

# THE ASIAN AGE

LONDON FRIDAY 12 JULY 2024



## NATION | 3

### LS Speaker Birla calls for reforms in UNSC, WTO in Brics parliamentary meet

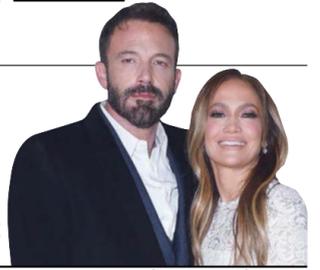


## WORLD | 6

### Joe Biden's New York Support crumbles as election anxiety mounts

## DELHI AGE | 11

### Jennifer Lopez wants half of Ben Affleck's \$150M fortune in revenge move, says report



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## WINDOWS



Actress Priyanka Chopra and husband Nick Jonas arrive for Anant Ambani-Radhika Merchant's wedding in Mumbai on Thursday. — PTI

## Rajnath admitted in AIIMS due to severe back pain

New Delhi: Defence minister Rajnath Singh has been admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS). He was rushed to the hospital today early morning and currently he is stable. Sources in AIIMS told this newspaper that Mr Singh was admitted to the neuro-surgery department of the hospital on Thursday early morning after he complained of severe back pain. Mr Singh is currently stable, added the source. The neuro department is yet to give further updates regarding the Union minister's health.

## HC lists Kejriwal's plea against ED on Sept. 9

New Delhi: The Delhi high court on Thursday listed for hearing on September 9 chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's petition challenging the summonses issued to him by the ED in connection with its probe into an excise policy-linked money laundering case. Full report on Page 2

## Air India unveils new baggage tracking tool

New Delhi: In a bid to reduce passengers' anxiety over checked-in baggage, Air India has launched a new baggage tracking feature on its mobile app and website. Passengers can track their checked-in bags by scanning the barcode on their baggage receipts. Full report on Page 2

## COUNTERPOINT



We need some drinking water, sir!

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## Jaishankar for infusing new energies into Bimstec group

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 11

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday called on the seven-nation Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec) grouping to infuse new energies, resources and a fresh commitment to bolster cooperation among the Bay of Bengal countries.

Mr Jaishankar made the appeal while hosting his counterparts from the Bimstec member states at a two-day retreat in the national capital.

The Bimstec, brings together seven countries of South and Southeast Asia for multifaceted cooperation. Besides India, the Bimstec comprises Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan.

In his opening remarks, Mr Jaishankar said Bimstec should harbour higher aspirations. "For India, Bimstec represents the intersection of its 'Neighbourhood First' outlook, the 'Act East Policy' and the 'Sagar vision,'" Mr Jaishankar said on the first day of the retreat.

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People walk through a flooded area after a breach in Munak canal that supplies water from Haryana to Delhi, led to knee-deep waterlogging in parts of Bawana in New Delhi on Thursday. Report on Page 2

## SC adjourns hearing of pleas linked to Neet test till July 18

'Received CBI report' 'No mass malpractice': Centre

RAKESH K. SINGH NEW DELHI, JULY 11

Amid the festering row over the conduct of the medical entrance exams, the Supreme Court on Thursday adjourned till July 18 the hearing of a clutch of petitions seeking cancellation, re-test and probe into the alleged malpractices of Neet-UG 2024 as the responses of the Centre and the National Testing Agency (NTA) were yet to be received by some parties.

## CBI arrests Neet-UG kingpin from Patna

New Delhi: The CBI on Thursday arrested one of the alleged kingpins in the Neet-UG paper leak case, officials said. Rocky alias Rakesh Ranjan was nabbed by the agency from outskirts of Patna. PAGE 3

filed on Wednesday by the Centre and the NTA, which conducts the all-India medical test, have not been received by counsel for some of the

petitioners. "The further hearing shall be on Thursday (July 18)," a bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said.

Solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, however, said they have served their affidavit to the counsel for the parties.

During the brief hearing, counsel for the petitioners sought listing of the pleas on July 15, but Mr Mehta said he will be unavailable that day.

The bench said it has Turn to Page 4

## Mamata to meet Uddhav, Pawar in Mumbai today

To attend Anant Ambani's wedding

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, JULY 12

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee flew to Mumbai on Thursday to meet the INDIA bloc leaders — Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav — on Friday. She will also attend the wedding of industrialist Mukesh Ambani's son Anant Ambani.

Before her departure to Mumbai, the CM at the Kolkata airport said, "I'm going to Mumbai to attend the marriage of the son of Mukesh Ji... He has attended the Bengal Global Business Summit multiple times on our invitation... I might not have gone, but since they have repeatedly asked me to come, including Mukesh Ji, his son, and Neeta Ji, I decided to attend the event."

Talking about her political engagements in Mumbai, the TMC chief



Mamata Banerjee

TALKING ABOUT her political engagements in Mumbai, the TMC chief said, "I also have an appointment with Mr Thackeray on Friday to discuss politics. It has been a long time; we haven't met since the Lok Sabha elections."

Ms Banerjee added: "Mr Thackeray on Friday to discuss politics. It has been a long time; we haven't met since the Lok Sabha elections. I will meet Sharad Ji at his residence. One meeting is at 4 pm, while the other is at 5 pm."

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## Rahul: Will raise Manipur 'with full force'

Says Opp. plans to corner govt in Parliament 'PM should visit, listen to people'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 11

The INDIA bloc is once again aiming to corner Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the upcoming Parliament session on the issue of Manipur. Days after his visit to the violence-hit state, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi made the Opposition's stance clear on Thursday. He also reiterated that the Prime Minister should personally visit Manipur and appeal for peace.

In a post on X in Hindi,

the former Congress president shared a video of his interactions with the people of Manipur during his day-long visit to the violence-hit state on Monday.

"I have visited Manipur three times since violence broke out there, but unfortunately there is no improvement in the situation — even today the state is divided into two parts. Houses are burning, innocent lives are in danger and thousands of families are forced to live in relief camps," Mr Gandhi posted.

"The Prime Minister



Rahul Gandhi

should personally visit Manipur, listen to the problems of the people of the state and appeal for peace, Mr Gandhi said.

"The Congress party and

INDIA will raise the need for peace in Manipur with full force in Parliament to put pressure on the government to end this tragedy," the Congress leader said.

In the video Mr Gandhi shared, he is telling the people that the Congress and its MPs had raised the problems the people of Manipur were facing in the Parliament session that has just ended and promised to raise the issues again in the upcoming session.

"We can put pressure (on the government) and we

will put pressure on them," he says to the people.

"I can help you. I can raise the issue and put pressure, but I can't reassure you when you will be able to go back to your homes because the government has the answer to this. You will see in the next session I will raise your voice," Mr Gandhi tells the people at a relief camp in Manipur.

"Thousands of families have been harmed, properties have been destroyed, family members have been killed and Turn to Page 4

## BMW crash accused Mihir 'confesses'

Driver sent to 14-day custody Bar confirms Mihir drank several pegs

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, JULY 11

A probe has found that Mihir Shah, the main accused in the Mumbai hit-and-run case and son of the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena's politician Rajesh Shah, was in an inebriated state when he allegedly rammed his BMW car into a two-wheeler, killing a woman. According to the police,

Mr Shah and his two friends drank several large pegs of whisky at a bar in Juhu before the accident. He reportedly bought more liquor after leaving the bar and consumed it. He also coerced his driver and co-accused Rajrishi Bidawat to allow him to drive.

In another development in the case on Thursday, the 30-year-old driver was sent to judicial custody

at the end of his police remand. Mr Shah and Mr Bidawat were interrogated by the police in connection with the case. Both accused are currently in the custody of Mumbai police. Mr Shah (24) has reportedly confessed that he was driving the car at the time of the accident. He reportedly told the police that his career was

for 14 days. Mr Bidawat was produced before chief metropolitan magistrate Sewree court S.P. Bhosale

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## No-trust vote in Nepal today; Prachanda govt likely to fall

Kathmandu, July 11: Ahead of a floor test for Nepal's embattled Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" on Friday, the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML have issued whips requiring their lawmakers to vote against the confidence motion tabled by the former guerrilla leader. K.P. Sharma Oli-led CPN-UML, the largest party in the ruling coalition, withdrew support from the Prachanda-led government last week after inking a power-sharing

deal with the largest party in the House — Nepali Congress — to replace the former Maoist leader, who is expected to lose the confidence vote. The Nepali Congress, the largest party in the 275-member House of Representatives, has 89

seats at present, while CPN-UML has 78 seats. Their combined strength of 167 is much more than the 138 seats required for a majority in the Lower House. Mr Prachanda's Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) has 32 seats. Mr Prachanda, who requires 138 votes for the government to win the vote of confidence in the House, is likely to secure around 63 votes, and the government is almost sure to lose the floor test on Friday. — PTI

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Container ship San Fernando reaches Vizhinjam International Seaport Limited as seen from Aazhimala Shiva Temple in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday. The container ship from China berthed at Kerala's Vizhinjam Seaport and marks the first arrival of such a vessel at India's largest transshipment port. Report on Page 4

## INLD & BSP to jointly contest Haryana polls; Abhay CM face

SHASHI BHUSHAN and BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, JULY 11

In an attempt to woo dalit and Jat voters, the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) and Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) have joined hands to contest the upcoming Assembly elections in Haryana.

The INLD will field its candidates in 53 seats while the BSP will contest in the remaining 37 constituencies in the 90-member Assembly. Addressing a joint press conference with the BSP, INLD leader Abhay Chautala asserted that the alliance is not based on any selfish interests, but has been formed keeping in mind people's feelings. Alliance leaders have also decided to project Abhay Chautala as its chief ministerial face.

Hinting to rope in the AAP, Mr Chautala said, "This bloc will like to include more outfits opposed to the Congress and the BJP to join hands with the alliance and build a strong front." More on Page 3

## IN BRIEF

## Man jumps to death before Metro train

**New Delhi:** A 68-year-old tuberculosis patient allegedly committed suicide on Thursday by jumping before a train at the Kashmere Gate Metro station on the Red Line, officials said. A senior police officer said the man has been identified as Sunil Gupta, a resident of Chawari Bazar. He said that according to the victim's brother, Gupta was suffering from tuberculosis for the past few years and had already spent more than ₹6 lakh on his treatment. A DMRC official said the incident occurred around 11:16 am when the passenger allegedly jumped before the approaching train at the Kashmere Gate Metro station when the train was going towards Shaheed Sthal. The passenger was retrieved from tracks and was sent to the nearest hospital around 12:04 pm after police clearance, he said. The Red Line connects Rithala in Delhi to Shaheed Sthal in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. The DMRC official said train services were regulated during this period. Services were run in one short loop from Rithala to Tis Hazari, and in another short loop from Shaheed Sthal to Shastri Park.

## L-G directs staff to carry out desilting

**New Delhi:** Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena on Thursday chaired a meeting of the DDMA and directed agencies to urgently carry out the work of desilting of drains and removal of encroachment along the drains, Raj Niwas officials said. Mr Saxena directed the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), which is coordinating with various construction agencies for the removal of debris and construction material from the Yamuna floodplains, to ensure that there is no obstruction in the flow of the Yamuna due to the construction of bridges and other activities in the floodplains. The L-G also directed that permanent and temporary pumps should be installed at the vulnerable spots and monitored round the clock from the control room. He said silt deposit in all 22 major drains should be assessed on urgent basis and all road culverts be cleaned urgently.

## Docs restore man's face after accident

**New Delhi:** A team of doctors has restored the disfigured face of a young patient who had undergone severe facial trauma leading to massive bleeding and hypovolemic shock during a road accident. The patient was driving on the wrong side without wearing the helmet. The patient was admitted to the Asian Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS) in Faridabad with multiple facial fractures and massive bleeding. Dr Anshumali Misra, associate director, and Dr Karan Goyal, executed the facial reconstruction while Dr L.M. Parashar performed a tracheostomy procedure.

## START PROBE AT ONCE FOR MISSING KIDS: HC TO COPS

**New Delhi:** The Delhi high court has directed the Delhi police to ensure that inquiry starts immediately after a case of a missing child is reported and there is no waiting period of 24 hours. The high court said the reason behind waiting for 24 hours after children go missing appeared to be a presumption or speculation that they usually go with friends or relatives and return to their homes. However, the 24-hour delay may result in the child being taken outside the jurisdiction of the court or some untoward incident taking place, it said. The ministry of women and child development has also formulated an SOP, titled 'standard operating procedure for cases of missing children', which states that upon receiving a complaint of a missing child, an FIR shall be registered as trafficking or abduction, it said. "The SOP makes it adequately clear that action has to be taken immediately, promptly, forthwith and at once. There is no scope for any speculation or conjecture that the child may return home in 24 hours and hence the police can wait," the bench said. The high court asked the commissioner of Delhi police to look into the matter.



People make their way through a flooded area after a breach in Munak canal that supplies water from Haryana to Delhi, led to knee-deep waterlogging in parts of JJ colony in Bawana in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

■ Water supply to be hit ■ Repair work on: Govt

## Munak canal breaks, Bawana submerged

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, JULY 11

Almost a year after the Yamuna River flooded parts of the national capital, a breach in the Munak canal that supplies water from Haryana to Delhi inundated several parts of North Delhi's Bawana area, causing significant inconvenience and concern for the locals who were stranded in their houses due to knee-deep water.

The water from the barrage of Munak canal entered the J, K, and L blocks of the colony in Northwest Delhi in the early hours of Thursday.

Multiple videos of the situation have surfaced on social media, showing people wading through waist-deep water lugging cylinders and holding onto one another for support.

"We have informed all the concerned departments, including the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), flood control department, public welfare department, and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), at midnight after the canal overflowed," the official said.

The flow of water from Sonapat has reduced and authorities have requested Haryana to close gates on the canal to control the flow, officials said.

The canal originates from the Yamuna River in Munak in Haryana's Karnal district.



Delhi water minister Atishi inspects a flooded area of JJ colony in Bawana in New Delhi. — PTI

Earlier in the day, minister Atishi in a post on X said, "Today early morning there has been a breach in one of the sub-branches of Munak canal. Delhi Jal Board is working in close coordination with the Haryana irrigation department, which maintains the Munak canal. Water has been diverted to the other sub-branch of the canal."

Ms Atishi, who visited affected areas, said the repair work is underway. BJP MP from the Northwest Delhi constituency Yogender Chandoliya also visited the area and said, "Once the water flow is stopped, concrete work will commence, which will surely take 24 hours and will also impact water availability for Delhi residents."

"The Munak canal that carries Yamuna water to Delhi is maintained by the Haryana government. The team of Haryana's irrigation department has been present at the breach site since last night and the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) team is also there to provide any support needed," Ms Atishi said.

