank, preventing the families from leaving safely as their food and water supplies dwindled.Qusai Abu Rida was holed up inside with his teenage son when settlers cut the water and electricity, leaving them to drink well water as dozens of Israeli settlers erected tents outside. His Palestinian American brother in Ohio, who owns the house, watched the siege unfold on security cameras and called for updates.The standoff in the northern West Bank town of Qusra is the latest in a wave of settler violence convulsing the territory, which Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war and which would make up the main part of a future Palestinian state.On Thursday, U.S. Ambassador Mike Huckabee referred to the settlers as "terrorists" — a word American officials usually reserve for Palestinian militants. It was an unusually sharp rebuke from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, who has given unprecedented support to Israeli settlement over the years.

Mounting criticism of Israel from the United States could pose a challenge for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is trying to maintain good relations with his country's closest ally as he mobilizes ultranationalist voters ahead of a tough battle for reelection in October.

Settlers have remained in the area despite the army interveningOn Sunday, dozens of settlers arrived at the homes in Qusra, blocking doors and preventing occupants from leaving, according to the families.

Jared Kushner to visit Israel and Egypt next week with Board of Peace officials to talk Gaza

WASHINGTON.(Agency)

President Donald Trump's son-in-law and negotiator Jared Kushner will travel to the Middle East next week to try to advance plans for an end to the conflict in Gaza after a deal recently announced by the Trump administration ran into Israeli opposition.An official with the Board of Peace, the body Trump established to oversee the fragile ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, said Kushner, board high representative Nickolay Mladenov, and executive board member and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair would arrive in Israel on Sunday.The group will then travel toCairo, where meetings of a Palestinian technocratic group set to assume control of Gaza under a U.S.-brokered ceasefire deal have been taking place for the past several months, the official said. The trip was reported earlier by Axios.The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because planning for details of the trip has not yet been finalized, said the meetings would demonstrate the determination of Trump and the Board of Peace to "see peace, prosperity and sustainable security emerge" in a demilitarized Gaza where Hamas has ceded

North Korea slams US-South Korea military drills and threatens strong response

SEOUL.(Agency)

North Korea on Friday threatened unspecified stern steps against the United States and South Korea ahead of their upcoming military drills, which Pyongyang called a war rehearsal that claimed would be more provocative than last year.The warning is typical of the harsh rhetoric that North Korea often deploys ahead of major US -South Korean military exercises and suggests the country could conduct more weapons tests in coming days. North Korea has often used major US-South Korean military training as a pretext to ramp up its testing activities to expand its weapons arsenals and promote public support for leader Kim Jong Un.The US and South Korean militaries are to start their major summertime Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises Monday and have described their scope as similar to past years. The allies have said the exercises are meant to strengthen their readiness against North Korean threats and reiterated that they are defensive in nature.In a statement carried by state media Friday, North Korea's Foreign Ministry called the US -South Korean training "a rehearsal for an aggressive war" that is triggering a different level of instability in the region.

"It is our consistent principle of ensuring security to respond to a new level of a threat with a new level of a deterrent," the statement said. North Korea "will more clearly express its stance on the enemies to cope with any threats and challenges through the responsible and decisive exercise of the right to legitimate self-defense.

Israeli settlers' siege of Palestinian homes draws a sharp US rebuke

QUSRA.(Agency)

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Ambassador Mike Huckabee referred to the settlers as "terrorists" — a word American officials usually reserve for Palestinian militants. It was an unusually sharp rebuke from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, who has given unprecedented support to Israeli settlement over the years.Mounting criticism of Israel from the United States could pose a challenge for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is trying to maintain good relations with his country's closest ally as he mobilizes ultranationalist voters ahead of a tough battle for reelection in October.

Settlers have remained in the area despite the army intervening On Sunday, dozens of settlers arrived at the homes in Qusra, blocking doors and preventing occupants from leaving, according to the families.Israeli troops have intervened multiple times, but the

settlers keep returning, said Loui Ridi, the homeowner in Ohio who spells the family name differently. Rights groups have long accused Israeli forces of turning a blind eye to settler violence or of intervening to protect the settlers.

