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GST 2.0 precursor to single tax slab

New Delhi: Describing the proposed GST tax reforms as 'Next Gen GST', senior government officials on Saturday said that the two-slab tax regime will eventually pave the way for a single sales/services tax rate, hopefully by 2047.

They said the proposed new GST regime, which slashes tax rates and assigns just two slabs of 5 per cent and 18 per cent, will boost the economy and also serve to mitigate tariff threats.

The proposed two-slab regime, if approved by the GST Council, will replace the current four slabs in the goods and services tax (GST) regime, doing away with the 12 per cent and 28 per cent slabs.

Calling it the "next Gen GST", one government official said "it is a game changer reform. In the pantheon of economic reforms seen in India, it's right up there." The officials spoke on condition of anonymity.

They said the new structure would mean that almost all of the common use items will move to the lower tax bracket, leading to price cuts, which in turn would boost consumption.

Terming the overhaul as "reformed and refined GST", a source said the Centre did not want a



short-term solution in the tax rate rationalisation and with the Compensation Cess coming to an end, a Next Gen GST was necessary.

"Lower taxes means it will put more money in people's pockets. It will obviously lead to more consumption," the official said.

Stability in rates

The Centre's proposal for a 5 and 18 per cent tax rate on merit and standard goods and a 40 per cent tax for sin goods, has been a "large canvas exercise" to ensure stability in tax rates, the officials said, explaining the rationale behind the exercise.

The changes that have come about after nearly six months of deliberations and dozens of meetings, have been conceived in a

way so as to ensure that demand for tax tweaks do not come and also input tax credit (ITC) do not get accumulated in the system.

Once the Centre's proposal is accepted by the Group of Ministers (GoM) and is approved by the GST Council, it will end the flux of tax rates and ensure stability, the officials said.

"What we have suggested is a 'Next Gen GST' keeping the needs of the middle class, poor, farmers, and MSMEs in mind. Also, it has been ensured that tax on daily use items are low," the official told PTI.

"Once the system is put in place and India becomes a developed nation, we can think about a single rate GST," said the official, adding that a single rate structure is suitable for developed countries where income and spending capacities are uniform.

"The ultimate aim is to move to a single slab structure," the official said, adding that the time, however, is not right at present.

The official said that during the process of overhaul, every due process is being followed. The Centre has taken the steering role but is protecting constitutional obligations by sharing it with the Group of

Ministers (GoM) on rate rationalisation.

"We have looked at every item, item by item and in some cases we have gone back and forth 3-4 times. Whether it is pesticide for use by farmers or pencils for students or some raw material or intermediaries for MSMEs, every item has been discussed threadbare and categorised in the merit or standard slab," the official added.

As many as 99 per cent of the items in the 12 per cent category such as butter, fruit juices and dry fruits would move to 5 per cent tax rate. Similarly, electronic items like ACs, TVs, fridges, and washing machines as well as other goods like cement will be among the 90 per cent of the items that would move from 28 per cent to lower 18 per cent slab.

The move comes after US President Donald Trump slapped a 25 per cent tariff on all goods India exports to the US, and planned doubling of the levy to 50 per cent from August 27 to punish New Delhi for its oil purchases from Russia. The tariffs are likely to impact USD 40-billion of non-exempt Indian exports such as that of gems and jewellery, textiles and footwear.

-PTI

Two killed in landslide amid heavy rains

Mumbai: Two persons were killed, and as many others sustained injuries in a landslide amid heavy rains in the eastern suburb of Vikhroli here on Saturday, civic officials said.

The incident took place around 2.39 am at Varsha Nagar in Vikhroli Parksite, which falls under the collector's jurisdiction.

Soil and stones from a nearby hillock collapsed on a hut, injuring four persons, an official from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) said.

He said the victims, who belong to one family, were rushed to civic-run Rajawadi Hospital, where doctors declared two of them dead.

Emergency response teams, including personnel from the fire brigade, local police, and civic staff, were immediately mobi-

lised to the site, the official said.

Shalu Mishra (19) and Suresh Mishra (50) died in the incident, while two others, Aarti Mishra (45) and Ruturaj Mishra (20), sustained injuries and their condition is said to be stable, he said.

He added that other residents of the area have been shifted to safer locations.

Evacuation notice

A resident of Vikhroli Parksite, where a landslide claimed two lives on Saturday, alleged that the civic authorities had not sent any prior notice this year to evacuate the area, which is prone to such accidents during monsoons.

Two members of a family were killed and two others sustained injuries when soil and stones from a hillock collapsed on their

hut at Varsha Nagar in Vikhroli Parksite amid heavy rains in the wee hours of the day.

"We did not receive any notice from the authorities this time. We are sleeping in our home, when suddenly around 2.30 am debris collapsed on one of the houses and a family was trapped," said Chaya Vasant Makwana, who has been residing in the locality for 25 years.

Everyone started running, but local authorities reached the site immediately and extricated the family trapped in the debris, she said.

Suresh Mishra (50) and his daughter Shalu (19) died on the spot, while his wife Aarti (45) and son Ruturaj (20) were injured and rushed to a hospital, Makwana said.

-PTI

Zelensky to meet Trump tomorrow

Kyiv: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he will meet US President Donald Trump in Washington on Monday after a Russia-US summit ended without an agreement to stop the fighting in Ukraine after 3 1/2 years.

In a reversal only few hours after meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump said an overall peace agreement, and not a ceasefire, was the best way to end the war. That statement echoed Putin's view that Russia is not interested in a temporary truce, and instead is seeking a long-term settlement that takes Moscow's interests into account.

Trump and Ukraine's European allies had been calling for a ceasefire ahead of any negotiations. Zelenskyy said he held a "long and substantive" conversation with Trump early Saturday.

'Some parties didn't examine voters' lists'

New Delhi: Seeking to counter opposition parties' allegations of fudging in voter data, the Election Commission (EC) on Saturday said it seems that some political parties did not examine the electoral rolls at the "appropriate time" to point out errors to the poll machinery and noted that it welcomes a scrutiny of the document to help its officials remove flaws.

In a statement, the EC said the period for raising claims and objections after the draft voters' list is published is the appropriate time for parties to flag flaws. "It seems that some political parties and their Booth Level Agents (BLAs) did not examine the electoral rolls at the appropriate time and did not point out errors, if any..." it said.