"The repair work has started on a war footing to plug the breach. We are in regular touch with the Haryana department. After the breach was reported in the CLC embankment, water released into it from Kakroi was diverted to another sub-branch of the Munak canal," she said.

The minister said the water treatment plants in Dwarka, Haiderpur, Bawana, and Nangloi were affected due to the breach. The water production from the Bawana, Nangloi, and Haiderpur treatment plants will normalise by Thursday evening but the Dwarka plant, which completely depends on CLC for water supply, will remain affected till Friday evening, she added.

The water production from the Bawana, Nangloi, and Haiderpur treatment plants will normalise by Thursday evening but the Dwarka plant, which completely depends on CLC for water supply, will remain affected till Friday evening, she added.

## 2 HC judges to be elevated to Supreme Court

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 11

The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Thursday recommended to the Centre the names of high court judges N. Kotiswar Singh and R. Mahadevan for elevation to the apex court.

While Justice Singh is currently the Chief Justice of the high court for Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, Justice Mahadevan is the acting Chief Justice of the Madras high court.

"In view of the foregoing, the collegium resolves to recommend that the appointment of the above persons be made in the following order of seniority: (i) Justice Nongmeikapam Kotiswar Singh, and (ii) Justice R Mahadevan," said the collegium resolution.

The other members of the top court collegium are Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B.R. Gavai, Surya Kant and Hrishikesh Roy.

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 11

In a bid to reduce passengers' anxiety over checked-in baggage, Air India has launched a new baggage tracking feature on its mobile app and website.

Passengers can track their checked-in bags by scanning the barcode on their baggage receipts. Alternatively, this information becomes automatically available in the 'my

## Gym owner stabbed 21 times on face, dies

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 11

A 28-year-old gym owner was stabbed to death by a group of men in Northeast Delhi's Bhajanpura area, the police said on Thursday. The victim, Sumit Chaudhary alias Prem, also ran a tour and travel

business and was attacked outside his house in Gamri Extension late on Wednesday night, they said.

Deputy commissioner of police (Northeast) Joy Tirkey said Chaudhary was sitting outside his house when he got into a spat with

three-four men. The men attacked him with a knife and stabbed him multiple times in the face, neck, chest and abdomen. There were more than 21 stab wounds on his face, the police said.

Chaudhary was taken to JPC Hospital where doctors declared him

brought dead. He was convicted in a case of attempt to murder and was out on bail, the deputy commissioner of police said.

CCTV footage is being scanned to identify the culprits, he said. Chaudhary is survived by his wife and a three-year-old son.

## Teenager stabs friend to death

**Gurgaon, July 11:** A teenager stabbed his friend to death in Gurgaon as he was apparently upset over his girlfriend talking to him over the last few days, the police on Thursday said. The accused teenager first called his friend from his home on the pretext of drinking beer and then stabbed him with a knife and ran away, they said.

The police apprehended the accused within a few hours and recovered the knife used in the murder from his possession.

The incident took place in Sector 40 last night, the police said. — PTI

## After 13 yrs, govt hikes PUC certificate charges

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 11

The Delhi government has increased the pollution under control (PUC) certificate charges for petrol, CNG and diesel vehicles after a gap of about 13 years, transport minister Kailash Gahlot said on Thursday. The charges for petrol, CNG or LPG (including bio fuel) two and three wheelers has been increased from ₹60 to ₹80 and for

four wheelers from ₹80 to ₹110, he said in a statement.

Mr Gahlot said the charges for diesel vehicles has been revised from ₹100 to ₹140.

The new rates will be effective as soon as it is notified by the government, he said. The Delhi government is committed to maintaining the city's air quality and ensuring that all vehicles meet the required pollution standards, he said.

"Considering the request from the Delhi petrol dealers association and the fact that pollution checking rates have not been revised since 2011, the Delhi government has announced increasing the rates for pollution checking of vehicles in Delhi," he said.

"This revision is necessary to ensure that pollution checking stations can continue to operate efficiently," he added.

## SC slams states for not clearing dues of judicial officers, summons babus

RAKESH K SINGH  
NEW DELHI, JULY 11

Coming down heavily on state governments for non-compliance with its directions to clear the arrears of pay, pension, and other allowances of district judicial officers in terms of recommendations of the Second National Judicial Pay Commission (SNJPC), the Supreme Court on Thursday summoned the chief and finance secretaries of 16 defaulting states to appear before it with compliance affidavits on August 23.

Expressing strong displeasure over non-compliance with the SNJPC's recommendations, a bench of Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said, "We know how to extract compliance now. If we just say that the chief secretary will be



CJI D.Y. Chandrachud with Justice Antonio Benjamin from Brazil and others during the inauguration of a new filing counter at the Supreme Court in New Delhi. — PTI

present if the affidavit is not filed then it will not be filed... We are not sending them to jail but let them be here and then an affidavit will be submitted. Let them be personally present now."

The top court said though seven opportunities have been granted to the states, it appears that full compliance has not

been affected and several states are in default. "The chief and finance secretaries have to be personally present. Failing compliance, the court will be constrained to initiate contempt," it said.

The bench, however, made clear that it will not grant any more extensions. It passed the orders after taking note of the

submissions and perusing the note provided by lawyer K. Parmeswar who is assisting the court as amicus curiae (a friend of the court).

The bench heard submissions on compliance with the SNJPC by various states. It rejected the submissions of states like West Bengal, which sought one more year's time, and Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, and Kerala on the alleged delay in complying with the recommendations on payment of arrears and other benefits to the judicial officers.

The top court had said it was a matter of grave concern that though officers in other services have availed of a revision of their conditions of service as far back as January 1, 2016, similar issues pertaining to the judicial officers are still awaiting a final decision eight years thereafter.

## SC to hear Kejriwal plea against ED's arrest today

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 11

The Supreme Court is slated to deliver on Friday its verdict on Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case linked to the excise policy "scam".

According to the cause list of July 12 uploaded on the apex court's website, a bench headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna will pronounce the judgment.

On May 17, the bench, also comprising Justice Dipankar Datta, had reserved its verdict on Mr Kejriwal's plea.

On the other hand, the Delhi high court on listed for hearing on September 9 chief minister Mr Kejriwal's plea against the summons issued by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the excise policy case and concerning the validity and interpretation of certain provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

A bench headed by

## Liquor scam raises doubt on Kejriwal career: Vaishnav

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 11

Slamming Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, Union information and broadcasting minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Thursday, said that his role in the alleged liquor scam has raised a question mark on his entire political career.

Mr Vaishnav was commenting on the Enforcement Directorate's chargesheet in the alleged excise policy scam, according to which Mr Kejriwal 'directly used' part of the ₹100 crore 'kickbacks' for his stay in a luxury hotel in Goa.

"The liquor scam by Mr Kejriwal has raised a question mark on his political

career. The Congress too has joined them in the scam. The AAP have formed an alliance of the corrupt to loot Delhi," the Union minister said.

"They made tall promises about removing mountains of trash, cleaning up Delhi, but haven't fulfilled a single promise. They could not ensure water supply to Delhi, but had their complete focus on liquor," he said.

He claimed every Delhiite was fed up with the manner in which AAP and Mr Kejriwal spread 'anarchy' in the national capital with their 'dishonesty'.

Justice Prathiba M. Singh granted four more weeks to the AAP leader to file a rejoinder to the reply submitted by the ED. The senior counsel, appearing for Mr Kejriwal, sought more

time to file the rejoinder saying there are certain changes in the circumstances and they have not been given a proper legal interview, a plea for which is pending in the high court.

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## Over 100 agents held for sending travellers abroad illegally in '24

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 11

The Delhi police has nabbed more than 100 fraudulent travel agents for allegedly sending passengers abroad from across the country, using various ways of cheating till June this year, officials said on Thursday.

This was a more than 200 per cent increase as compared to the same period last year, the officials added.

These travel agents were nabbed from Punjab, Gujarat, Haryana, Maharashtra, and West Bengal. According to a statement by the IGI Airport, 51 fraudulent agents were nabbed during the same period in 2023.

"We have arrested a total of 108 such agents and the arrests have been made nationwide. The police has shifted its focus towards holding agents accountable rather than solely targeting the passengers, who may unknowingly fall victim to illegal immigration schemes, often seeking better opportunities abroad," DCP (IGI Airport)

Usha Rangani said. The officer further claimed that around 75 look-out circulars (LOCs) have been issued for agents who have fled abroad or remain untraceable, ensuring their apprehension on arrival or departure from India.

Revealing the modus operandi of such agents, the officer said agents provide counterfeit visas that closely resemble the genuine ones to passengers.

Despite their attempts to replicate the original visas, passengers are frequently apprehended at immigration check posts or airline counters, the officer said.

Even if they manage to bypass the Indian authorities, they are often intercepted at the destination country's immigration check.

"We have arrested a total of 19 such agents in the first six months this year who were involved in such fake visa scams. We have also arrested 11 agents who were involved in the donkey routes scam (helping people cross borders illegally)," said the DCP.

## SC terms rising cases of suicides a social issue

**New Delhi, July 11:** Terming the rising number of suicides a "social issue", the Supreme Court on Thursday granted four weeks to the Centre for filing a comprehensive reply to a PIL seeking effective implementation of a public health programme for prevention and reduction of suicides. A bench comprising Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and justices

J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the submissions of lawyer and petitioner Gaurav Kumar Bansal that effective steps are needed to deal with the rising number of suicide cases and asked the Centre to file a comprehensive affidavit.

"It is a social issue, let them (Centre and authorities) file a counter affidavit," the CJI said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

**Need fund hike: Sai to Finance Commission**

**Raipur:** Chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Thursday urged the 16th Finance Commission to consider increasing financial assistance for Chhattisgarh to support the expansion of the public welfare works in the state. Addressing the meeting of the 16th Finance Commission, held here, Mr Sai highlighted the additional expenditure burden on the state due to its difficult geographical conditions. The 16th finance commission headed by Dr Arvind Panagariya is currently on a visit to Chhattisgarh. "Rapid development work is underway in Maoist-affected areas. Under the 'Niyad Nelnar scheme', efforts are being made to ensure basic facilities like education, health, roads, electricity, and water in these regions", Mr Sai told the commission, according to a spokesman of the Chhattisgarh government.

**Smriti Irani vacates her official bungalow**

**New Delhi:** Former Union minister Smriti Irani, who lost the recently held Lok Sabha elections, has vacated her official bungalow at 28 Tughlak Crescent in Lutyens' Delhi, officials said on Thursday. Ms Irani vacated the bungalow earlier this week, weeks after she was defeated by Congress leader Kishori Lal Sharma from Amethi parliamentary seat with a margin of over 1.5 lakh votes. The former women and child development minister was dubbed a giant slayer in 2019 after she defeated Congress leader Rahul Gandhi from the seat. "She (Irani) vacated her official residence earlier this week," an official said, adding that former ministers and MPs need to vacate their government accommodation within a month after a new government is formed. — PTI

**Shivraj assures spl aid to Bihar farmers**

**New Delhi:** Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday said that the Centre will continue to provide all possible assistance to Bihar in the interest of farmers and the agriculture sector. With the aim of rapid progress of the agriculture sector in the country, Mr Chouhan has initiated state-wise discussions, under which he held a meeting with a high-level delegation including Bihar agriculture minister Mangal Pande. Mr Chouhan assured to review the allocation of funds under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna (RKVY) and National Food Security Mission to Bihar and called for new proposals in this regard. The Union minister also called for a review to ensure a smooth supply of seeds for the Kharif season and early planning for the supply of Rabi seeds.

**MAHA BRINGS BILL TO CURB 'URBAN NAXALS'**

**SONU SRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, JULY 11**

The Maharashtra government on Thursday tabled a bill to curb 'Urban Naxals'. The bill titled "Maharashtra Special Public Security Act, 2024" has a provision of two years to seven years imprisonment for unlawful activities and fine of ₹2-5 lakhs. The Opposition has opposed the bill stating that the bill aims to muzzle the voices of the institutions which expresses dissent against the government. Maharashtra Cabinet minister Uday Samant tabled the bill in the Lower House of the State Legislature. The bill aims to give more powers to the state government to declare an organization "unlawful" for being involved in "unlawful activity". It describes unlawful activities as indulging in or propagating acts of violence, vandalism or other acts generating fear and apprehension in the public. Indulging in or encouraging use of firearms, explosives or other devices, encouraging or preaching disobedience to established law and its institutions is also an unlawful activity. The government said, "The menace of naxalism is not only limited to remote areas of the naxal affected states but its presence is increasing in the urban areas also through the naxal frontal organisations."

**One of kingpins in Neet-UG paper leak case held by CBI**

**Special court sends him to 10-day custody**

**AMRESH SRIVASTAVA with agency inputs NEW DELHI/PATNA, JULY 11**

The CBI on Thursday arrested one of the alleged kingpins named Rakesh Ranjan in the Neet-UG paper leak case who was on the run ever since the crackdown on irregularities in the entrance exam began.

Rockey alias Rakesh Ranjan, who hails from Nalanda, is said to be a relative of mastermind Sanjeev Mukhia, who was nabbed by the agency from outskirts of Patna and he was remanded 10 days CBI custody after he was produced before the special court at Patna, the officials of the agency said.

The CBI had been trailing him since the case came to the agency. His run came to an end Thursday morning when he was arrested by the agency, they said. According to sources Rockey was planning to flee to Nepal.

The agency also conducted searches at three locations in Patna and nearby areas and one in Kolkata after his arrest.

**Retd Raj prof. held in Reet '21 paper leak case**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI/JAIPUR, JULY 11**

The ED on Thursday said it has arrested a retired professor in connection with its ongoing money laundering investigation into the alleged 2021 question paper leak of the Rajasthan Eligibility Examination for Teachers (Reet). Dr Pradeep Parasher was taken into custody on Wednesday. A special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Jaipur sent him to ED custody for three days, it said in a statement.

**Jaishankar hosts members, discusses ties with Myanmar's dy PM**

**Infuse new energy into Bimstec: EAM**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 11**

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar, hosting the second Bimstec foreign ministers' retreat in New Delhi, emphasised the group's complementary and congenial membership. He highlighted Bimstec's determination to infuse new energies and commitment into regional cooperation. Bimstec, comprising India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, has gained importance as Saarc remains inactive due to India-Pakistan tensions.

Myanmar's deputy prime minister and foreign minister U Than Swe attended the event, marking his second visit to India in a fortnight amid ongoing conflict in Myanmar. Mr

**Pradhan meets Neet aspirants amidst uncertainty over exam**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 11:**

Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday met some Neet aspirants at his residence, amid a raging row over alleged irregularities in the conduct of the medical entrance exam this year.

According to sources, the students raised issues like the uncertainty prevailing over the fate of the exam which was conducted in May, the delay in the counselling process and ultimately the academic calendar.