"It's a cycle," Ridi said. "They need to be prevented from the entire area, not just removed and moved 100 feet away so when the (Israeli military) leaves, they come back."On Tuesday, Israel's military condemned the siege as "illegal, reprehensible, and unacceptable," and declared Qusra a closed military zone. The next day, dozens of settlers returned, tried to block the road with rocks and clashed with Israeli soldiers, according to video shot by village residents.

On Thursday, the military said troops dismantled "wo illegal outposts" in Qusra and a nearby village, and detained one Israeli. It said more

soldiers were sent to "carry out defensive missions and patrols."Qusra Mayor Abdel Azim Wadi said that Israeli forces evacuated more than a dozen homes to take up positions in the village. The settlers, though removed from their outposts, remain in other parts of the village, he added.

Abu Rida said soldiers gave the occupants of all the homes 30 minutes to evacuate and move into one of the besieged houses. The military said the soldiers have been told to allow families to remain in their homes and not to operate in them, but families have not yet returned, Abu Rida said.

It's still nt clear when families in the besieged area will be able to get basic supplies and what would happen to their homes. Israel's military said the families had basic supplies like food and water when it checked in on them on Wednesday.

Israeli settlers' siege of Palestinian homes draws a sharp US rebuke

LAS VEGAS.(Agency)

For five nights, Israeli settlers surrounded three Palestinian homes on the outskirts of a town in the occupied West Bank, preventing the families from leaving safely as their food and water supplies dwindled.Qusai Abu Rida was holed up inside with his teenage son when settlers cut the water and electricity, leaving them to drink well water as dozens of Israeli settlers erected tents outside. His Palestinian American brother in Ohio, who owns the house, watched the siege unfold on security cameras and called for updates.The standoff in the northern West Bank town of Qusra is the latest in a wave of settler violence convulsing the territory, which Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war and which would make up the main part of a future Palestinian state.On Thursday, U.S. Ambassador Mike Huckabee referred to the settlers as "terrorists" — a word American officials usually reserve for Palestinian militants. It was an unusually sharp rebuke from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, who has given unprecedented support to Israeli settlement over the years.Mounting criticism of Israel from the United States could pose a challenge for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is trying to maintain good relations with his country's closest ally as he mobilizes ultranationalist voters ahead of a tough battle for reelection in October.Settlers have remained in the area despite the army interveningOn Sunday, dozens of settlers arrived at the homes in Qusra, blocking doors and preventing occupants from leaving, according to the families.Israeli troops have intervened multiple times, but the settlers keep returning, said Loui Ridi, the homeowner in Ohio who spells the family name differently. Rights groups have long accused Israeli forces of turning a blind eye to settler violence or of intervening to protect the settlers.

"It's a cycle," Ridi said. "They need to be prevented from the entire area, not just removed and moved 100 feet away so when the (Israeli military) leaves, they come back."On Tuesday, Israel's military condemned the siege as "illegal, reprehensible, and unacceptable," and declared Qusra a closed military zone. The next day, dozens of settlers returned, tried to block the road with rocks and clashed with Israeli soldiers, according to video shot by village residents.

World War II Memorial in DC vandalized with bubbles, graffiti

WASHINGTON.(Agency)

The World War II Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., was vandalized Thursday, with bubbles filling a fountain and "Clean hands dirty \$" written in red paint.The Interior Department released a statement late Thursday saying: "Our U.S. Park Police are on the scene and the investigation is ongoing. The public should know we will find the person responsible for this disgusting act."The Friends of the National World War II Memorial, a nonprofit organization that helps

maintain the site, said: "There are many places in our country for expression, debate, and



disagreement. A national memorial honoring those who served and those who never

returned home should never be used as a canvas for vandalism."

The Veterans of Foreign Wars called the vandalism "an act of profound disrespect, a slap in the face to the veterans who served and sacrificed and to the families who carried that burden at home." The World War II Memorial is just east of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool on the Mall. After a botched repair job earlier this year left the pool with peeling blue sealant and green algae, President Donald Trump blamed the issues on vandalism without providing evidence.