SKY clears fitness test ahead of selection

New Delhi: Ahead of the Ajit Agarkar-led selection panel's meeting to pick India's Asia Cup squad, T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav has cleared his fitness test at the BCCI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru.

The swashbuckling batter, who last featured in the IPL and was adjudged Player-of-the-Series, had undergone surgery for a sports hernia in the lower-right abdomen in Munich, Germany, in June.

"Fitness tests are mandatory before Return to Play (RTP) post-surgery. Surya has cleared the fitness test," a BCCI source told PTI.

After surgery, Yadav had posted on Instagram: "Life Update: Underwent surgery for a sports hernia in the lower-right abdo-



Asia Cup

men. Grateful to share that after a smooth surgery, I'm already on the road to recovery. Can't wait to be back."

With fitness regained, the stylish batter is now set to attend the selection committee meeting in Mumbai on Tuesday.

The Asia Cup will be played in the UAE from September 9-28, with India scheduled to open their campaign against the hosts on September 10, while the

marquee fixture against arch-rivals Pakistan is slated on September 14, both in Dubai.

The 34-year-old enjoyed a stellar IPL season, scoring 717 runs and was only the second batter after Sachin Tendulkar to score over 600 runs for Mumbai Indians in a season.

He finished behind Orange Cap winner Sai Sudharsan (759 runs) of Gujarat Titans and was instrumental in taking MI to the playoffs, where they beat Gujarat in the Eliminator before bowing out to Punjab Kings in Qualifier 2.

Soon after, he turned out for Triumph Knights Mumbai North East in the T20 Mumbai League, scoring 122 runs in five innings.

-PTI



The Kokan Nagar Govinda Pathak created history by forming a 10-tier human pyramid, setting a world record at an event organised by The Sanskruti Yuva Pratishthan in Thane on Saturday.

Op Sindoor themes dominate Dahi Handi events hosted by BJP

Mumbai: Political messaging for upcoming civic polls blended with the fervour of Dahi Handi festival in Mumbai and its satellite areas on Saturday, with BJP leaders organising Janmashtami celebrations marked by fanfare and cultural programmes.

Troupes of 'Govindas', adorned in colourful attire, formed daring human pyramids to break earthen pots filled with curd and sweets, suspended high above the ground, as thousands gathered to witness the spectacle.

The BJP has made winning the upcoming elections for civic bodies, including the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, a prestige issue. In Mumbai and the metropolitan region, the BJP is eyeing traditional Marathi votes to breach the citadel of Shiv Sena (UBT).

In Worli, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis inaugurated a grand Dahi Handi event at Jambori Maidan organised by the Mumbai

BJP unit under the theme "Pari-vartan Dahi Handi 2025".

The event, led by city BJP chief Ashish Shelar, drew massive crowds and top Govinda teams.

"This year's Dahi Handi will mark a new era for Mumbai," Shelar said.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who visited several 'Dahi Handi' events across the city, took a veiled dig at the Shiv Sena (UBT) while asserting that a win for the ruling alliance was imminent in the upcoming local body polls, including in Mumbai.

"Change is imminent in the municipal corporation. We have broken the 'handi' (pot) of sins of those who looted the civic body and started the 'handi' of development," the CM said in a swipe at the Uddhav Thackeray-led party, which, in its undivided avatar, ruled Mumbai's civic body between 1997 and 2022.

The BMC has been under a gov-

ernment-appointed administrator since 2022, when the term of its general body expired.

In suburban Ghatkopar, BJP MLA Ram Kadam hosted an Operation Sindoor-themed Dahi Handi.

Kurla area saw another spirited celebration, with local BJP leaders collaborating with the Kurla Vyapari Sangh to organise a grand Dahi Handi festival. The event featured vibrant performances and substantial cash prizes, adding to the festive zeal.

In Bhandup, senior BJP leader Kirit Somaiya continued his 30-year tradition of participating in Dahi Handi celebrations. He broke a dahi handi at the fourth tier of a human pyramid.

Dombivli, a key MMR hub, witnessed a massive turnout where state BJP president Ravindra Chavan organised "Dombivli Pride 2025" Dahi Handi festival.

Mumbai Police and Brihan-

mumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) enforced strict measures. Helmets and harnesses were mandatory, and 125 hospital beds were reserved for injured Govindas, officials said. The involvement of women's teams, like the Shakti Squad in Bandra, added an inclusive dimension, breaking traditional barriers with their seven-tier pyramids.

Fadnavis also visited Bhivandi in Thane district to attend former Lok Sabha member Kapil Patil's Dahi Handi celebration.

Similar events were organised by leaders of Shiv Sena and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena.

Amid heavy rains, a 'govinda' team formed a 10-layer pyramid at an event in Thane, which Maharashtra transport minister Pratap Sarnaik claimed was a "world record". He also announced a prize of Rs 25 lakh for the Konkarnagar Raja Govinda Team, which achieved the feat.



Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde during 'Dahi Handi' festival in Thane.

Shiv Sena factions, MNS not behind

Amid a scramble to woo Marathi voters ahead of civic polls, Dahi Handi celebrations organised by leaders of Shiv Sena (UBT), Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde, and Raj Thackeray-headed MNS in Mumbai and neighbouring areas remained steeped in political symbolism.

The festival resonated with Maharashtrian ethos through 'Govinda' squads who form human pyramids to break curd-filled earthen pots hung high and provide a platform to reach out to lakhs of people.

Although many leaders have been organising Dahi Handi celebrations for several years, the upcoming civic poll has added a new dimension amid the evolving political landscape and realignments.

In Thane, a dahi handi event organised by



Shiv Sena leader and Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik drew large crowds.

Amid heavy rains, a 'govinda' team formed a 10-layer pyramid, which Sarnaik claimed was a "world record", and announced a prize of Rs 25 lakh for the Konkarnagar Raja Govinda Team, which achieved the feat.

"Earlier, a record of nine layers was set on our stage. Today, govindas of Konkarnagar achieved ten layers," Sarnaik's son Purvesh, who organised the Thane event, said.

Sarnaik's colleague in Shiv Sena and MLA Prakash Surve organised dahi handi in Magathane constituency in north Mumbai.

Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde visited several dahi handi mandals in Mumbai, Thane, and Mira-Bhayander. Among MNS leaders, Bala Nandgaonkar organised a dahi handi

event in Kalachowkie area of Mumbai with a prize amount of Rs 15 lakh, and Ganesh Chukkal in Ghatkopar West. In Thane, MNS city president Avinash Jadhav hosted dahi handi for "Marathi mannos", which was attended by NCP (SP) leader Jitendra Awhad. Leaders of Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) didn't lag behind. Sena (UBT) MLC Anil Parab, MLA Sunil Prabhu organised Dahi Handis in Bandra (East) and Dindoshi, respectively.

A similar celebration was organised in Worli, the assembly constituency of Aaditya Thackeray, who has been visiting several dahi handi mandals in Mumbai and the satellite cities. The process for long-awaited elections to civic bodies, including the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, and local bodies, is expected to start after Diwali.

Let's restore the progressive spirit of social movements

PUBLIC CAMPAIGN NEEDED TO BANISH DOLBY, LASER SHOWS FROM GANESHOTSAV

By Rajendra Joshi

Mumbai: Maharashtra's major cities urgently need to assess hearing loss among families living along Ganesh immersion routes. Year after year, the deafening Dolby sound systems used during processions—especially during the grand visarjan—have led to a steady rise in hearing impairment cases in many homes.

Faced with the questions of "Whom should we complain to?" and the social pressures of going against a popular celebration, affected families remain silent. Despite a law against noise pollution, Supreme Court restrictions, and consistent media campaigns on the dangers of high-decibel celebrations, young revelers remain undeterred—and politicians lack the will to act for fear of losing votes.

Rather than dragging Maharashtra into a new public health crisis, the state's youth should seize Ganeshotsav as an opportunity to revive the progressive legacy of social

reformers. The movement to eliminate Dolby sound systems and laser shows from public celebrations must start here.

This year's Ganeshotsav is barely a fortnight away. In cities like Mumbai, Pune, and Kolhapur, the celebrations are organised on a massive scale, fuelled by sponsors and donors, with spending now crossing the Rs 1,000 crore mark. Yet Kolhapur's Ganesh festival holds a distinct place in history. During the freedom struggle, Lokmanya Tilak used public Ganesh and Shiv Jayanti festivals to mobilise dissent against British rule, while Shahu Maharaj and Jyotiba Phule sowed the seeds of progressive thought in the region.

Kolhapur's "One Village, One Ganpati" initiative became a model admired across India and abroad. It was also the first city to take up the fight against water pollution during immersions, building visarjan tanks at multiple spots to protect rivers and lakes—another milestone in the city's reformist tradition. While the

"One Village, One Ganpati" campaign has faded, immersion tank initiatives have spread state wide. Why, then, should Maharashtra's youth lag in leading a movement against noise pollution?

Instead of turning up the volume, the youth must take the lead in turning it down. Only then can Maharashtrians claim, with pride, to be true heirs to Tilak and Shahu's legacy.

Recently, district police chiefs across Maharashtra appealed to organisers to avoid Dolby and laser shows during immersion processions. This is not new—past chiefs have made the same request. Yet, in reality, Dolby speakers blare and laser beams flash through the night, leaving countless innocent people with impaired hearing, partial blindness, or worse.

With social pressure discouraging complaints, most victims' families prefer silence over confrontation. But gifting someone hearing loss or blindness in the name of celebration is not a tradition worth defending.



Union Bank celebrates I-Day

Mumbai: Union Bank Of India's Mumbai Zonal Office celebrated Independence day at a building which was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi. Zonal Head & CGM B P Das hoisted the flag. He was accompanied by Regional Head Rahul Juyal, Deputy Zonal Head Natraj and Security Officer Sanjeev.

Executives and staffs of Zonal Office, Regional Office and branches joined the celebration. The staff's children presented cultural activities. In his message Das has said that Union bank of India has always stand as a financial pillar of India and always dedicated in the country's economic growth.

Online milk order: woman ends up losing Rs 18.5 lakh

Mumbai: A 71-year-old woman from Mumbai allegedly lost Rs 18.5 lakh from her bank accounts while attempting to order a litre of milk online, police said on Saturday.

The woman, a resident of Wadala, was allegedly duped of her entire bank savings in two days when she attempted to order milk from an online delivery app earlier this month, an official said.

On August 4, the woman received a call from a man identifying himself as Deepak, an executive from the milk company, who sent a link to her mobile phone number asking her to furnish her details to order milk, the official said.

He said the woman was instructed to click on the link without disconnecting the call and follow further instructions. As the call went on for more than an hour, the complainant got bored and decided to hang up.

The official said that the next day, the complainant received a phone call from the same accused, who gathered more details from her.

During a routine bank visit in the following days, the complainant discovered that Rs 1.7 lakh had been siphoned off from one

of her accounts, and on checking further, she found that her other two bank accounts had also been emptied.

According to the police, the complainant lost Rs 18.5 lakh as all three bank accounts were emptied.

The accused allegedly managed to hack into the complainant's phone after she clicked on the link he sent to her mobile phone.

Based on a complaint, the police registered a case earlier this week, and a probe is underway, the official said.

"The accused allegedly threatened to kill the complainant and his family members when he insisted on repayment," the official said, adding that a probe is underway into the firm's operations and transactions.

Businessman loses Rs 5.24 cr in investment scam

Four cyber fraudsters have been arrested for allegedly duping a businessman from Mumbai of Rs 5.24 crore by posing as executives of a Dubai-based investment company, police said on Saturday.

The fraud came to light after the accused themselves invited the

victim to Dubai, where he found that the company does not exist, an official said.

A probe has revealed that the accused, who were recently apprehended from different parts of the country, had used the same modus operandi to cheat people of more than Rs 65 crore in Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai, Pune and Kerala, an official said.

Three of the accused have been identified as R. Menon (35), Manikandan (32) and H. Pandi., he said.

Man duped of Rs 23.5 lakh in trading fraud

Thane: A 44-year-old man was allegedly duped of Rs 23.5 lakh by the owner of a financial services company in Thane district and his associates, who lured him to invest in share trading, police said.

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1. Original title Agreement/s from developers/ builder in favour of Mrs. Kamlavati M. Kothari and others.
2. Original Agreement between Mrs. Kamlavati M. Kothari and others., and Mrs J.S. Arora and sons.