Earlier this week, the CBI had conducted searches at 15 locations in Bihar and Jharkhand gathering incriminating evidence in the case, they said.

The agency had earlier arrested the principal and vice-principal of Jharkhand's Hazaribagh-based Oasis school in the

While there have been demand for a retest from several quarters, the education ministry has maintained the incidents of paper leak were localised, and by cancelling the exam in toto it cannot jeopardise the careers of lakhs of candidates who cleared the test fairly.

The government's assertion assumes significance in view of the observations made by the top court on July 8 that it may order a retest if there were large-scale malpractices in holding the exam. The matter is being investigated by the CBI.

case and two persons who allegedly lent premises to Neet candidates where burnt question papers were recovered by the Bihar police.

The CBI, which is probing the alleged irregularities in the medical entrance exam, has registered six FIRs in the matter so far.

**CBI likely to book student who shared 'doctored' pic NET paper**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 11**

The CBI is likely to file a chargesheet against a youth who allegedly circulated a "doctored" screenshot of the UGC-NET paper on Telegram which led to the cancellation of the exam after an alert from the Union home ministry about a possible "breach".

The Central Bureau of Investigation did not find any large scale conspiracy in the episode and would limit the charge sheet to offences of attempt to cheat or cheating, the officials of the agency said.

The Central agency's probe into the alleged UGC-NET paper leak had

found that the screenshot of the "leaked" question paper for the June 18 exam was "doctored" by a school student, they said.

The CBI has informally conveyed its findings to the government and is likely to file a chargesheet against the youth, they said.

More than 11 lakh candidates had registered for the exam which determines eligibility for junior research fellowship, appointment as assistant professors and admission to PhD in Indian universities and colleges.

The exam was cancelled by the Union education ministry on June 19 following the alert from the Union home ministry.



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar during the second Bimstec foreign ministers' retreat in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

Jaishankar, after a bilateral meeting with Than Swe, stressed concerns over border stability, displaced persons, illegal narcotics, arms trade, and insurgent activities. He also pressed for the return of Indians

detailed by cyber scam gangs and supported Myanmar's return to democracy.

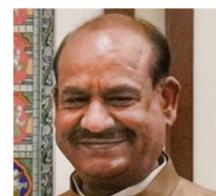
In his inaugural address, Mr Jaishankar linked Bimstec to India's 'Neighbourhood First', 'Act East Policy,' and

**At Brics Parl meet, Speaker calls UNSC, WTO reforms**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 11**

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday made a strong pitch for greater democratisation of the global governance system, and for reforming the international organisations such as the UN Security Council and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Mr Birla said that parliamentarians play a crucial role in advancing the agenda of growth and sustainable development. Addressing the 10th Brics parliamentary forum in St. Petersburg in Russia, Mr Birla said that India's commitment to uniting emerging markets and developing countries, and affirmed its dedication to the principles of mutual respect, understanding, equality, soli-



Om Birla

arity, openness, inclusiveness, and consensus.

Welcoming the four new members — Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — into the Brics parliamentary forum, Mr Birla said, "Brics, largely representing the interests of the developing world, stands for greater democratisation of the global governance system, and for reforming the interna-

**180-day child adoption leave for Assam govt female staff**

**Special leave for govt employees to spend time with parents, in-laws**

**MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, JULY 11**

The Assam government on Thursday announced a 180-day child adoption leave policy for women employees in all the state government departments.

Informing the Cabinet decision, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the decision was taken in line with Rule 43-B of the Central Civil Services (Leave) Rules, 1972.

"To ensure that adopted children, below 1 year, get proper care and nourishment, the Cabinet has accorded approval to the provision of the child adop-

tion leave of 180 days to female employees of govt of Assam," he said.

The state government further said, "This decision will benefit such female employees of the state government who adopt children below 1 year, and ensure proper care."

Representing the Union government in the Supreme Court in a recent hearing on adoption rules, solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati revealed that there is a gap between registration and adoption in the country.

According to Ms Bhati, 19,424 adoptions took place under the Hindu Adoptions and Maint-

**THE STATE govt further said, 'This decision will benefit such female employees of the state government who adopt children below 1 year, and ensure proper care.'**

enance Act (HAMA) between 2021 and 2023, while 4,029 children were adopted in 2023-24 through Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA).

The SC earlier this week asked 13 Indian states and Union territories, including Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Arunachal, to establish specialised adoption agencies by August 30 following

the court's past order. Meanwhile, the Assam government has also allowed two days of special casual leave in November for its employees to spend time with their parents or in-laws.

It is significant that two days of special casual leave for spending time with parents and parents-in-law for government employees has been introduced in the state by the Assam chief minister since 2021.

The leave must be used solely for spending time with aging parents or parents-in-law to honour, respect, and care for them, and not for personal enjoyment.

**Odia IPS officer who allegedly worked for BJD govt cut to size**

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, JULY 11**

Ashish Kumar Singh, a 2004 batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer who was in the eye of storm for his alleged "active involvement" in Biju Janata Dal (BJD) politics to facilitate to help the party retain in power, was on Thursday transferred and was posted as Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in the home department, a notification issued in this regard mentioned.

The transfer and new posting was seen in bureaucratic circles as a punishment to the IPS officer whose "act of misconduct" was taken cognisance by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Before this order, the senior IPS was working as the IG of police (chief minister's security). He was transferred with immediate effect, the home department notification said.



Army personnel during a rescue and relief operation following a rise in the water levels in the Garra and Khannaut rivers in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh, on Thursday. — PTI

**Not deep enough: Garcetti on India & US relationship**

**'In times of conflict, there is no strategic autonomy'**

**SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, JULY 11**

United States ambassador to India Eric Garcetti set the cat among the pigeons on Thursday evening by asserting that while India values its strategic autonomy, "in times of conflict, there is no such thing as strategic autonomy." The statement, which came following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's successful visit to Russia, is viewed by observers as a reflection of American discontent over the strong bilateral ties between India and Russia.

In what is also perceived as a clear warning to New Delhi, the US envoy emphasised that a "cynical calculation" cannot substitute for a "trusted relationship" between India and the US. He noted that while ties with India are deeper than ever, "it is not yet deep enough".

Speaking at an event in the national capital, Mr



Eric Garcetti

Garcetti said, "I know that India — and I respect it — likes its strategic autonomy. But in times of conflict, there is no such thing as strategic autonomy. We will, in times of crisis moments, need to know each other. I don't care what title we put to it but we will need to know that we are trusted friends, brothers and sisters, colleagues..."

There was no immediate response from Indian officials to the US envoy's comments.

"It's an important focus as Americans and as Indians to remember that

the more we put into this relationship, the more we will get out of it. The more we insist on a kind of cynical calculation in place of a trusted relationship, the less we will get. ...While it is wider and deeper than it's ever been, it is not yet deep enough. If we take it for granted, I will have to fight many defence battles to help this relationship move ahead," Mr Garcetti added.

It may be noted that the US is harbouring deep-rooted concerns over the continuing and strengthening close ties between New Delhi and Moscow that have stood the test of time over the past several decades.

Just last month, US deputy secretary of state Kurt M. Campbell had said Washington has raised concerns with New Delhi regarding India's relationship with Russia particularly in view of the close military technological partnership between India and the United States.

**BSP & INLD join hands in Haryana, Abhay is CM face**

**SHASHI BHUSHAN and BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, JULY 11**

In an attempt to woo Dalit and Jat voters, the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) and Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) have joined hands to contest the upcoming Assembly elections in Haryana.

As part of the arrangement, the INLD will be fielding its candidates in 53 seats while the BSP will contest in the remaining 37 constituencies in the 90-member Assembly.

Addressing a joint press conference with the BSP, INLD leader Abhay Chautala asserted that the alliance is not based on any selfish interests, but has been formed keeping in mind people's feelings. Alliance leaders have also decided to project Abhay Chautala as its chief ministerial face.

Hinting to rope in the AAP, Mr Chautala said, "This alliance bloc will like to include more outfits opposed to the

Congress and BJP to join hands with the alliance and build a strong front."

It is pertinent to mention that India bloc partners, Congress and AAP will be pitted against each other as the Congress has decided to go solo in the upcoming polls.

"In Haryana, we have decided to jointly fight the upcoming Assembly elections. Today, the feeling of common people is to oust from power the BJP, which is looting the state, and keep the Congress party at bay, which looted the state for 10 years earlier," Mr Chautala said.

BSP national coordinator Akash Anand said, "This alliance will not be limited to fighting Assembly polls only and we will fight other elections in the state jointly in the future."

Soon after the announcement, Mayawati said in a post on X that the BSP and INLD will work together to defeat anti-people parties and form a new government.

**Pro-activeness must for 'New India': PM to IAS trainee officers**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 11**

Asking trainee IAS officers to provide the best possible governance and quality of life to citizens, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that 'New India' is not satisfied with a lackadaisical approach and demands pro-activeness.

Mr Modi interacted with 181 officer trainees of IAS 2022 batch who have been attached as assistant secretaries in various ministries and departments at Sushma Swaraj Bhavan in the national capital.

The Prime Minister recalled his earlier interaction with them during the "Aarambh" programme in 2022.

Speaking about the assistant secretary programme, the Prime Minister said that the intent behind it was to provide opportunity of experiential learning to the young officers from the top to the bottom of the administrative pyramid.

SHORT TAKES

China ship on way to Pak seized in TN

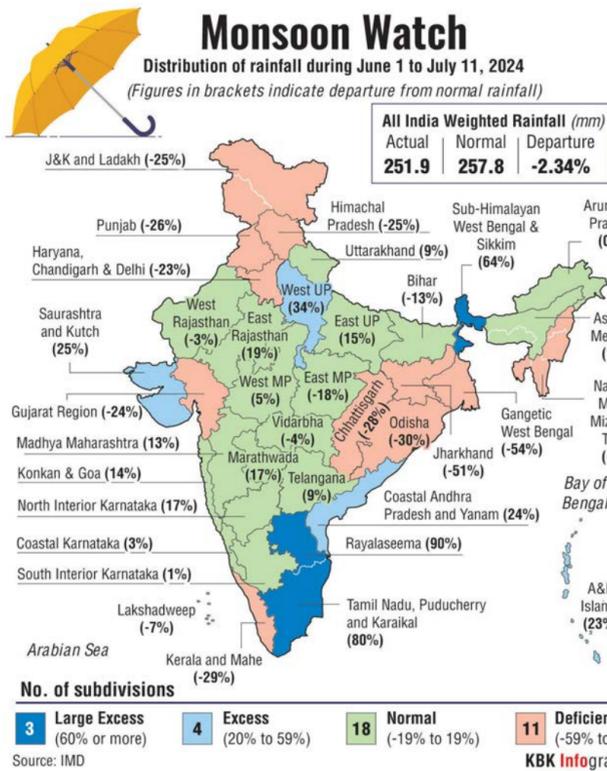
Chennai, July 11: Security agencies have seized a Chinese shipment of internationally banned chemicals, apparently intended for Pakistan's biological and chemical warfare program, at a port in Tamil Nadu, officials said on Thursday. The consignment of Ortho-Chloro Benzylidene Malononitrile, also known as CS is used as a tear gas and riot control agent, was intercepted by Customs authorities at Kattupalli Port in Tamil Nadu, they said. CS is a dual-use chemical listed under international agreements and India's export control list. While it has civilian applications as riot control agents, the sheer quantity seized raises concerns about its potential military use. The 2560-kg shipment originated from the Chinese firm, Chengdu Shichen Trading Co. Ltd., and was consigned to Rohail Enterprises, a Rawalpindi-based defence supplier in Pakistan. — PTI

Wife deserts hubby for being dark in MP

Bhopal: A man in the district headquarters of Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh accused his wife of harassing him over his dark complexion, police said on Thursday. The 24-year-old man, father of an infant girl, and his mother have lodged a complaint with the local police in this regard on Tuesday, deputy superintendent of police of Gwalior Kiran Ahirwar said on Thursday. In his complaint, the man alleged that his wife used to taunt him for his dark skin and left him to stay with her parents, leaving the infant with him. He alleged that his wife also filed a complaint with the police, accusing him of harassing her. As per police officer, the couple was summoned to the police station for counselling on Saturday.

Didi to meet Uddhav & Pawar in Mumbai

Continued from Page 1  
Yadav is also reaching Mumbai on Friday. I may meet him also. But it is yet to be decided when he will reach there. I will return after attending the marriage." The Trinamul Congress supremo also slammed BJP IT Cell chief Amit Malviya and a section of the media for highlighting, ahead of Wednesday's Assembly bypolls at four seats in the state, an old video of the TMC men beating up a person inside a club at Ariadaha in Kamarhati of North 24 Parganas. She also claimed that BJP leader Arjun Singh was the local MP then. Ms Banerjee said: "Those, who were involved, were arrested and are in jail. Even today, at Ranibandh in Bankura, attempts are being made to make the incident of a death viral. I inquired about it and found that it was the fallout of a family dispute or personal enmity. There is nothing political regarding this."



Aims to boost defence capabilities DRDO awards 7 new cutting-edge deals to startups

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 11

To provide impetus to Aatmanirbharta, DRDO has awarded seven new projects to private entities to develop key military assets including unmanned aerial vehicles and long-range remotely operated systems. These projects have been awarded under the Technology Development Fund scheme for various requirements of the Armed Forces and aerospace and defence sectors. This will help in nurturing industries, especially MSMEs and start-ups, in defence and aerospace domains. The indigenous development of these technologies will strengthen the military industrial ecosystem. Among the project awarded includes indigenous scenario and sensor simulation toolkit. The project involves development of an indigenous toolkit for simulator training of pilots in realistic scenarios. This will help in full mission planning and large force engagement. The project has been awarded to start-up, Oxygen 2 Innovation Pvt Ltd, Noida. The second project Underwater Launched

J&K, Punjab police, BSF discuss ways to strengthen security grid

Jammu, July 11: Senior BSF and police officials gathered at a high-level interstate security review meeting in J&K's Kathua on Thursday, days after terrorists, who are believed to have infiltrated from across the International Border, ambushed an army patrol. Five army personnel, including a junior commissioned officer, were killed and as many injured when terrorists opened fire on two army vehicles on the Machedi-Kindli-Malhar mountain road near Badnota village, about 150 km from the district headquarters of Kathua, on Monday.