Judge drops Nevada case against electors accused of forging certificate in 2020 election

LAS VEGAS.(Agency)

The yearslong case against six Nevada Republicans who were accused of submitting a bogus certificate that falsely declared Donald Trump the winner of the state's 2020 presidential election has been dismissed, a judge ruled Thursday.The dismissal marks the latest setback in swing states' efforts to prosecute fake electors who tried to keep Trump in the White House after he lost to Joe Biden in 2020.Three other fake elector cases in Arizona, Michigan and Georgia have been dismissed. Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes recently dismissed her office's criminal case but vowed to bring it back to a grand jury in hopes of securing another indictment. The dismissal was a legal maneuver aimed at getting around a deadline for starting new grand jury proceedings after Mayes lost an appeal earlier in June.

Nevada Attorney General Aaron

Ford, who is also running for governor as a Democrat, brought charges relating to forgery and "offering a false instrument for filing or record" against the six



Nevada Republicans, who pleaded not guilty.His office plans to appeal the ruling.The defendants included Michael McDonald, the chair of the Nevada Republican Party, and Jesse Law, the former chair of the Clark County Republican Party.In a Thursday statement, McDonald's defense attorney Richard Wright called the attorney general's plans to appeal "hasty" and "premature" and said continuing the case was

politically motivated.After the 2020 election, the six Republican electors gathered outside of the Nevada Legislature to sign a certificate giving the state's six electoral votes to Trump, despite Biden winning the state by more than 30,000 votes. The ceremony was broadcast online, and the video footage was used as evidence in the case.The case hasrevolved around the defendants' intent behind s u b m i t t i n g the certificate.Prosecutors argue the defendants intended for their documents to be mistaken for actual electoral votes that then-Vice President Mike Pence would count on Jan. 6, 2021.The defendants say submitting the certificate was an act of "political theater" designed to publicize their concerns about the election. They were preserving their rights to challenge the official election results and had no intent to deceive a government agency into accepting the GOP certificate as real, their attorneys argued.

US takes U-turn, says Tehran's nuclear programme not priority in Iran war as focus shifts to lowering oil prices

WASHINGTON.(Agency)

The top US priority now in the Iran war is no longer its nuclear program but to bring gasoline prices down for American consumers, the vice president said Thursday, with the treasury secretary adding that new economic punishment to wear down Tehran is imminent.The comments by Vice President JD Vance and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent illustrate the powerful leverage Tehran has gained by shutting down the Strait of Hormuz. Preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, consistently touted by President Donald Trump as his main reason for the war, now takes a back seat to getting oil flowing again freely through the strait, Vance said on Fox News.Vance's comments underscored

the stark reality that the war now centers on control of the Strait of Hormuz, the critical fuel supply conduit that was open before Trump started the war along with Israel in late February.Iran has all but shut it down in retaliation and thus found a crucial bargaining chip against Trump as he struggles to find a way out of the war and shies away from resuming large-scale attacks.The 80-year-old president's approval rating is plummeting, the war is unpopular among Americans and midterm elections are approaching in November.Republicans fear Trump and the war, which has caused gasoline prices to soar, will cost them their control of Congress."I know that oil is down today and it's way down from the highs in the early days of the conflict," Vance said on Fox News. "That's goal

number one -- keep oil and gas cheap for Americans all over our



country." "And then obviously goal number two is ensure that Iran never gets a nuclear weapon," he added.Low Keying itThe vice president has been among the members of the administration most skeptical of the offensive launched against Iran in late February.These remarks, however, appear to confirm the more cautious

approach now favored by the US president, which involves maintaining strong economic pressure on Iran by blockading its ports and preventing it from selling oil.Heralding more economic punishment, Bessent threatened to subject Iran to economic isolation "like the world has never seen before." He said new measures are expected next week.Only days ago Trump had said an agreement to reopen the strait was imminent. Now his administration seems to be digging in, with diplomacy on hold as he hopes economic suffering will cause Iran to yield."We are low-keying it," Trump said Sunday. "We are only semi-negotiating with them. We are just watching Iran with its huge inflation and the fact they have no money," Trump told the news outlet Axios.