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ADVOCATE
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Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Road,
Parel, Mumbai 400012
Mobile 9167197876.

'Loan waiver not for farmers building bungalows'

Mumbai: The state's Revenue Minister Chandrashekar Bawankule has said that the state government will waive loans of only needy farmers, and not those building farmhouses and bungalows.

"Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has announced in the legislature that farmers in Maharashtra who genuinely need a loan waiver should get it. Why should someone who builds a bungalow or farmhouse on agricultural land and takes a loan be entitled to a loan waiver?" Bawankule told re-



porters on Friday.

Bawankule said instead of a blanket waiver, the government is working towards granting relief to poor farmers whose fields yield nothing, those who have taken loans and are on the verge of suicide.

"We are trying to move forward with a plan to conduct individual surveys and provide a loan waiver to such farmers," he informed.

During the recently concluded monsoon session of the state legislature, the Opposition had questioned the government about

when the waiver would be announced.

At the time, the government had informed the House that a committee had been set up to study whether a waiver should be granted and how it should be implemented. A decision would be taken after the committee submits its report, the government had said.

The demand for a loan waiver has been intensifying across the state in recent weeks, with opposition parties cornering the government over the issue.

-PTI

Redevelopment to redefine MMR’s urban landscape

By Bhalchandra Chorghade

Mumbai: Mumbai, the financial capital of India, has long struggled with its dual identity, a global economic powerhouse coexisting with some of the most dilapidated and congested housing clusters. The pressure on its aging housing stock, particularly within the city’s core, has reached a tipping point. Now, redevelopment projects, driven by both public policy and private investment, are poised to fundamentally reshape the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

A milestone in this journey has been the Bharat Nagar Development Department (BDD) Chawl redevelopment project, one of the largest urban renewal initiatives in India. Spread across Worli, Naigaon and NM Joshi Marg, the project aims to replace nearly century-old chawls with modern high-rises offering spacious, self-contained flats for more than 15,000 families.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, speaking at a recent function, noted, “The BDD Chawl redevelopment has opened new avenues.” The symbolic significance of the first batch of flats being handed over to beneficiaries earlier this year cannot be overstated. Families that once lived in 150-



200 sq. ft. one-room units with common toilets now receive permanent ownership of 500 sq. ft. modern apartments, complete with kitchens, private bathrooms and access to landscaped community spaces.

This shift reflects not just a change in housing stock, but a transformation in living standards, promising dignity, comfort and upward social mobility.

Market transformation

According to Dr. Niranjan Hiranandani, Chairman of the Hiranandani Group and former President of NAREDCO, “Redevelopment is indeed set to transform the way Mumbaikars purchase their homes, particularly with landmark projects like the BDD Chawl redevelopment.”

He underlined how this integrated approach under the leadership of CM Fadnavis, combining redevelopment of old buildings, slum rehabilitation and infrastructure upgrades, is

creating an entirely new housing ecosystem.

“Such transformation will also act as a magnet for fresh investments and job creation,” he added, “propelling Mumbai closer to the vision of a USD 1 trillion MMR economy within the next five years.”

The state government’s push is not limited to the BDD chawls alone. Across MMR, initiatives include slum redevelopment schemes, particularly in Dharavi and Mankhurd, aimed at providing permanent housing solutions for lakhs of families; redevelopment of cessed and unsafe buildings in South and Central Mumbai besides upgradation of public infrastructure like the Mumbai Metro, Coastal Road and Trans-Harbour Link, which complement housing transformation by improving connectivity.

This holistic strategy, linking redevelopment with infrastructure, ensures that urban renewal is

not limited to new housing alone, but also to enhanced mobility, green spaces, and community-centric facilities.

Market dynamics

However, the redevelopment wave faces pricing and affordability hurdles. Experts highlight that Ready Reckoner (RR) rates remain high, alongside stamp duty, premiums and other statutory charges, which prevent a significant drop in housing prices despite an increase in supply.

This implies that while redevelopment projects offer world-class amenities and safer, modern homes, affordability for lower- and middle-income buyers remains constrained. Nevertheless, the appeal of secure ownership, improved safety, and better social infrastructure is expected to shift homebuyer preferences steadily towards redeveloped housing.

The successful imple-

mentation of marquee projects like the BDD Chawl redevelopment sets a template for future redevelopment across the region. For Mumbai — where nearly 70% of the population lives in slums or outdated housing stock — the implications are transformative.

Redevelopment will replace unsafe housing with modern, resilient structures

generate construction-driven employment and spur allied industries, improve the global competitiveness of MMR by upgrading its real estate ecosystem and enhance the city’s livability index, crucial to attracting both talent and investments.

Redevelopment in MMR is no longer an isolated urban planning exercise but a city-defining transformation. With the state government’s backing and industry support, it is not just about giving Mumbaikars bigger and better homes; it is about redefining the urban fabric, ensuring economic growth and aligning Mumbai with its global aspirations. The success of BDD Chawl and similar initiatives may well mark the start of a new era where Mumbai finally sheds its tag of crumbling housing and embraces a modern, inclusive and sustainable future.



'Govindas' take part in 'Dahi Handi' on the occasion of 'Janmashtami' festival in Mumbai on Saturday.

Pic: PTI

32-year-old 'Govinda' dies in Mankhurd

Mumbai: A 32-year-old 'Govinda' fell to his death while tying 'Dahi Handi' in Mankhurd here on Saturday afternoon, while 30 others taking part in the formation of human pyramids synonymous with the celebrations were injured across the metropolis, officials said.

Jagmohan Shivkiran Chaudhari was tying the 'Dahi Handi' to a rope from the first-floor window grille of his house in Maharashtra Nagar when he fell, said a civic official.

Chaudhari was taken to the civic-run Shatabdi Govandi Hospital where he was declared brought dead, the official added.

At least 30 'Govindas' have sustained injuries during the celebrations, which have been held this year amid heavy rains in Mumbai, Thane and other parts of the metropolitan

region, officials said.

Fifteen of them have been hospitalised, while the remaining were discharged after treatment, they added.

The thirty injured persons comprise 18 from the island city, and six each from the eastern and western parts of the metropolis, the officials said.