The meeting was attended by Jammu and Kashmir director-general of police R.R. Swain, his Punjab counterpart Gaurav Yadav and Special director-general of BSF, Western Command, Y.B. Khurana, among others, to review the security grid along the International Border and plug any loopholes, officials said. Additional director-general of police (Law and Order), J-K, Vijay Kumar, ADG (Law and Order), Punjab, Arpit Shukla and inspector general-rank BSF officers of Punjab and Jammu were also present at the meeting, they said. The officials said the ter-

rorists are believed to have successfully infiltrated through the International Border and managed to reach the dense forests of Machedi that connects Basantgarh in Udhampur and Baderwah in Doda district. The terrorists have also used the route in the past when militancy was at its peak in the area over two decades ago. The area was cleared of terrorist presence but the revival of terrorist activities has led to serious security concerns. Over 50 have so far been detained for questioning as a massive manhunt for the terrorists entered on Thursday. — PTI

Meghalaya ex-gov recalls 2019 horror, praises Khasi women IPS officer When Roy feared crowd will burn Raj Bhavan

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, JULY 11

Former governor of Meghalaya, Tathagata Roy, in his memoirs has recalled an incident when a large crowd gathered outside the Raj Bhavan, while his frenetic SOS calls to the officials of the state government were not answered, as he feared that the British-era wooden house could be burned down. Mr Roy credits a Khasi-woman IPS officer, who held pistols in her both hands, for the safety of the Raj Bhavan. Mr Roy claimed that there were attempts made

by senior representatives in the state government to "pressure him to sign a bill that would have mandated the people visiting the state even for two-day to report to the police". "On 13 December 2019, a massive mob of rowdies, said to be around 10,000 strong and many of them stone drunk, surrounded the Raj Bhavan. Coincidentally, or perhaps not so coincidentally, most of the state cabinet, including the chief minister, was away in New Delhi," Mr Roy writes in his book, Desires, Dreams and Powers. He further states that the



Tathagata Roy "person left in charge was Mr James Sangma, the home minister and the chief minister's elder brother. While the mob was outside, delivering what sounded like fiery speeches in the tribal language that I did not understand, what I was truly worried about was the

danger of fire in case the mob threw petrol bombs or something similar". He grimly notes that "this could have instantly engulfed the wooden Raj Bhavan building in flames". The Raj Bhavan in Shillong is made of woods with the British-era legacy, while also being the summer capital of Assam in the past. Mr Roy gives an account of the state officials not responding to his SOS calls. He writes: "Fortunately, no such thing happened. My secretary Pravin Bakshi and I stood outside the building, keeping watch. I tried to

found it to be a Jain idol. The ancient sculpture is one and a half feet tall and one-foot wide with a few portions of it in damaged condition. It shows cases at least 24 Tirthankaras inscribed on it. "A few locals alerted me about the century-old idol found on the river bank. As soon as I received the news, I rushed to the spot and learnt that the idol was very rare and precious. So, I informed my seniors and we came to know that this was a Jain idol," informed researcher Bisambhar Rout. The Raj Bhavan in Shillong is made of woods with the British-era legacy, while also being the summer capital of Assam in the past. Mr Roy gives an account of the state officials not responding to his SOS calls. He writes: "Fortunately, no such thing happened. My secretary Pravin Bakshi and I stood outside the building, keeping watch. I tried to

SC adjourns pleas linked to Neet test

Continued from Page 1  
received a status report from the CBI on the progress made in the probe into alleged irregularities in the conduct of Neet-UG 2024. In an additional affidavit filed in the apex court on Wednesday, the Centre said data analytics of the results of Neet-UG 2024 was conducted by IIT Madras, which found there was neither any indication of "mass malpractice" nor a localised set of candidates benefiting from it and scoring abnormally high marks. The government's assertion assumes significance in view of the observations made by the top court on July 8 that it may order a re-test if there were large-scale malpractices in holding the exam on May 5. The Centre's fresh affidavit said experts from IIT Madras have found that the marks distribution follows the bell-shaped curve that is witnessed in any large-scale examination, indicating no abnormality. A bell curve describes the shape of data

conforming to a normal distribution. The affidavit said that for 2024-25, the counselling process for undergraduate seats will be conducted in four rounds starting in the third week of July. The NTA also filed a separate additional affidavit on similar lines. It said it has carried out an analysis of the distribution of marks at the national, state and city levels. "This analysis indicates that the distribution of marks is quite normal and there seems to be no extraneous factor that would influence the distribution of marks," the NTA said in its affidavit, which also gave details of the system in place for ensuring confidential printing of question papers, their transportation and their distribution. While hearing the pleas on July 8, the top court had observed that the sanctity of the Neet-UG 2024 has been "breached". Observing that a re-test may be ordered if the entire process was affected,

the bench had sought details from the NTA and the CBI, including the timing and manner of the alleged paper leak and the number of wrongdoers, to understand the extent of irregularities claimed by the petitioners. The apex court is hearing a batch of pleas related to Neet-UG 2024, including those alleging irregularities and malpractices and seeking a direction to conduct it afresh. Over 23.33-lakh students had taken the test on May 5 at 4,750 centres in 571 cities, including 14 cities overseas. The Centre and the NTA, in their earlier affidavits filed in the apex court, had said that scrapping the exam will be "counterproductive" and "seriously jeopardise" lakhs of honest candidates in the absence of any proof of a large-scale breach of confidentiality. The Neet-UG is conducted by the NTA for admissions to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses in government and private institutions across the country.

Crash accused Mihir 'confesses'

Continued from Page 1  
the accident scene in the early hours of Thursday. A woman, Kaveri Nakhwa (45), was killed and her husband Pradip injured after their two-wheeler was hit from the rear by a BMW allegedly driven by Mr Shah at 5.30 am on Sunday in Worli's Anni Besant Road. Mr Shah, who was arrested from Virar in the neighbouring Palghar district on Tuesday, is in custody till July 16. His father is also accused in the case and is currently out on bail. Mr Shah had been absconding for three days after the accident on July 7. He was arrested on June 9 and produced before a Mumbai court the next day. The court has remanded him to police custody until July 16. An investigation team recreated

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Rahul: Will raise Manipur 'with full force'

Continued from Page 1  
I have never seen anywhere in India what is going on here. The state is completely split in two and it is a tragedy for everybody involved. I want to tell all the people of Manipur that I come here as your broth-

er... I come here as somebody who wants to help you, who wants to work with you to bring back peace in Manipur," he added. Last week in the Rajya Sabha, the Prime Minister said instances of violence had

declined in Manipur. He added that the reopening of schools, offices and establishments in the state is a sign of normalcy being restored. Parliament's Budget Session will be held between July 22 and August 12.

Ex-Agniveers to get quota, age relaxations: CAPF chiefs

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA NEW DELHI, JULY 11

The director-generals of Central Armed Police Forces on Thursday said 10 per cent posts of constables will be reserved in their respective forces for former Agniveers in line with a decision by the Union home ministry. The remarks by CISF director-general Nina Singh and her BSF counterpart Nitin Agrawal came amid focus on the Agnipath recruitment scheme for short-term induction of personnel in the Army, Navy and the Air Force. "The Union home ministry has taken an important decision regarding the recruitment of ex-Agniveers. Accordingly, the CISF is also preparing the process of the recruitment of ex-Agniveer," Ms Singh said. The chief of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) said 10 per cent jobs will be reserved for ex-Agniveers in all future

appointments of constables. "In physical tests also, they will be given exemption along with the relaxation on the age. In the first year the age relaxation is for five five years and in the subsequent year, the age relaxation will be three years," she told the public broadcaster DD News. "Ex-Agniveer will be able to take advantage of this and the CISF will ensure that. This will be beneficial for the CISF too as the force will get trained and disciplined personnel," she said. In June 2022, the government rolled out the Agnipath recruitment scheme with an aim to bring down the age profile of the three services. The Agnipath scheme

provides for recruiting youths between the age bracket of 17-and-half years and 21 for four years with a provision to retain 25 percent of them for 15 more years. "They got four years of experience. They are fully disciplined and trained personnel. This is very good for the BSF as we are getting trained soldiers. After short training, they will be deployed along the border," the Border Security Force (BSF) director general Nitin Agrawal said. He said all the security forces will be benefited by recruiting former Agniveers. "We are waiting for them to be deployed after giving conversion training, they will be deployed. 10 per cent of the total vacancies will be reserved for them," he said. "There will be age relaxation for them as well. The first batch will get five years of age relaxation and the subsequent batches will get three years of age relaxation," he said.

Agnipath set to hit combat effectiveness: Ex-Navy Chief

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 11

In a criticism of the Agnipath scheme as it exists today, former Navy Chief Admiral Arun Prakash has said that Agnipath scheme will degrade combat effectiveness of the armed forces as Agniveers are "barely trained" and military is not a laboratory for social engineering and reform. Speaking about the navy, Admiral Prakash said that "it must be recognised that at least 5-6 years are required before a new entrant can acquire hands-on experience to be entrusted with the operation or maintenance of lethal weapon systems and complex machinery and electronics." This means that the 6 months training an Agniveer gets is woefully inadequate and, anyway, after 4 years he ceases to be in service, he said.

Jain sculpture found on banks of Baitarani

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, JULY 11

Residents of Mundapada in Odisha's Bhadrak district discovered a rare and precious Jain Tirthankara sculpture belonging to the 7th or 8th century on the banks of Baitarani river near. As per reports, the villagers stumbled upon the ancient idol when they were en route to the river to take bath. The idol was half-buried in the sand. The villagers soon alerted local researcher Bisambhar Rout who rushed to the spot and

found it to be a Jain idol. The ancient sculpture is one and a half feet tall and one-foot wide with a few portions of it in damaged condition. It shows cases at least 24 Tirthankaras inscribed on it. "A few locals alerted me about the century-old idol found on the river bank. As soon as I received the news, I rushed to the spot and learnt that the idol was very rare and precious. So, I informed my seniors and we came to know that this was a Jain idol," informed researcher Bisambhar Rout. The Raj Bhavan in Shillong is made of woods with the British-era legacy, while also being the summer capital of Assam in the past. Mr Roy gives an account of the state officials not responding to his SOS calls. He writes: "Fortunately, no such thing happened. My secretary Pravin Bakshi and I stood outside the building, keeping watch. I tried to

1st mothership docks at Kerala's Vizhinjam Port, makes history

AGE CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JULY 11

Kerala's Vizhinjam International Seaport, India's inaugural transshipment hub and deepwater container terminal, made history on Thursday by commencing operations and receiving its first mothership, San Fernando, as part of a trial run. A transshipment port acts as a transit hub where cargo from large motherships is transferred to smaller vessels bound for final destinations. The ship arrived from Sri Lanka early in the morning, and a harbour pilot guided it into the dock amid a grand water salute. Thousands of people gathered to witness the arrival of the massive vessel. A large tugboat, Ocean Prsitage and three smaller tugboats worked together to carefully bring the ship to its berth, marking a momentous occasion in the port's history. Vizhinjam Port, India's first deepwater container transshipment port boasts a natural draft of 18-20 metres, making it an ideal hub for the world's largest container vessels. Strategically located just 16 km from Thiruvananthapuram, the port enjoys proximity to the bustling

International East-West shipping route. Once fully operational, Vizhinjam Seaport is poised to rival top international ports like Colombo, Salalah and Singapore, vying for a significant share of global container transshipment traffic. The San Fernando, with a capacity of 8,000 to 9,000 TEUs, sailed from Xiamen Port in China and was expected to offload approximately 2,000 containers at Vizhinjam Port. The port will handle an additional 400 containers, showcasing its capabilities and efficiency. After a special ceremony on Friday the ship will leave for Colombo. The arrival of the container ship marks the beginning of the trial run of Kerala's ambitious project, Vizhinjam Port. Vizhinjam port is India's first semi-automated port, with modern equipment and advanced technology. It will be fully operational by September-October 2024. The Kerala government and Adani Group are partners in this project, implemented through the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. Construction of the port began in 2015, with Phases 2 and 3 expected to be completed by 2028.



THE ASIAN AGE

12 JULY 2024

A win for women's rights, secularism, thanks to SC

The Supreme Court's verdict asserting that Muslim divorcees are not bound by the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, while seeking alimony from their former husbands and that this law will not prevail over Section 125 of the erstwhile Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) reassures the primacy of the secular laws in a country that chose to be secular despite its Partition along religious lines.

The verdict, which has legal and political overtones, becomes historic for several reasons. Primarily, it has brought into focus the dignity of human life and ruled that maintenance is not charity but the right of all married women, irrespective of their religion. It also effectively neutralises the 1986 law, brought in to overturn the apex court ruling in 1985 in the famous Shah Bano case which allowed Muslim women to seek maintenance under the secular law. With the latest order, the legal recourse a Muslim woman had to take to get her rightful relief has been restored.

The 1986 law had sought to bar Muslim women from accessing the reliefs available to all Indian women. It marked an inflection point in Indian politics after which matters took a turn for the worse. Congress Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who came to power with an unprecedented 414 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha in the 1984 election, allowed himself to be tricked into introducing this law which undermined the secular credentials of not only his party but also of the country. The Prime Minister was unable to foresee the damage such a regressive law could cause to the social fabric of the country.

The charge that the Congress had sold itself to Muslim fundamentalists gave an extra push to Hindutva politics, championed by the BJP, and was followed by the opening of the gate of the Babri Masjid locked up in 1949 on the orders of then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

Tumultuous events followed, starting with the Rath Yatra of Mr Lal Krishna Advani, followed by the razing of the Masjid, and ultimately, the construction and consecration of the Ayodhya Ram temple. The Congress and secular politics ended up the losers.

Now, India is back to square one. The Supreme Court has rendered this divisive law toothless by declaring that it is up to the aggrieved Muslim woman to seek remedy under the provisions of either law — the Section 125 of the CrPC or the 1986 law. It has also held that the 1986 law did not negate the CrPC, which is religion-neutral; it only added to the choices of the Muslim women. In fact, courts across India had offered Muslim women relief under the CrPC despite the presence of the 1986 law in the statute book. The latest order only places on it the imprimatur of the Supreme Court.

India, a nation with limited resources, has to wage a tough battle in order that it may ensure a dignified life for all its citizens. Communal angles to social issues can only undermine or delay those efforts. The SC order reminds all stakeholders to stay the course.

Attack on media an outrage

The rapidly evolving and degenerating administrative ecosystem in India has exacerbated the rivalry between the principal pillars of democracy greatly. Never before have those in power and those who are supposed to speak truth to power been so irreconcilably opposed to the interests of the other.

The unprovoked vandalism of the office of *Deccan Chronicle* in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, by goon activists belonging to the ruling Telugu Desam Party, over a report on the possible U-turn on the privatisation of the Vizag Steel Plant, a part of the RINL (Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd), that was based on a statement by a BJP leader and a minister in the N. Chandrababu Naidu-led government, is a blatant and vicious attack on press freedom.