Govindas form 10-layer human pyramid

Thane: A Govinda squad formed ten layers of a human pyramid at a Dahi Handi event organised in Thane on Saturday, organisers claimed.

Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik praised the feat, stating that it is a "world record" in forming human layers during the festival.

Sarnaik announced a prize of Rs 25 lakh for the

Konkan Nagar Raja Govinda Team. The event was organised by the Pratap Sarnaik Foundation and Sanskriti Yuva Pratishthan, headed by his son Purvesh Sarnaik.

The minister stated, "The Govinda team has formed ten layers. We are continuing the traditions associated with Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray and Anand Dighe."

The Dahi Handi festival is celebrated across Maharashtra to mark the birthday of Lord Krishna. The day is marked by troupes of young men and women scrambling to form human pyramids to break dahi handis (pots of curd) suspended in the air with ropes.

Purvesh said, "Earlier, a record of nine layers was set on our stage. Today, Govindas of Konkan Nagar achieved ten layers."

Wife of tainted fraudster honcho to join WPP

By Quaid Najmi

Mumbai: In a global C-Suite head-turner, Microsoft’s COO Global Enterprise Cindy Rose – wife of an alleged scamster from Mumbai - is slated to take charge as CEO of WPP, a multinational media giant, from Sep. 1.

Announced in July by WPP – which just reported a steep fall of 71 pc in pre-tax profits for the first half of 2025– Rose’s ‘birthday gift’ appointment has again focused attention on her husband, diamantaire Rajesh Kishor Mehta.

He is one of the Trustees with the Lilavati Kirtilal Mehta Medical Trust (LK-MMT), that runs the prestigious Lilavati Hospital in Bandra.

Last fortnight, Rajesh Kishor Mehta, one of the defaulters of the HDFC Bank in a Rs 147.50-cr loan (of 2004) was permitted conditional foreign travel for a few months by the Bombay High Court.

Earlier, in Feb. 2020, the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT), Mumbai had issued arrest warrants against him and two others in the same case, but in July 2025 the same was suddenly



withdrawn plus the travel ban was lifted.

HDFC Bank, already facing a Rs 1000-cr libel suit from the Lilavati Hospital, and an embarrassing revelation that its CEO-MD Sashidhar Jagdishan was secretly appointed as Financial Advisor to the LK-MMT by a deceased Trustee, Rekha Sheth, challenged the DRT order, but was forced to a 'climbdown'.

The Mehta Family sources in Mumbai said that Cindy Rose married Rajesh Kishor Mehta around 13 years ago, but red flags of her spouse’s alleged murky dealings were apparently disregarded by both MS and WPP.

Rajesh Kishor Mehta, of a prominent and influential diamantaire clan, figures as a ‘wanted fugitive’ in an InterPol red corner notice (Oct. 23, 2007), facing

charges of “counterfeiting, forgery, fraud and organized crime/transnational crime”.

“Usually, major corporations exercise extreme caution for such high-profile positions. It is unclear if it was done in the present case. It is also a mystery whether the candidate voluntarily disclosed her husband’s purported shady affairs to the companies or the InterPol. This merits a probe,” an ex-Trustee told The Perfect Voice, preferring anonymity.

Rose – who reportedly calls her husband ‘Raj’ as ‘a diamond businessman’ based in Belgium – and the couple has several lucrative realty transactions on record in New York- New Jersey, raising ethical questions of ‘compliance vis-à-vis complicity’.

Presently, Rajesh K. Mehta is traveling abroad to renew his Belgium residency permit. He is accused of milking crores of Rupees from the LKMMT, money-laundering through property deals, operating offshore bank accounts with questionable transactions plus arm-twisting lenders.

Fifteen Rescued

Ship collides with boat

Palghar: A cargo ship collided with a fishing boat off the Palghar coast in Maharashtra, triggering panic. However, thanks to the timely help of two other boats, the lives of 15 sailors were saved and a potential disaster averted, a district official said on Saturday.

"The collision occurred about three nautical miles from the coastline on the night of August 14. The impact was such that four sailors of the 'Shri Sai' boat were thrown into the sea. They, however, managed to swim back to the vessel," a Palghar district official said.

Upon receiving the distress call, two nearby boats- 'Jai Sai Priya' and 'Jai Sai Ram' rushed to the spot and extended immediate assistance.

The fishermen not only rescued sailors but also secured the damaged vessel.

"The ordeal continued well into the next day. After almost 17 hours of struggle, two more fishing boats from Murbe joined the operation, and together they managed to bring the damaged boat safely to Satpati-Murbe port on August 15 at around 3 p.m.," the official added.



Heavy rains batter Mumbai

Mumbai: Heavy downpour pummelled Mumbai and its suburbs, with some parts recording more than 200 mm rainfall in the wee hours of Saturday, inundating low-lying areas and affecting the movement of local trains.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a red alert, forecasting heavy to very heavy rainfall in the metropolis for two days.

Incessant rain continued to lash parts of the city in the morning with occasional heavy spells.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has appealed to citizens not to step out unnecessarily.

Two people were killed

and as many others sustained injuries in a landslide amid rains in the Vikhroli Parksite area in the eastern suburbs.

The downpour began around 1 am and continued into the early hours of the day, causing waterlogging in low-lying areas of the western and eastern suburbs, including Vikhroli, Ghatkopar, Bhandup, Chunabhatti, Aarey, Andheri, Kings Circle, Malad, and Goregaon, among others.

The suburban train services were also severely affected due to waterlogging on tracks at several locations on the Central and Western Railway lines.

On the Central Railway line, tracks were sub-

merged at Matunga, Sion, Kurla, Vidyavihar, Ghatkopar, and Bhandup on the main line, and Wadala, Chunabhatti, Tilak Nagar and Kurla on the Harbour Line.

Passengers have complained that Harbour Line services continue to be badly affected.

Tracks were also inundated on the stretch between Dadar and Mahim stations on the Western Railway.

"The water receded around 8 am and the train traffic slowly returned to normalcy," said Swapnil Nila, chief public relations officer of Central Railway, adding that the trains were running 15-20 minutes late around 11.30 am.

Forty-five customers duped

Thane: As many as 45 customers of a medical distributor in Thane district were allegedly duped of Rs 9.12 lakh as their orders were not delivered, police said on Saturday.

Based on a complaint lodged by the distributor from Bhiwandi town, the police have registered a case under sections 316(4) (criminal breach of trust) and 318(4) (cheating) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita against Zishan Sha-keel Patkire, an agent, an official said.

Patkire allegedly collected orders for medicines from 45 customers between March and June this year and took Rs 9.12 lakh from them, he said.

The official said that the accused pocketed the money and did not deposit it with the distributor, who failed to supply the order.

In another instance, the Mumbai Cyber Police have arrested four individuals for allegedly duping more than 30 people in a share investment scam amounting to over Rs 65 crore.

-PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Transformation is inevitable in the Municipal Corporation (in Mumbai). We have broken the pot of sin in the Municipal Corporation. Whatever butter is in that pot of development, the effort will be made to take it to the common man.”

Devendra Fadnavis, Chief Minister



'Sholay' not the perfect film: Ramesh Sippy

Mumbai: Fifty years since “Sholay” appeared on screen, it has been seen by generations of audiences as perfection personified, with every frame emblazoned in their memory.

Yet the man who made the magic says “Sholay” is not a perfect film.

Really? Why do you say that, we asked Ramesh Sippy.

“I think you always want to better ‘Sholay’. That’s how you keep your spirits up. Otherwise, how will you carry on?” Sippy told PTI in an interview at his

office.

He said if he had told himself “Oh, I can’t” make another film like “Sholay”, then that would have been the end of it. “(But) there is no end of it. Otherwise ‘Sholay’ would not have been made if there was an end to it.”

“The fact that ‘Sholay’ was made, that means something better than ‘Sholay’ can also be made and people will learn to like that kind of film as well,” he said.

Whatever Sippy might feel, the Indian audiences



over generations don’t think anything better than “Sholay” has been made.

Setting aside the modesty, the 78-year-old concedes that the audience’s enduring love for every

frame of the classic is nothing short of amazing.

Be it Gabbar Singh’s evil laughter, Jai-Veeru’s undying friendship, Thakur’s quest for vengeance, SoormaBhopali’s boastful

banter or Basanti’s exuberant defiance, the film lives in the memories of those who watched it for the first time when it released on August 15, 1975. It stayed on in the hearts of generations who discovered it later.

“It feels good that people still love everything about it, and I’m amazed that we’re talking about it after 50 years. It’s still not gone. It’s there in everyone’s heart. We have a new generation and a new generation coming up.

“All that has also hap-

pened, but that’s the beauty of masterpieces and those beautiful moments that are captured,” Sippy added.

Written by Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar, “Sholay” was about two small-time criminals who are hired by a vengeful policeman to capture the ruthless dacoit Gabbar Singh.

The action-adventure movie was praised for its gripping storytelling, powerful dialogues and unforgettable characters.

-PTI

Bangladeshi Hindus celebrate Janmashtami amid tight security

Dhaka: Hindus in Bangladesh on Saturday celebrated the Janmashtami festival amid tight security with the country's army, navy and air chiefs joining the main function in the capital.

The community leaders welcomed Army Chief General Waker-uz-Zaman, Navy Chief Admiral M Nazmul Hassan and Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan at the Palashi before the start of the procession amid beating of drums to mark the festivity. The celebrations began with songs and dance.

"I am grateful that you have included us in this festivity," Zaman told the devotees, adding that Bangladesh belonged equally to people of all religions and communities.

The armed forces would always stand beside citizens to safeguard peace, security, and harmony, he added.

Police enforced a tight vigil while army troops, tasked to assist law enforcement with magistracy power, were kept on alert as the main celebration began at the National Dhakeswari Temple, one of the prominent shakti peethas.

Thousands of Hindu men, women and children in colourful dresses joined the prayers at the temple and Palashi procession in Dhaka, even as members of Bangladesh's largest minority community also celebrated the traditional festival elsewhere in the



country.

Hindu community leaders said generally the mayor of Dhaka opens the festival, but since there is no mayor since the ouster of then prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League regime last year, the three armed forces chiefs were invited.

"Lord Krishna's message calls for 'suppression of evil and preservation of virtue', and so their (three chiefs) presence is significant in the current scenario when a sense of insecurity prevails among the minority communities," a key-organiser of the festival Kajal Debnath told PTI. The three service chiefs jointly inaugurated the Janmashtami procession by lighting ceremonial lamps while the street march began from Palashi intersection and concluded at Bahadur Shah Park in Old Dhaka.

Debnath said, soon after assuming power, the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yu-

nus visited the Dhakeswari Temple when he vowed to develop all Bangladeshis as "one family", but in the past months, the minority communities were excluded from meetings of his "national unity commission".

"You cannot form one family discarding 10 per cent of the (minority) population," Debnath said.

Escalating violence

Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council said in a statement that religious minorities in the country were facing escalating violence and systemic exclusion, while it cited reports of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and Bangladesh rights groups.

In a statement last month, the Council said the minority communities faced 2,442 incidents of communal violence in 330 days from August 4, 2024, when the political unrest

reached its peak, eventually ousting the past regime.

It said the incidents included "murders, rapes, vandalism of places of worship, forced evictions, and attacks on small communities".

The US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), in a report, said in the latest such incidents on July 26 and 27, a mob damaged at least 14 homes belonging to members of the Hindu minority in northwestern Rangpur, and there were "continuing violations" against minority communities in the southeastern Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The government previously insisted such attacks were political and the outburst of public anger against leaders of the banned "fascist regime" of the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League.

But in December 2024, Bangladesh confirmed 88 cases of communal violence targeting minorities, primarily Hindus, since the ouster of the past regime, adding that 70 individuals were arrested in connection with the attacks.

Meanwhile, the media reports said police in the northeastern port city of Chattogram detained six people from the traditional Janmashtami procession after they displayed placards and chanted slogans demanding the release of former Iskcon leader Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari. -PTI

Russian Industrial Plant Fire Eleven dead, 130 injured

Moscow: A fire at an industrial plant in Russia's Ryazan region on Friday killed 11 people and injured 130, Russian officials said Saturday.

The blaze broke out Friday at the Elastik plant in the Shilovsky District, around 250 kilometres southeast of Moscow.

Emergency crews continued to search through debris into the weekend, and two additional bodies were recovered overnight, the Russian Emergencies Ministry said.