For too long, such attacks have happened on social media by organised trolls hired by politicians with huge resources to further the singular purpose of gaslighting and silencing journalists, discrediting those amongst them who resist through a campaign of lies. While it is problematic, most journalists have made peace with it even, often seeing it as a fact of life. The odd complaint rarely begets justice or ensures punishment for the troll army.

But when the attacks move offline and enter the realm of physical space, and political parties start sending their activists with clear instructions to vandalise media offices, and manhandle and unleash violence upon mediapersons, also resort to arson, and brazenly, too — for this gang of lumpen elements recorded videos of their act in order to report it to their bosses as well as make an example of it — it is nothing short of an attack on democracy and our Constitution.

Let us all stand up to not only condemn it but to end this culture of violence against those who disagree with us, for in dissent lies the seed of progress and the portal of democracy.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Chandrajit Banerjee  
BUDGET 2024-25



Industry hopes for sustained growth, competitiveness & building inclusion

The Union Budget 2024-25 has a special significance. It comes at a time when the Indian economy is in top gear, having clocked a stellar 8.2 per cent growth for 2023-24. The forthcoming Budget should sustain this growth momentum. Being the first Budget of the new government, it should set the tone for the government's reform agenda for its full term.

Here, I make suggestions focusing on three pivotal issues. First, public capex has been a key driver of India's impressive GDP growth over the past three years. It has also facilitated large-scale employment in the construction sector, bolstered the competitiveness of the Indian industry by creating world-class infrastructure and is crowding in private investment. Although signs of revival in private capex are evident, it is yet to become broad-based. Sustaining the momentum of public capex is crucial to fortify the private capex recovery into a broad-based investment cycle and continue with the much-needed infrastructure building. The Interim Union Budget 2024-25 increased the capex allocation by 16.8 per cent over the revised estimate of 2023-24. This should be enhanced to 25 per cent.

On the fiscal deficit front, the revised estimates for fiscal deficit for 2023-24 came in at 5.6 per cent of GDP, lower than the 5.8 per cent of GDP estimated in the Interim Budget. Additionally, the transfer from the Reserve Bank of India has been ₹1.1 lakh crore more than the estimates in the Interim Budget. Given these, the glide path of reducing the

fiscal deficit to below 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2025-26, must be adhered to, ensuring continued macroeconomic stability.

Second, India is endowed with a favourable demographic dividend. The urgency to capitalise on this cannot be overstated for which quality employment generation at scale is necessary. Employment generation is also a growth imperative. India remains a consumption driven economy, and employment generation is critical for broad-based demand generation. Higher demand will provide impetus to private investment, and both will drive long term sustained high growth and resilience.

Building on the success of the Production Linked Scheme, an Employment Linked Scheme (ELS) should be launched for labour intensive sectors, providing incentives based on outcomes linked to employment generation. Some of the suggested sectors include tourism, logistics, retail, media and entertainment, toys, textiles and apparels, and wood-based industries. To address low female labour force participation rate in the country, higher incentives could be provided for women's employment. Further sector-specific interventions should be made for strengthening their competitiveness.

Micro-enterprises and self-employment need to be promoted. The successful PM-SVANidhi scheme for street vendors could be extended beyond December 2024 and be expanded to rural and semi-urban areas. The government should promote micro-enterprises like "Drone Didi", which will also

develop an ecosystem for technology induction in agriculture. Integrated rural business hubs for providing social infrastructure in clusters of villages along with a scheme for rural industrial parks to promote non-farm jobs could be launched.

India's demographic dividend coincides with a global workforce shortage in many developed countries. Given the positive reputation of the Indian workforce worldwide and India's strong relationships with many developed countries, a proactive approach towards facilitating access to overseas employment opportunities for Indian youth should be developed. The Budget could announce an International Mobility Authority to take up this agenda on a mission mode. A mapping exercise should be conducted to identify countries facing labour shortages, the skills in demand and their alignment with skills available in India. Based on this, country-specific interventions can be effected.

Third, Indian industry has an important role in India's growth and development and policy should foster its competitiveness. India's share of global manufacturing and merchandise exports does not reflect the country's potential. More work is needed on the EODB and CODB front. The past decade has witnessed significant improvements in many of these aspects. The Budget should build on these.

All approvals for industry, both from the Central and the state governments, should be made in a time-bound manner through the digital National Single Window System. This should be applicable

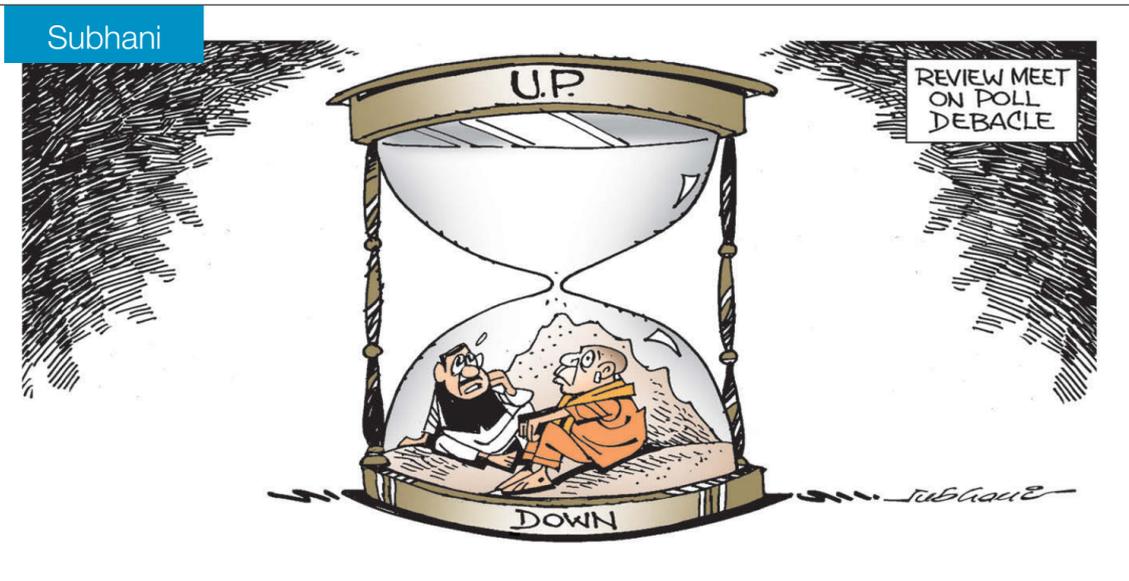
for approvals and compliances for setting up new business, for existing business and for winding up of an existing business. The thrust on the decriminalisation of business laws should continue.

To alleviate the legal burden on businesses, Alternate Dispute Resolution mechanisms should be adopted more widely, in conjunction with an increase in the number of dedicated courts and benches for resolving commercial disputes.

Innovative solutions to enhance accessibility of land such as land banks and land pools for industry are urgently needed. To reduce the cost of power and logistics, two major cost components for industry, a roadmap for eliminating the cross-subsidisation of power to other end users and railway passenger fares, by industry, should be outlined. The inclusion of fuels and electricity duty under GST is strongly recommended.

To make manufacturing future-ready two missions could be launched, a Mission on Advanced Manufacturing and a Mission on Advanced Materials. The future of manufacturing is green, hence sectoral roadmaps for achieving Net Zero should be prepared. R&D is key for industrial competitiveness. For this the operationalisation of the ₹1 lakh crore fund for encouraging R&D in the private sector, announced in the Interim Union Budget 2024-25, should be expedited.

The writer is the director-general of the Confederation of Indian Industry



Political underpinnings of the wonder that is India



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

The heart of India's Parliament is, ironically, the "Lower House", or the Lok Sabha, where 543 members, directly elected by voters represent the will of the people. It is elected during quinquennial, rumbustious national elections. Since China, another populous country, does not follow classic democratic principles, like universal franchise and representation rights, India's elections have always been the largest democratic spectacle globally, with 970 million eligible voters in 2024 and a voter turnout of 65.8 per cent, marginally lower than the 67.4 per cent turnout in the previous general election in 2019.

The "Upper House" of our bicameral Parliament, the Rajya Sabha, is smaller but permanent. Each member has a six-year term with one-third retiring every two years.

The President of India nominates 12 members to represent non-political perspectives — one such is Sudha Murthy, Rishi Sunak's mother-in-law, for her philanthropic work. Members of state Assemblies indirectly elect 238 members. They represent the political preferences of the state legislatures which elected them — a useful device for widespread early buy-in for Central legislation, particularly if the Constitution is to be amended, for which the Rajya Sabha's approval is compulsory. Its semi-permanent status brings partial stability to voting patterns in Parliament, unlike the Lok Sabha, which can be swept by the winds of change, radically altering the structure of political power, every five years.

On four occasions, over the past three decades, dramatic transformations swept the Lok Sabha. In 1999 the BJP alliance under Atal Behari Vajpayee swept the polls for the first time. In

Muslim women have fallen behind Indian women of other faiths, constrained by recently imported Middle Eastern, Islamic cultural norms, which have replaced home-grown liberal cultural practices

a "Sengol", a golden staff presented by a Hindu sect as a blessing, has become the norm. This adornment now ritually precedes the President of India as a symbol of religious legitimacy, an "innovation" contrary to the earlier all-party consensus, that Parliament has no need for religious symbols of approval, since its sole guiding light is the Constitution.

There is a context to the adoption of secular principles in electoral and representative practices. The Constituent Assembly (1947-1950) had considered the adoption of communal electorates — where people vote for a leader from their own community, defined on the basis of religion or caste. That this option was rejected shows the expansive worldview then adopted. Opting for universal franchise and mixed constituencies, aligned with the hope that all voters and candidates seeking votes would subsume their individual social identities in their national identity as an Indian. In return, the State would treat all Indians the same, irrespective of religion or caste, other than targeted measures for positive discrimination. This forward-looking principle is what has, plausibly, been the glue to our democracy, in sharp contrast to our neighbourhood where religion as a basis for citizenship failed to nurture democracy or well-being.

At 75, India can credibly claim to have a tested model of democratic representation with customised features to progressively reduce inequality — both social and economic. However, it is unclear whether it is sufficiently resilient to withstand the recent model of triumphant majoritarianism. Admittedly, some of

this is a politically savvy reaction to the mindless rhetoric of secularism, which earlier masked the continuation of minority pocket boroughs. Ironically, while these helped the leaders, they failed to fast forward the welfare of minorities. Muslims in India today have a larger overlap with the poor and the lower middle class than at Independence in 1947. Muslim women have fallen behind Indian women of other denominations, constrained by recently imported Middle Eastern, Islamic cultural norms, which have replaced home-grown liberal cultural practices.

Jammu and Kashmir has been efficiently subdued but not won over yet. Aggressive "Khalistan" supporters undermine the amicable, societal bond between Hindus and Sikhs.

Christianity is the least at odds with resurgent Hinduism, that demands Indianisation of foreign religions. Church prayers are in local languages. India's coziness with the Western alliance drives a tolerant approach to the practice of Christianity — a bit like the US plays to its Semitic lobby whilst tolerating Israel's transgressions. But mere tolerance is far from respectful acceptance. Lower castes, mindful of Babasaheb Ambedkar's conviction that traditional Hinduism has no equitable space for dalits, are unlikely to revel in a revival of ritual-heavy prescriptive Hinduism. This totals to at least one-third of Indians, destabilised by domestic identity politics. This was not what the Constituent Assembly hoped to achieve, through the secular, moral path of liberal democracy, in sharp contrast to the rest of British India, which became the Islamic Republic of Pakistan but split in 1971 due to irreconcilable regional and cultural differences with Bangladesh.

India can become great once again, if it chooses to become the global lodestar of social amity and common purpose in a world divided by hate and self-interest. We owe no less to our children.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

LETTERS BEYOND THE PALE

The Haryana government's intolerant behaviour towards the nation, demonstrated by repeatedly blocking water to Delhi and installing barricades between Haryana and Punjab since February, has caused numerous problems for farmers and commuters. This has disrupted public transit and adversely affected businesses and industries in Punjab and other states. Such actions are unacceptable by any means. Punjab farmers are now over the moon with the high court's direction to the Haryana government to lift the barricades. The Haryana government must not treat residents of other states as enemies but recognise them as fellow Indians and perceive others' hurt as the own hurt.

Jakir Hussain  
Kanpur

REVOLUTION IN LIMBO

INDIA'S SHIFT to electric vehicles (EVs) is a vital move to reduce carbon emissions and establish the country as a significant player in the global EV market. While Ola Electric's production of lithium-ion battery cells is noteworthy, the development of a robust charging infrastructure remains a priority. Plans for 2,500 charging stations are yet to take off. Standardising battery cells and charging protocols is also necessary to avoid market fragmentation. Additionally, as EV adoption increases, addressing the recycling of lithium-ion batteries is crucial. To promote EV use, especially in commercial fleets and public transportation, incentives and subsidies are a must.

Amarjeet Kumar  
Hazariabagh

THE ONION EFFECT

IT'S NOT JUST cutting onions that bring tears to the eyes; sometimes its prices have the same effect. At least twice a year these take off like runaway horses and trample underfoot the budget of the poor homemaker. Various measures to keep the onion prices stable including dehydrating them have been suggested. Freshly cut onion with a dash of lime is an essential accompaniment to a heavy meal. During heavy rains there is nothing to beat the pleasure of having *kanda bhajias* or onion *pakodas* with sips of piping hot tea!

Anthony Henriques  
Mumbai



SHORT TAKES

ONE MISSING IN POLAND MINE ACCIDENT

Warsaw, July 11: One more miner was brought to the surface and one is still trapped underground after a pit in southern Poland was struck by an earth tremor, the mine-owner PGG said.

Some 76 miners had been brought to the surface earlier and 17 had been taken to nearby hospitals with one seriously hurt, PGG CEO Leszek Pietraszek said during a televised news conference in the afternoon. One of the missing miners was brought to the surface and the other is still underground.

INDONESIAN FORMER MINISTER JAILED FOR GRAFT

Jakarta, July 11: Indonesia's former agriculture minister was jailed for 10 years on Thursday after he was found guilty of misappropriating more than \$9,000,000 of public funds.

Syahrial Yasin Limpo was found guilty by a Jakarta court of ordering officials in his ministry to send him money from state coffers, some of which was used for his personal expenses. "The defendant ... was legally and convincingly proven according to the law to be guilty of committing a criminal act of corruption," said presiding judge Rianto Adam Pontoh.

CHINA TELCOS OUT OF GERMANY 5G NETWORK

Berlin, July 11: Germany said on Thursday it will phase out the use of components from Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE in its 5G networks in the coming years. The step is on account of national security concerns.

It was the latest move by Berlin to reduce economic reliance on Beijing that some fear have left it vulnerable, and follows warnings from the EU that the firms pose a risk to the bloc.

Parts from Huawei and ZTE will no longer be used in "core" 5G mobile networks by the end of 2026 at the latest, the interior ministry in Berlin said.

PHILIPPINES BUS COLLIDES WITH TRUCK, 11 DIE

Tuguegarao, July 11: A bus collided with a pickup truck on Thursday morning, killing 11 people and injuring six others in a northern Philippine town, police said.

Those who died were riding the small truck as it was rammed on the side by the bus, causing it to lose control and smash into a roadside food stall in Abulug town, about 600 km (373 miles) north of Manila, said police chief Maj. Antonio Palatiao.

Most of the victims aboard the truck were on their way home from a wake shortly after midnight on Thursday.

UK FOR TIGHTER CROSSBOW LAWS AFTER 3 SLAIN

London, July 11: A man suspected of killing the wife and daughters of a BBC radio sports commentator with a crossbow was being treated in a hospital on Thursday after being found injured in a cemetery some 15 miles (22 km) from the scene of the crimes.

Police had spent almost a day hunting for Kyle Clifford after the attack on Carol Hunt, 61, and her daughters Hannah, 28 and Louise, 25 at their home in Bushey, northwest of London.

Police and ambulance crews called to the suburban cul-de-sac on Tuesday evening tried to save them.

FLOODING AS STORMS BATTER CAPE TOWN

Cape Town, July 11: Several areas of Cape Town were flooded on Thursday after heavy winter rains and strong winds battered the city, ripping off roofs from homes and damaging thousands of makeshift dwellings, South African officials said.

The city's disaster operations centre said informal settlements, including the major township of Khayelitsha, had been particularly affected.

Nearly 7,000 structures, including homes and shacks, were damaged, impacting more than 8,000 people.

Nato alleges China enabling Russia's war against Ukraine

Beijing accuses Western military alliance of trying to create chaos in Asia

Washington, Beijing, July 11: Nato has voiced profound concern over China's deepening relationship with Russia and accused Beijing of becoming a "decisive enabler" of Russia's war against Ukraine through its so-called no limits partnership with the country.

China accused Nato on Thursday of seeking security at the expense of others and told the alliance not to bring the same chaos to Asia.

The statement by a foreign ministry spokesperson came a day after Nato labeled China a decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine.

"China urges Nato to ... stop interfering in China's internal politics and smearing China's image and not create chaos in the Asia-Pacific after creating turmoil in Europe," spokesperson Lin Jian said.

Leaders of the 32-member North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) said this in a statement following their meeting in Washington to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the North Atlantic Council.

"The People's Republic of China's (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies continue to challenge our interests, security and values. The deepening strategic partnership between Russia and the PRC



A police officer inspects 250-kilogramme (550 pound) unexploded bomb after Russian airstrike on farm warehouse of Bilyi Kolodiaz, Ukraine, on Thursday.

RUSSIA DENIES JAILED CAMPAIGNER ORLOV'S PLEA FOR FREEDOM

A Moscow court on Thursday upheld a prison sentence against Nobel Prize-winning rights advocate Oleg Orlov, after the campaigner compared Russia's justice system to that of Nazi Germany. Orlov, 71, appealed a two-and-a-half-year term he was handed after calling Russia a "fascist" state and criticising its Ukraine campaign.

and their mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut and reshape the rules-based international order are a cause for profound concern," said the Summit Declaration. "We are confronted by hybrid, cyber, space and other threats and malicious activities from state and non-state actors," it said.

"The PRC has become a decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine through its so-called no limits partnership and its large-scale support for Russia's defence industrial base. This increases the

threat Russia poses to its neighbours and to Euro-Atlantic security," it said.

Nato leaders called on China, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council with a particular responsibility to uphold the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, to cease all material and political support to Russia's war effort.

"This includes the transfer of dual-use materials, such as weapons components, equipment, and raw materials that serve as inputs for Russia's defence sector." — PTI

CARGO SHIP HELPING RUSSIA

UKRAINE SEIZES CARGO SHIP, DETAINS CAPTAIN FOR EXPORTING 'LOOTED' GRAIN

Ukraine seized a foreign cargo ship in the Black Sea off its Odesa region and detained the captain on suspicion of helping Moscow export Ukrainian grain from Russian-occupied Crimea, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said on Thursday.



RUSSIA TO COUNTER 'THREATENING' DEPLOYMENT OF LONG-RANGE MISSILES IN GERMANY BY U.S.

Russia will act to counter the planned U.S. deployment of long-range missiles in Germany, the Kremlin said on Thursday, as it regarded the NATO military alliance's actions as a serious threat to Russia's national security.



Biden's support crumbling in key pillar NY as poll anxiety mounts

Washington, July 11: Support for President Joe Biden's candidacy is cracking in one of the party's key pillars: New York.

Lieutenant Governor Antonio Delgado, who says that Biden "deserves our eternal gratitude" for his nearly four years running the country, called for him to end his campaign for reelection and make "room for a new leader."

That came just hours after Hudson Valley congressman Pat Ryan, a rising star in the party, issued an unequivocal call for Biden to step down from the race against former President Donald Trump.

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server or network failed or because the format is not supported.

"Trump is an existential threat to American democracy; it is our duty to put forward the strongest candidate against him," Ryan, who won a special election for his swing district seat in 2022, posted on social media. "Joe Biden is a patriot but is no longer the best candidate to defeat Trump." Even Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has signalled concern to donors that he's open to replacing Biden. Axios reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

While a majority of the state's Democratic delegation and some of its most senior politicians, including Governor Kathy Hochul and New York City mayor Eric Adams, continue to offer full-throated support to Biden, dissent is growing.

It's a remarkable moment for the Empire State, the country's media capital and home to a sizeable bloc of the party's most prolific donors — as well

as the two Democratic Congressional leaders, Schumer and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

The divisions aren't divided by ideology, geography or how safe the politicians' seats are in Nov., underscoring the complex fractures and calculations within the Democratic party since the 81-year-old president's disastrous debate performance last month against Trump.

"This is unprecedented," said Christina Greer, an associate professor of political science at Fordham University. For some Democrats, the calculus is deeply personal as they decide whether to abandon a man whom many respect and have worked with for decades. — Bloomberg



Joe Biden

Nepal govt may fall today

Kathmandu, July 11: Ahead of a floor test for Nepal's embattled Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Friday, the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML have issued whips requiring their lawmakers to vote against the confidence motion tabled by the former guerrilla leader.

K.P. Sharma Oli-led CPN-UML, the largest party in the ruling coalition, withdrew support from the Prachanda-led government last week after inking a power-sharing deal with the largest party in the House — Nepali Congress (NC) — to replace the former Maoist leader, who is expected to lose the confidence vote.

The Nepali Congress, the largest party in the 275-member House of Representatives, has 89 seats at present, while CPN-

UML has 78 seats. Their combined strength of 167 is much more than the 138 required for a majority in the lower house.

UML has 78 seats. Their combined strength of 167 is much more than the 138 seats required for a majority in the lower house.

Prachanda's Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) has 32 seats. Prachanda, who requires 138 votes for the government to win the vote of confidence in the House, is likely to secure around 63 votes, and the government is almost sure to lose the floor test on Friday.

The NC has instructed its lawmakers to be present in the House and vote against Prachanda's confidence motion. Similarly, the CPN-UML has also issued a whip requiring

its lawmakers to vote against the motion, My Republic newspaper reported.

This coordinated effort between the NC and the UML aims to oust the Prachanda-led government and establish new administrations at both federal and provincial levels.

Oli, the CPN-UML chairperson, met NC president Sher Bahadur Deuba on Wednesday. The meeting between the two was aimed at formulating a future strategy on how to move forward after the NC and the CPN-UML agreed to form a new coalition government.

During the two-hour-long meeting held at Deuba's residence at Budhanilkantha, on the outskirts of Kathmandu, the two leaders discussed matters such as collecting signatures in favour of the new coalition. — PTI

Fire scare in France



Smoke billows from the spire of France's Rouen Cathedral, on Thursday. Firefighters brought the blaze under control after it had reminded onlookers of the 2019 fire at Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris.

— AFP

ISS ASTRONAUTS CONFIDENT THAT STARLINER WILL BRING THEM HOME

Washington, July 11: A pair of US astronauts stuck waiting to leave the International Space Station said on Wednesday they were confident that the problem-plagued Boeing Starliner they rode up on would soon bring them home, even as significant uncertainties remain.

Butch Willmore and Suni Williams blasted off on June 5 aboard the brand

Bodies trapped in Gaza, mediators push for ceasefire

Cairo, Gaza, July 11: Residents of Gaza City were trapped in houses and bodies lay uncollected in the streets under an intense new Israeli assault on Thursday, even as Washington pushed for a peace deal at talks in Egypt and Qatar.

Hamas says a heavy Israeli assault on Gaza City this week could wreck efforts to finally end the war just as negotiations have entered the home stretch. In a statement, the Palestinian Islamist militant group said mediators had yet to provide it with updates on the state of the talks since it made concessions last week in response to a US-backed Israeli peace offer.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the head of Israel's Shin Bet security agency was headed to Cairo for more ceasefire talks. US envoy Brett McGurk was in Israel, where he met defence minister Yoav Gallant.

Residents of Gaza City say this week's assault is comparable to the fiercest battle of the war, which destroyed the enclave's oldest and biggest settlement in the first weeks of fighting last year.

Home to more than a quarter of Gaza's residents before the war, Gaza City was largely razed to the ground in late 2023, but hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have returned to homes in the ruins. They have now once again been ordered out by the Israeli military. Many say they won't go.

"We will die but not leave to the south. We have tolerated starvation and bombs for nine months

PROBE NETANYAHU FOR OCT. 7 ATTACK, SAYS DEFENCE MIN.

Jerusalem, July 11: Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant on Thursday called for a state inquiry into failings around the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, saying it should investigate Gallant himself and his boss, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Gallant made the comments at a graduation ceremony for new military officers, also attended by Netanyahu, whose coalition government is already strained by infighting.

The state inquiry, he said, "must be objective, it needs to investigate all of us, those who make decisions and those who carry them out, the government, the military, and the security agencies."

"It must investigate me, the defence minister, it must investigate the prime minister," he said, to cheers from the crowd.

Netanyahu has dismissed past calls to form a state inquiry into the Oct. 7 attack. — Reuters

and we are ready to die as martyrs here," said Mohammad Ali, 30, reached by text message.

Ali, whose family has relocated several times within the city, said they had been running short of food, water and medicine.

"The occupation (Israel) bombs Gaza City as if the war was restarting. We hope there will be a ceasefire soon, but if not then is God's will." — Reuters

SK's laser weapons to block North's drones

Seoul, July 11: South Korea said on Thursday it will begin deploying laser weapons systems to intercept North Korean drones, which have caused security concerns in the South in recent years.

South Korea's defence acquisition programme administration said that it will deploy at least one anti-air laser weapons system called Block-I by the end of this year and more in coming years.

An agency statement

said the Block-I system is capable of launching precision attacks on small incoming drones and multi-copters. It said the system, developed by local company Hanwha Aerospace, costs just 2,000 won (about \$1.50) per shot.

"We face North Korea on our doorstep and its drones pose threats to us, so that's why we've been aiming to build and deploy laser weapons to cope with them," an agency official said. — AP

B'DESH POLICE FIRE RUBBER BULLETS AT PROTESTERS

Dhaka, July 11: Bangladesh police on Thursday fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse university student protesters demanding the scrapping of quotas they say are rigged to support pro-government job candidates.

The quota system reserves more than half of well-paid civil service posts, totalling hundreds of thousands of government jobs, for specific groups including children of heroes from the country's 1971 liberation war. Students launched protests earlier this month, demanding a merit-based system, and have continued demonstrations despite Bangladesh's top court suspending the quota scheme this week.

Officers forcibly dispersed around 150 students in the eastern city of Comilla after they attempted to blockade the main highway to the capital Dhaka, police inspector Syed Fazle Rabbi said.

"Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse them," he said.

Comilla Medical College Hospital director Sheikh Fazle Rabbi told AFP that 11 protesters had been injured, with two since discharged. However, none of the injured had been hit by rubber bullets.

Police in Dhaka tried in vain to stop thousands of young protesters from blocking roads around the megacity for the second time in as many days. — AFP

GOLDBLOCKS | ZONE All the water in Earth's oceans represent only 0.02 percent of its mass

Exoplanet could be first ocean world: Scientists

Paris, July 11: A planet relatively close to Earth could be the first ever detected with a potentially life-sustaining liquid ocean outside our Solar System, according to scientists using the James Webb space telescope.

More than 5,000 planets have been discovered outside of the Solar System so far, but only a handful are in what is called the "Goldilocks zone" — neither too hot or too cold — that could host liquid water, a key ingredient for life.

The exoplanet LHS 1140 b

is one of the few in this habitable zone, and has been thoroughly scrutinised since it was first discovered in 2017.

It sits 48 light years from Earth, which equates to more than 450 trillion kilometres (280 trillion miles) — relatively close in the vast distances of space.

The exoplanet has been thought to be a small gas giant called a "mini-Neptune" with an atmosphere too thick with hydrogen and helium to support alien life.

However, new observati-

ons from the Webb telescope have confirmed that the exoplanet is in fact a rocky "super-Earth".

It is 1.7 times bigger than Earth. However, it has 5.6 times its mass, according to a study published late on Wednesday in The

There were no signs of hydrogen or helium. The density of the planet indicates that it actually has large quantities of water.

— MARTIN TURBET Study co-author

Astrophysical Journal Letters.

The Webb telescope was able to analyse the planet's atmosphere as it passed in front of its star.

There were no signs of hydrogen or helium, which ruled out that the planet was a mini-Neptune.

The density of the planet indicates that it "actually has large quantities of water," study co-author Martin Turbet of France's CNRS scientific research centre told AFP. It could be a truly immense amount of water. — AFP



## quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	79,897.34 -0.03
Nifty 50	24,315.95 0.00
S&P 500*	5,605.64 -0.50
Dollar (₹)	83.56 -0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	107.61 -0.58
Euro (₹)	90.63 -0.28
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	73,159.491 0.68
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	85.41 0.39
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.984 0.008
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.28 0.12

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## ISF says 2.2 lakh flexi jobs added in 2023-24

Industry body Indian Staffing Federation (ISF) said it added 2.2 lakh new flexi jobs to reach 16.6 lakh in 2023-24. The data was shared as part of its 'Annual Employment Trends 2024' report. Flexi staffing industry witnessed 15.3 per cent year on year growth in new jobs during FY24," it said. ISF president Lohit Bhatia said the staffing industry added 30,000 new flexi employment opportunities in the last quarter of FY24.