According to the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti, a gunpowder workshop at the facility caught fire and triggered the blast.

Of the injured, 29 remained hospitalised on Saturday — 13 in Ryazan and 16 transported to medical centres in Moscow, officials said.

Regional authorities said three people were rescued from under the rubble overnight as investigators launched a preliminary probe into the cause of the fire.

Local authorities declared a day of mourning in the Ryazan region on Monday. "Flags will be lowered across the region. Cultural institutions, television and radio companies and organisations have been asked to cancel entertainment events," Ryazan Governor Pavel Malkov said.

It was the second deadly explosion at the Elastik plant in less than four years. In October 2021, according to the Russian state news agency Interfax, 17 people were killed in a blast at a workshop operated by explosives manufacturer Razryad.



Animal lovers being stopped by police and security personnel during their protest against the recent order by the Supreme Court at Connaught Place in New Delhi on Saturday.

PTI

Rahul Gandhi to embark on 'Voter Adhikar Yatra'

By Asim Kamal

Sasaram (Bihar): Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will embark on a 'Voter Adhikar Yatra' across Bihar from here on Sunday, with his party asserting it will fight for the "one person, one vote" principle and not accept the Election Commission becoming a "compartment" of the BJP's "so-called double engine".

The leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, along with RJD's Tejashwi Yadav and other Mahagathbandhan leaders, will undertake the 16-day and 1,300 km-long yatra from Sasaram, which will conclude with a rally in Patna on September 1.

In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi said, "16 days, 20+ districts, 1,300+ km. We are coming among the people with the Voter Adhikar Yatra. This is a fight to protect the most basic democratic right - 'one person,

one vote'."

"Join us in Bihar to save the Constitution," he added.

Addressing a press conference at the Indira Bhawan in New Delhi, Congress' media and publicity department head, Pawan Khera, said, "Whenever Rahul Gandhi ji has set out for a yatra, the democracy of this country has turned a page. 'Voter Adhikar Yatra' will be a historic march. It will prove to be a milestone in the history of our democracy.

"We will not accept that the Election Commission becomes a compartment of this so-called 'double engine'. We are fighting against this and will continue to do so in the future," he added.

The party has been protesting against the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, alleging the EC's exercise is aimed at "disenfranchising voters" in Bihar ahead of the As-

sembly elections due later this year.

The Congress urged the people of Bihar to join the 'yatra' for their rights and entitlements so that democracy can get a direction from Bihar.

"The yatra, starting in Bihar from August 17, is a journey to make people aware because the conspirators will not be deterred and they will try to steal votes," Khera said. "The yatra will conclude with a huge rally in Patna on September 1, and the people of the INDIA bloc will participate in it," he added.

He added that the 'yatra' has been planned to fight for the right of 'one person-one vote'. "It is possible to breathe freely in independent India because we have the power to vote. Rahul Gandhi has started a struggle so that every citizen of the country can breathe freely," Khera said. -PTI

Woman succumbs to burn injuries

Ahmedabad: A 37-year-old grocer, who had set herself on fire after receiving a shop demolition notice from the Ahmedabad civic body two days back, succumbed to her injuries on Saturday, police said.

A police official confirmed the death of the woman, identified as Narmada Kumavat, at LG Hospital.

A viral video showed Kumavat dousing herself with kerosene and setting herself ablaze following an argument with Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation staffers outside her kirana shop in the Jashodanagar area on August 14.

Her husband, Ramesh, and three others sustained burn injuries while trying to put out the flames and were hospitalised.

Kumavat immolated herself out of frustration as her kirana shop was demolished in the past, and yet another notice was served because of illegal construction, police said.

After the incident, local shopkeepers organised a foot march alleging harassment by civic authorities.

-PTI

Three Held Extortion plot in Thailand fails

New Delhi: Three men, including a London School of Economics graduate, were arrested for allegedly attempting to extort money from a Delhi man to repay debts through a cyber fraud plot hatched in Thailand, an officer said on Saturday.

Sumit, 42, Prince, 35, and Nitish, 31, allegedly threatened a city-based businessman by impersonating a gangster and demanding payment in cryptocurrency, he said.

Nitish holds a master's degree from the London School of Economics, while the others have business and local backgrounds, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Nidhin Valsan said.

During interrogation, the three confessed that they were under heavy debts and conspired to extort money by using the name of a dreaded gangster.

As part of the plan, they travelled to Thailand, procured an international SIM card, and made calls from an online messaging platform from there, he said.

-PTI

The complainant approached the Desh Bandhu Gupta Road Police Station earlier this week, alleging that he received an international WhatsApp call from an unknown number.

The caller, identifying himself as a gangster, allegedly threatened to kill the man's children if he did not transfer cryptocurrency and gave him a QR code, the DCP said.

A case under Section 308(4) (extortion) of the BNS was registered, and police launched an investigation.

Investigation led to the discovery that the call and the QR code originated from Thailand, Valsan said.

Police took help from the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, and traced earlier cryptocurrency transactions that helped them narrow down the suspects.

"Once the suspects landed in India from Thailand, they were apprehended," the officer said.

Insulted Indian Flag Keralite living in US booked

Kochi: A non-resident Keralite, living in the United States, has been booked for allegedly insulting the national flag in a Facebook post, police said on Saturday.

Edathala Police here registered a case against Albichan Muringayil, reportedly hailing from Kottayam, on Friday based on a complaint lodged by Anoop, a local BJP functionary.

As per the complaint, on the occasion of Independence Day, the accused put a Facebook post with some derogatory content in connection with the national flag, police said.

"The accused reportedly lives in the US at present. His Facebook account has several posts insulting India. It also contained posts insulting the pledge," a senior police officer said.

He said Muringayil was booked under relevant sections of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act.

The case would soon be handed over to the Cyber Police for further investigation, the officer added.

-PTI

MANUU celebrates Independence Day



Hyderabad: Prof. Syed Ainul Hasan, Vice-Chancellor, Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) unfurled the tricolor at University campus on the 79th Independence Day on Friday.

In his message Prof. Hasan said that achieving freedom was not an easy task. Our Freedom fighters sacrificed many things and also lost their lives. They choose the way of non-violence to get Independence and finally those who were oppressing us had to leave

our country.