## Indegene ties up with Microsoft for AI solutions

Healthcare tech firm Indegene said it has tied up with Microsoft to empower global life sciences firms to scale up the adoption of generative AI (GenAI) services, thereby driving faster innovation at scale. The companies have committed to developing resources in medical and technology tools to co-innovate GenAI services and workflows across commercial, medical, regulatory, and clinical functions.

## Kalpataru arm bags orders worth ₹2,995 cr

Kalpataru Projects International Ltd (KPIL) said the company along with its joint ventures and international subsidiaries have bagged orders worth ₹2,995 crore. The company said the new order wins were in the transmission and distribution, building and factories and water business. Our order intake till date in the current financial year stands at ₹6,178 crore," Manish Mohnot, MD and CEO, KPIL, said.



## Serentica supplies renewable power to Hindustan Zinc

Vedanta group firm Hindustan Zinc said it has started receiving power supply from Serentica Renewables. The renewable energy is being used for Hindustan Zinc's operational business units in Rajasthan. "On global energy independence day, Hindustan Zinc announced the commencement of the first phase of renewable energy integration from Serentica Renewables," the Vedanta group firm said.

# India makes 29% of all films produced globally

## Occupies fourth position in publishing industry revenue

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JULY 11

India is the top film producer, contributing 29 per cent of the global volume. India also occupies the fourth position in terms of publishing industry revenue and number of ISBN registrations.

According to a report by UNCTAD, 2022 saw the second-highest number of feature films produced, reaching a total of 8,748 films and representing a 15 per cent increase.

Overall, India held the top film producer position, contributing 29 per cent of the global volume while other developing economies such as Argentina, Brazil, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mexico, Philippines, Russian Federation, and Türkiye were also among the top 20 film producing economies in the world.

However, digital video piracy leads to between \$40 to \$97 billion in revenue losses for the global film industry. The losses range from \$40 billion to \$95 billion for the global television industry. The Indian entertainment sector experiences an annual revenue loss of approximately \$2.8 billion due to digital piracy.

The market studies by competition commission of India (CCI) has identified competition concerns within the sector, such as imbalances related to the superior bargaining power of some competi-



● WITH \$21 BILLION, India also was the seventh largest exporter of creative goods in 2022 after China, the US and Hong Kong. Jewellery accounted for 59.6 per cent of the creative goods.

tors, unequal revenue sharing agreements, the challenges posed by new technologies in cinema, and tying and bundling agreements at the exhibition level. The CCI recommended self-regulation by the interested parties.

India also stood fourth in terms of publishing industry revenue with \$9132 million. While US topped with \$26,152 million, Germany and Japan had less than \$10,000 million.

Similarly, India recorded the fourth highest number of ISBN registrations at 2.81 lakh. The US had

highest ISBN registrations with 32.79 lakh followed by Japan.

With \$21 billion, India also was the seventh largest exporter of creative goods in 2022 after China, the US and Hong Kong. Jewellery accounted for 59.6 per cent of the creative goods while fashion accessories amounted for 12.8 per cent. India had 2.9 per cent share in the global creative goods exports. India's imports of creative goods was \$5.6 bn, accounting for 0.9 per cent of global imports.

Further, the average share of women in the creative industries fluctuates from 80.5 per cent in the Dominican Republic to 6.5 per cent in India, alongside a global average of around 38 per cent.

In India, the creative jobs are significantly higher in urban areas, with a substantial share of 67.1 per cent.

## Occupancy at multiplexes set to rise in FY25

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JULY 11

Multiplexes have started showing growth both in revenue and profitability for the past one to two years, supported by a consistent increase in the number of films being released and a meaningful increase in the average ticket price and spends per head.

However, occupancy levels still lag the pre-covid

levels.

India Ratings expects the occupancy levels to pick up in FY25 to support the growth in the revenue and profitability of these companies.

The over-the-top platforms are expected to co-exist as an alternative entertainment medium without any near-term threat to multiplexes.

The India Ratings believes given the synergies available between the

● THE OVER-THE-TOP platforms are expected to co-exist as an alternative entertainment medium without any near-term threat to multiplexes.

cable television business and the broadband business, multi-system operators will increasingly bundle their offerings with broadband services which ride on the same infra-

structure.

Cable MSOs will continue to leverage their existing network and offer higher-margin broadband services in a bundled form to mitigate the impact of margin pressures in the cable business. MSOs are also expected to increasingly diversify their geographical presence in the short to medium term, to minimise the impact of subscriber erosion driven by competitive intensity.

## Shipping route disruptions to hit margins of auto cos

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JULY 11

The disruption along the Red Sea route, which has resulted in a surge in container rates by 2-3 times in year-to-date CY2024 compared to CY2023, and increment of shipping time by over 2 weeks is likely to impact margins of the auto component industry over the next few quarters, credit ratings agency ICRA said on Thursday.

It said close to two-thirds of the auto component exports are made to North America and Europe, and one-third of the imports is from these regions.

The operating margins are set for a year-on-year improvement of around 50 basis-points in FY2025, benefitting from better operating leverage, higher content per vehicle, and value additions, while remaining exposed to any sharp volatility in commodity prices and foreign exchange rates, it said.

ICRA expects the growth in revenues of Indian auto component industry to ease to 5-7 per cent FY25, from the highs of around



14 per cent in FY24.

"Demand from domestic original equipment manufacturers (OEM) constitutes over 50 per cent of sales for the Indian auto component industry and the pace of growth in the segment is expected to moderate in FY2025," said Vinutaa S, vice-president and Sector head for corporate ratings at ICRA.

The ageing of vehicles and increased sales of used vehicles in global markets are also expected to aid in the export of components for the replacement segment in overseas markets, according to the ratings agency.

"The auto industry has incurred a capex of over ₹20,000 crore in FY24 and is estimated to spend another ₹20,000 to ₹25,000 crore in FY2025," Vinutaa added.

## TRANSACTIONS VIA GEM PORTAL CROSS ₹1.24 LAKH CRORE

New Delhi, July 11: With the procurement of goods and services through the government's portal GeM crossing ₹1.24 lakh crore in first quarter of 2024-25, the platform will become world's largest by the end of this fiscal, a senior official said on Thursday.

The government e-market (GeM) portal was launched for online purchases of goods and services by all central government ministries and departments.

"GeM has clocked a gross merchandise value of ₹1,24,761 lakh crore at the end of first quarter, representing a quarter-on-quarter growth of 136 per cent over last year's ₹52,670 crore," said GeM chief executive officer Prashant Kumar Singh.

He said India's GeM will become the world's largest platform.

South Korea's KONEPS is the largest such platform in the world. GeM stands at second position. The procurement by ministries including CPSEs surpassed ₹1 lakh crore milestone in this period, he added.

— PTI

## GOOD | GROWTH Device works to capture signals, translate into actions

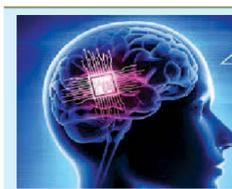
# Wires in brain chip implant stable

Fremont (US), July 11: The tiny wires of Neuralink's brain chip implant used in the first participant in a trial run by Elon Musk's company have become "more or less very stable," a company executive said.

The company had in May said that a number of tiny wires inside the brain of Noland Arbaugh, who is paralysed from the shoulders down due to a 2016 diving accident, had pulled out of position.

"Once you do the brain surgery it takes some time for the tissues to come in and anchor the threads in place, and once that happens, everything has been stable," said Neuralink executive Dongjin "D.J." Seo.

So far, Arbaugh, based in



● NEURALINK IS also working on a new device that it believes will require half the number of electrodes to be implanted in brain to make it more efficient and powerful.

Arizona, was the only patient to have received the implant, but Musk said he hopes to have participants in the high single digits this year.

The company is now taking risk mitigation measures such as skull sculpting and reducing carbon dioxide concentration in the blood to normal level in patients, the company's executives said in a live stream on social media

platform X.

"In upcoming implants, our plan is to sculpt the surface of the skull very intentionally to minimise the gap under the implant, that will put it closer to the brain and eliminate some of the tension on the threads," said Matthew MacDougall, Neuralink's head of neurosurgery.

Neuralink is testing its implant to give paralysed patients the ability to use

digital devices by thinking alone. The device works by using tiny wires, which are thinner than a human hair, to capture signals from the brain and translating those into actions such as moving a mouse cursor on a computer screen.

Musk said during the livestream that the device doesn't harm the brain.

So far, the device has allowed Arbaugh to play video games, browse the internet and move a cursor on his laptop by thinking alone.

Neuralink is also working on a new device that it believes will require half the number of electrodes to be implanted in brain to make it more efficient and powerful, the executives said.

— Reuters

## TIME NOT RIPE TO CHANGE STANCE ON INTEREST RATES: RBI GOV

New Delhi, July 11: Reserve Bank governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said the question of change of stance on interest rate is quite premature given the gap between current inflation and 4 per cent target.

"When we move towards 4 per cent CPI (retail inflation) on a sustained basis is when we will get the confidence to think about a change in stance," Das said in TV interview.

He said inflation journey is progressing as per expectations, but added that it is the last mile of the journey towards 4 per cent, which will be the most difficult or sticky.

Consumer price index (CPI)-based retail inflation has been projected at 4.5 per cent with quarter-wise projections at 4.9 per cent in Q1 (April-June), 3.8 per cent in Q2, 4.6 per cent in Q3, and 4.5 per cent in Q4, RBI had said in its June bi-monthly report.

He had said headline inflation softened further during March-April, though persisting food inflation pressures offset the gains of disinflation in core and deflation in the fuel groups.

With regard to GDP, RBI governor said many drivers of growth are playing out their role and momentum of growth was very strong in fourth quarter of last financial year which continues to be strong in first quarter.

— PTI

# Top real estate firms valued at ₹14.2 lakh crore

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JULY 11

With real estate companies worth \$36 billion in 2024, India is accelerating to become the real estate capital of Asia, pushing away China in terms of growth rate according to the 2024 GROHE-Hurun India Real Estate 100 report.

At a time when China's real estate market is facing headwinds due to government clampdowns and demand slowdown, India's market benefits from a young population increasing urbanisation and a growing middle class.

Additionally, the implementation of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA) has enhanced transparency and accountability, boosting investor confidence. In contrast, China's market struggles with excess supply, high debt levels among property developers, and strict government regulations making India's real estate sector a more attractive and stable investment destination, said the report.

"With the middle class projected to reach 54.7 crore by 2030, residential sales are expected to grow 10-12 per cent in FY 2024-25. Rising foreign investments of around \$4 billion yearly are further catalysing growth," said Anas Rahman Junaid, founder and chief researcher, Hurun India.

The number of billion-dollar listed companies in Mainland China plummeted from 100 to just 30. In the list of the top 100,

## TOP REAL ESTATE CITIES

City	No of companies	Cumulative Valuation (₹Cr)
Mumbai	33	6,40,560
Bengaluru	15	2,13,720
New Delhi	14	87,460
Gurugram	10	2,49,320
Hyderabad	6	68,290
Ahmedabad	4	68,390
Noida	4	11,470
Pune	4	12,560
Chennai	3	12,730
Kochi	3	20,970

From Hyderabad, Aparna Constructions & Estates is listed as most prominent firm in real estate with ₹33,130-cr value

66 companies focus on the residential sector, followed by 19 in the office sector and 10 in the hospitality sector.

India's most valuable real estate firms have a cumulative value of ₹14.2 lakh crore and employ around 5 lakh people. As many as 86 per cent of the companies saw their values increase, collectively adding ₹6.2 lakh crore, it added.

DLF has emerged as the top real estate company with a valuation of more than ₹2 lakh crore. Macrotech Developers held the second position with a valuation of ₹1.4 lakh crore, and Indian Hotels Company ranked third with ₹79,150 crore, the seventh edition of Grohe-Hurun India Real Estate 100 List features.

The report also features some of the most valuable unlisted firms, Adani Realty, followed by K Raheja Group and Hyderabad's Aparna Construction's Estates.

# 42L demat accounts added in June

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JULY 11

Demat accounts increased to 16.2 crore in June with a new addition of 42 lakh in the month against an average monthly addition of 34 lakh in the fiscal.

With increasing awareness about equity investments there has been a steady growth in the number of demat accounts in the recent years. At the end of June the total number of demat accounts stood at 16.2 crore against

● WITH INCREASING awareness about equity investments there has been a steady growth in the number of demat accounts in the recent years.

13.9 crore in December 2023 and 15.1 crore by March 2024. In June 2024, the total number of demat accounts was 35 per cent higher than the same month last year.

In June 42 lakh demat accounts were added compared to 36 lakh additions a month ago and 23.6 crore a year ago, as per the data of Motilal Oswal.

This was the fourth time

when new demat additions surpassed 40 lakh. Previously, similar milestones were achieved in December 2023, Jan. and Feb. 2024.

Overall average daily turnover increased 15 per cent month-on-month in June.

The increased participation had helped the primary market raise ₹1,960 crore in June.

## TCS' Q1 net up 8% to ₹12,040 cr

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JULY 11

IT software company Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) started the new financial year on a strong footing.

The company saw its net profit rise 8.02 per cent to ₹12,040 crore y-o-y from ₹11,074 crore in first quarter of last fiscal.

With broad-based growth, as its first quarter revenue stood at ₹62,613 crore, growing 5.4 per cent from ₹59,381 crore same quarter last fiscal.

TCS chief executive officer and managing director K Krithivasan said "A



France, IoT lab in the US and expanding our delivery centres in Latin America, Canada and Europe." "Artificial intelligence (AI), cloud, cyber security and enterprise solutions led the growth this quarter," TCS said.

The company workforce strength rose to 6,06,998 with net headcount addition of 5,452 during April-June 2024 period.

Annual increments to employees helped in retention and strong business performance, with the net headcount addition, said Milind Lakkad, chief human resources Officer, TCS.

strong start to the new fiscal year with all-round growth across industries and markets. We are continuing to expand our client relationships, create new capabilities in emerging technologies and invest in innovation, including a new AI-focused TCS PacePort in

Step up hunt for oil, gas to cut imports, says Puri

New Delhi, July 11: Oil minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Thursday called for stepping up oil and gas hunt to cut India's reliance on imports and make available fuel in an affordable and sustainable way.

Speaking at the Urja Varta conference, he said the exploration and production (E&P) sector is integral in the journey towards energy self-sufficiency, which is critical for sustained economic growth.

"E&P offers investment opportunities worth \$100 billion by 2030," the minister said.

Stating that India's exploration and production potential still lies untapped, he said, "India is so heavily reliant on oil

imports despite the abundant geological resources available to us."

The Indian sedimentary basins hold about 651.8 million tonnes of crude oil and 1,138.6 billion cubic meters of natural gas, he said.

Puri said only 10 per cent of our sedimentary basin area is under exploration, which will rise to 16 per cent by 2024-end after the current bid ends.

"The focus of our exploratory endeavours must pivot towards discovering yet to find resources," he said.

"The government intend to increase the India's exploration acreage to 1 million square kilometre by 2030," the minister added.



## BROOKFIELD ACQUIRES STAKE IN LEAP GREEN ENERGY

New Delhi, July 11: Canadian asset management firm Brookfield on Thursday announced the acquisition of a majority stake in Tamil Nadu-based renewable energy company Leap Green Energy with an upfront investment of over \$200 million through a combination of subscription of new shares and acquisition of shares from current shareholders.

Additionally, Brookfield has an option to infuse further \$350 million of incremental equity capital to support the future growth of the business.

"Brookfield and Leap Green recently entered into definitive strategic investment agreements pursuant to which Brookfield has acquired a majority controlling stake in the company," the firm said in a statement.

It, however, did not disclose how much equity stake it has acquired in Leap Green Energy.

"Brookfield to enhance the company's capabilities and grow the platform to in excess of 3 gigawatts over the next four to five years," the company said.

Leap Green Energy has an existing wind and solar asset base of 775 megawatts.

— PTI

**SHORT TAKES**

## India to play three ODIs, T20s in SL

**New Delhi:** India will play three T20 Internationals and as many ODIs during their tour to Sri Lanka across July and August, and the matches will be played at Pallekele and Colombo, the BCCI announced on Thursday. The white-ball tour will kick off with the T20s (July 26, 27, 29) at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium and the series will then move to Colombo where the one-dayers (August 1, 4, 7) will be played at the R Premadasa International Stadium.

India will be manned by newly-appointed head coach Gautam Gambhir, while the Lankans will also have a new coach in Sanath Jayasuriya. Gambhir has recently replaced Rahul Dravid, who led India to their second T20 World Cup title in the Americas, while Jayasuriya came in for Chris Silverwood.

India are yet to announce the squad for the series. It is expected that Hardik Pandya might get the reins of the T20I side, while KL Rahul could be appointed as the ODI team's skipper. — PTI

## Wanindu quits as Lanka T20 captain

**Colombo:** Wanindu Hasaranga on Thursday stepped down as the Sri Lanka captain in T20 Internationals ahead of their upcoming three-match series against India.

"Sri Lanka Cricket wishes to inform the public that National Men's 20I Captain Wanindu Hasaranga has decided to resign from the captaincy," a release from Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) said.

"Hasaranga said it is in the best interest of Sri Lanka Cricket that he decided to relinquish the captaincy duties and remain in the side as a player," the release added.

Hasaranga's last assignment as Sri Lanka skipper was in the T20 World Cup where the 2014 champions failed to make the Super Eight round.

"Sri Lanka will always have my utmost best efforts as a player, and I will support and stand by my team and leadership as always," Hasaranga was quoted as saying in the statement.

The SLC added that it has accepted Hasaranga's resignation. "Sri Lanka Cricket, while accepting his resignation, wishes to state that Hasaranga will remain an important player for us in our international cricketing plans," SLC said. — PTI

## Avesh all praise for Bishnoi catch

**Harare:** Ravi Bishnoi's fielding has always had a touch of athleticism but he took it to a different plane in the third T20I against Zimbabwe when he leapt to pluck a screamer off Avesh Khan to dismiss Brian Bennett, leaving his India teammate in awe.

India defeated Zimbabwe by 23 runs on Wednesday to take a 2-1 lead in the five-match series but the talk in the dressing room was Bishnoi's astonishing catch to dismiss the Zimbabwe top-order batter, reducing the hosts to 19 for 3 in the fourth over.

The pacer said he was left "shocked" for a moment. "When he took the catch, I don't think he got the reaction time. I also did not get the reaction time (to see what happened). I was, in fact, shocked how he took that catch," said Avesh, who took two wickets as India restricted Zimbabwe to 159/6 in the chase of 182.

Avesh added that the wicket should be credited to Bishnoi's account for the sheer effort. "He is a good fielder, works a lot on his fielding. The catch that he took, the scoreboard will show that it was taken by me, but it should be credited in his (Bishnoi's) account," added Avesh in a video posted by BCCI. — PTI

## Dada buys team in Racing Festival

**New Delhi:** Former India captain Sourav Ganguly was on Thursday unveiled as the owner of the Kolkata Royal Tigers ahead of the Indian Racing Festival 2024, scheduled between August and September this year. Apart from the debutant Kolkata racing team, the event will see participation from seven other outfits based at Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Goa, Kochi, and Ahmedabad. The racing festival encompasses two main championships — Indian Racing League (IRL) and the Formula 4 Indian Championship (F4IC). "I am truly excited to embark on this journey with the Kolkata team in the Indian Racing Festival," Ganguly said.

# WATKINGS!

## Super-sub strikes, England go past Netherlands & into Euro final

**Dortmund (Germany), July 11:** Ollie Watkins struck a stunning injury-time winner as England beat the Netherlands 2-1 on Wednesday to set up a Euro 2024 final showdown with Spain in Berlin.

It was an incredible finish to an evening that began badly for England, as Xavi Simons gave the Netherlands an early lead in the semifinal in Dortmund.

However, England were soon level through a Harry Kane penalty following a contentious VAR call by German referee Felix Zwayer, and the match looked set for extra time until Watkins struck.

On for Kane, Watkins received a pass from fellow substitute Cole Palmer with his back to goal in the first minute of stoppage time, turned and fired low into the far corner to leave the Netherlands bewildered.

"I'm lost for words really," said Watkins, the Aston Villa striker. "I don't think I've hit a ball that sweet before, and obviously in such a special moment."

It has rarely been a con-

## KING CHARLES III APPLAUDS ENGLAND FOOTBALL TEAM

**London, July 12:** King Charles III has congratulated the England football team on reaching the final of Euro 2024 and jokingly urged them to win the tournament without any nerve-shredding last-minute drama.

Britain's head of state sent the team his "warmest congratulations" after their 2-1 win against The Netherlands on Wednesday evening and his "very best wishes" for Sunday's final against Spain.

But he urged them to play with the nation's blood pressure in mind after fans endured the suspense of a last-gasp equaliser in the second round against Slovakia, a penalty triumph against Switzerland in the quarterfinal, and Ollie Watkins' 90th-minute winner to send them through to the final.

"If I may encourage you to secure victory before the need for any last minute wonder-goals or another penalties drama, I am sure the stresses on the nation's collective heart rate and blood pressure would be greatly alleviated!" he said.

"Good luck, England." In Washington, Joe Biden congratulated Keir Starmer in the Oval Office Wednesday on a historic victory — England's passage to the Euro 2024 football final, that is, rather than the British premier's recent election win. — AFP

vincing campaign from Gareth Southgate's England side, but they are through to their second consecutive European Championship final as they dream of finally winning a first major trophy since 1966.

To do that they will surely have to perform better than at any point so far in

Germany as they face an outstanding Spain team, who beat France 2-1 on Tuesday.

The Netherlands had been hoping to repeat their triumph at the last Euros in Germany, in 1988, but their current side lacks anyone with the star quality of Marco van Basten or Ruud Gullit.

A victory for them would have seen this Euros conclude with the same final as the 2010 World Cup. Instead they now go home. "I am disappointed about the final result in a match which started really good for us," said their coach, Ronald Koeman.

"A great goal, and then it's over, and that is difficult to accept."

England had got to this stage despite not winning any of their last four matches in 90 minutes, and having been taken to extra time by Slovakia and Switzerland.

That might have given the Dutch an edge physically, after the Oranje shrugged off finishing third in their group to brush aside Romania and see off Turkey. — AFP

## SOUTHGATE TAKES PRIDE AT 3 LIONS REACHING FINAL

**Dortmund (Germany), July 11:** England manager Gareth Southgate said he was "immensely proud" to lead the Three Lions into a first ever major tournament final on foreign soil after a 2-1 win over Netherlands.

"I was really pleased with the quality of our play. It will be, I would imagine, a long time, if ever, an English side had 60 per cent of the ball against a side from the Netherlands. So it shows the more modern England way," said Southgate.

The England boss had been heavily criticised after his side needed late equalisers against Slovakia and Switzerland to reach the last four. But in four major tournaments in charge, Southgate has now led his country to two finals, a semifinal and a quarterfinal. — AFP



Jasmine Paolini of Italy celebrates after defeating Croatia's Donna Vekic in their Wimbledon semifinal match in London on Thursday. — AP

## Paolini into first Wimbledon final

**London, July 11:** Italy's Jasmine Paolini reached her first Wimbledon final with a stirring fightback to beat tearful Croatian Donna Vekic 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 (10/8) on Thursday in the longest women's semifinal at the All England Club.

Paolini had never won a main draw match at Wimbledon before this year, but the world number seven tenaciously saw off Vekic in two hours and 51 minutes on Centre Court to secure a second successive Grand Slam final appearance.

The 28-year-old, who lost the French Open final last month, will face 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina or Czech 31st seed Barbora Krejickova in Saturday's final.

After surviving the emotional encounter with Vekic, Paolini could celebrate becoming the first Italian woman to reach the Wimbledon final.

It has been a breakthrough year for Paolini, who reached her maiden Grand Slam final at Roland Garros before losing to world number one Iga Swiatek.

Paolini, who made the Australia Open last 16 in January, had not gone past the second round in any Slam before this year.

Without a win at the All England Club heading into the tournament, Paolini now has six victories under her belt and has dropped just two sets in the process.

"You know there is no place better than here to fight for every ball and every point," Paolini said.

### THE RESULT

**Women's semifinals:** Jasmine Paolini (ITA x7) bt Donna Vekic (CRO) 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 (10/8).

"I was struggling at the beginning. I was serving really bad, so I'm so happy. This match I will remember forever."

Vekic paid the price for 57 unforced errors, with the semi-final fittingly ending on another wild forehand from the unseeded Croatian.

Unable to contain her frustration at letting 3-1 and 4-3 leads slip in the last set, Vekic broke down in tears in the closing stages of a rollercoaster clash.

### FEISTY PAOLINI

Vekic landed the first break in the fifth game of the opening set, taking a 3-2 lead gift-wrapped by two wayward Paolini forehands.

Unloading baseline winners and deft drop-shots at will, the Croatian broke again in the seventh game and emphatically served out the set.

Paolini couldn't convert her first break opportunity of the match in the fourth game of the second set.

But Vekic squandered two break points in the following game, losing her momentum as the feisty Paolini levelled the match with a ferocious forehand to take the set with a break at 5-4.

Vekic took a lengthy break off court to gather herself before the decider. — AFP



England's Ollie Watkins (second from right) celebrates after scoring against Netherlands during their semifinal match at the Euro 2024 tournament in Dortmund, Germany, on Wednesday. England won 2-1 and will meet Spain in the summit clash in Berlin on Sunday. — AP

## Colombia pip Uruguay to reach Copa final

**Charlotte (United States), July 11:** Ten-man Colombia defeated Uruguay 1-0 to reach the final of the Copa America for the first time in 23 years after an ill-tempered semifinal on Wednesday.

A 39th-minute Jefferson Lerma header sealed victory for the Colombians, who will now face holders Argentina in Sunday's final in Miami.

It was an anarchic semifinal played in front of a packed and passionate crowd which ended with scuffles on the field and fighting in the stands, including several players who had climbed in among supporters amid the flying punches.

Colombia, despite having Daniel Munoz sent off just before the interval and facing plenty of Uruguay pressure, hung on for a famous victory to the delight of their massive following of fans.

The win was the 28th game without defeat for Colombia, setting a new record for the team.

The downtown streets of the North Carolina city were packed with partying fans in bright yellow Colombia jerseys hours before the kick-off.

Not surprisingly in such an atmosphere, Colombia started strongly with their livewire Liverpool winger Luis Diaz doing well to wriggle some space for a cross on the left, finding Daniel Munoz at the back post but the full-back's header was off target.

Uruguay were, as always, a threat on the counter-attack and their Liverpool star, Darwin Nunez, was



Colombia's Jefferson Lerma (third from left) scores against Uruguay during their Copa America semifinal match in Charlotte on Wednesday. Colombia won 1-0 and will now face holders Argentina in Sunday's final in Miami. — AP

close to finishing off one break when Rodrigo Bentancur found him with a clever pass but the forward poked his shot wide.

Nunez had another opening when Maximiliano Araujo played him clear in the inside-right channel but the striker rushed his shot, blasting high and wide.

At the other end, Colombia forced a turnover which led to James Rodriguez curling

in a cross from the right but Jhon Cordoba's header was off target.

### LERMA BREAKTHROUGH

The breakthrough came in the 39th minute when Lerma rose majestically above Jose Maria Gimenez and powerfully headed home Rodriguez's corner.

It was the sixth assist of the tournament for Rodriguez with the former Real Madrid midfielder

beating the record for most assists in a single Copa, which was set by Lionel Messi in 2021.

Colombia looked to make the most of their momentum with Richard Rios forcing a save out of Uruguay keeper Sergio Rochet, after being played in by Munoz.

But having been so influential down the right in the opening half, Munoz lost his head completely, just before the break, pick-

ing up a second yellow card, after landing an elbow on Manuel Ugarte.

It was a moment of madness which left Colombia to defend their lead with just 10 men for the entire second half.

Colombia coach Nestor Lorenzo took off Rodriguez, who was also on a yellow card, in the 62nd minute as Uruguay gradually began to turn their numerical advantage into real pressure. — AFP

## NUNEZ & URUGUAY PLAYERS BRAWL IN STANDS WITH FANS

**Charlotte (United States), July 11:** Liverpool star Darwin Nunez and other Uruguay players were involved in a brawl with Colombian fans which erupted after their 1-0 Copa America semifinal defeat on Wednesday.

Uruguay striker Nunez unleashed a flurry of punches at Colombian supporters after jumping into the spectator seating at Charlotte's Bank of America Stadium following an ill-tempered loss to Colombia.

Uruguay central defender Jose Maria Gimenez said players had leapt into the melee out of concern for the safety of family members and loved ones watching the game.

"This is a disaster. Our family was in danger. We had to go to the stands to take out our loved ones, with tiny newborn babies," the Atletico Madrid player said.

"There was not a single

Uruguay striker Nunez unleashed a flurry of punches at Colombian supporters after jumping into the spectator seating at Bank of America Stadium following an ill-tempered loss to Colombia.

police officer... I hope those who are organising this are a little more careful with the families.

"Every game it's been happening because there are people who don't know how to handle a couple of drinks."

The overwhelming majority of the spectators in the crowd were supporting Colombia but there was no segregation between them and their Uruguayan counterparts.

The fighting continued for several minutes until police finally intervened. — AFP



Uruguay players argue with Colombian fans at the end of a Copa America semifinal match against Colombia in Charlotte on Wednesday. — AP