Talking about freedom, he said that every citizen has some responsibilities and powers. Students have the responsibility to acquire knowledge so that they can move forward in life, and teachers have the responsibility to provide good education to their students. Without respect there is no freedom, we have to respect each other and always help others, he added.

The Vice-Chancellor also distributed badges to

MANUU NCC Cadets.

Earlier, MANUU Sub-Unit NCC cadets presented guard of honour. Prof. Ish-tiaque Ahmed, Registrar and Prof. Mohammed Abdul Azeem, Proctor accompanied the Vice-Chancellor during the Parade.

Students presented patriotic songs on the occasion under the supervision of Dr. Mohd. Muzaffar Hussain Khan, Associate Professor, Department of Education & Training and Dr. Shaikh Wasim, Associate Professor, Education.

'Homebound' wins top honours at IFFM 2025

Melbourne: Filmmaker Neeraj Ghaywan's moving drama "Homebound" dominated the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM) 2025 awards night, bagging the coveted honours of best film and best director.

Ghaywan's movie, starring Ishaan Khatter, Vishal Jetwa and Janhvi Kapoor, triumphed at the annual gala, which honours the best of Indian cinema on a global stage, on Friday night.

"Homebound", which explores themes of belonging, displacement and the emotional complexities of returning home, will also serve as the festival's closing film on August 24.

Apart from Ghaywan's double win, the evening also saw Bollywood star Aamir Khan receive the prestigious Excellence in Cinema Award for his decades-long contribution to the industry.

"I have been attracted to telling stories from a very young age. Filmmaking is a collaborative art and this award and recognition wouldn't have been possible without my writers, directors, co-stars, and the audiences who have given me the opportunity to tell the stories and be part of the many stories I have been part of," Aamir, who most recently starred in critical hit "Sitaare Za-



meen Par", said in a statement.

Abhishek Bachchan was named best actor (Male) for his performance in filmmaker Shoojit Sircar's "I Want to Talk", while Geetha Kailasam won best

actor (Female) for "Angammal", which also won best indie film award.

"Life has come a full circle for me. I came here in 2022 where I was feted with the excellence in cinema award for my body of work. But this is an emotional moment for me to get the best actor on this very stage and be recognised for my role in a film that's extremely special to me.

"It was 3 years back in Melbourne at this same festival where Shoojit Da offered me this role in 'I Want To Talk'. It was Shoojit Da who believed in me that I could pull off this role and this role is an ode to my father

and my daughter because it's about caring and raising a parent," Bachchan said.

On the streaming side, the best series award went to filmmaker Vikramaditya Motwane's "Black Warrant". Jaideep Ahlawat was recognised as best actor (Male) for "Paatal Lok" season two, while Nimisha Sajayan earned best actor (Female) for "Dabba Cartel".

The winners also included actor-comedian Vir Das, who received the Disruptor Award, Aditi Rao Hydari, honoured for Diversity in Cinema, and Arvind Swami, recognised with the Leadership in Cinema Award.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The freedom for which Bhagat Singh embraced the gallows was not achieved on August 15. We achieved a kati phati (torn) azadi. We envision Akhand Bharat. One day, the tricolour will be hoisted in Islamabad and the dream of Akhand Bharat will be realised."

Kailash Vijayvargiya, Minister, Madhya Pradesh

J&K Cloudburst

Rescue operations continue for third day

Kishtwar/Jammu: A co-ordinated rescue and relief operation continued for the third consecutive day on Saturday in a remote village in Jammu and Kashmir’s Kishtwar district, where 60 people lost their lives and over 100 others were injured, officials said.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh, accompanied by Jammu and Kashmir Di-rector General of Police (DGP) Nalin Prabhat, visited the devastated village late Friday night and re-viewed ongoing rescue and relief efforts carried out by the police, army, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Border Roads Organisation (BRO), civil administration, and local volunteers operating in the high-alti-tude terrain.

So far, 46 bodies have been identified and handed over to their next of kin after completion of legal



National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel carry a dead body on a stretcher during rescue operations after Thursday’s flash floods in Chositi village, Kishtwar distr.

Pic: PTI

formalities. Meanwhile, 75 persons have been reported missing by their families, although locals and eyewitnesses claim that hundreds may have been swept away by flash floods and buried under giant boulders, logs, and rubble.

Among the deceased were two personnel of the

Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and a Special Police Officer (SPO) of the local police, the offi-cials added.

The disaster struck Chisoti—the last motor-able village en route to the Machail Mata temple—at approximately 12:25 pm on August 14. It flattened a

makeshift market, a langar (community kitchen) site for the yatra, and a secu-rity outpost.

At least 16 residential houses and government buildings, three temples, four water mills, a 30-me-ter-long bridge, and over a dozen vehicles were also damaged in the flash

floods.

The annual Machail Mata yatra, which began on July 25 and was sched-uled to conclude on Sep-tember 5, remained sus-pended for the third consecutive day on Satur-day. The 8.5-kilometre trek to the 9,500-foot-high shrine starts from Chisoti, located about 90 kilome-tres from Kishtwar town.

Rescue efforts were in-tensified with the deploy-ment of nearly a dozen earth-movers by the civil administration and the use of specialized equipment and dog squads by the NDRF.

“After a long, tedious uphill drive, managed to reach the site of the cloudburst disaster in Kisht-war... very late, around midnight,” the Union Min-ister said in a social media post after the visit.

He was accompanied by the DGP and was briefed on the ongoing rescue and relief operations. -PTI



People make a ‘rangoli’ on the occasion of ‘Janmashtami’ festival in Moradabad on Saturday.

Pic: PTI

Trailer launch of ‘The Bengal Files’ stopped

Kolkata: The Kolkata Po-lice on Saturday stopped the trailer launch of ‘The Bengal Files’, based on the 1946 Calcutta Riots, its di-rector Vivek Agnihotri claimed.

The trailer of the contro-versial film was slated to be screened at a five-star hotel in the metropolis in the afternoon.

Police personnel present at the venue refused to comment on the issue.

Agnihotri, however, al-leged that it was an attack on the democratic rights of people, as the censor board had cleared the film and “the Calcutta High Court stayed a ban on it”.

The screening of the trailer was first stopped by a representative of the ho-tel around 1 pm, who said that permission had been granted for only a press conference, he said.

As the trailer was shown again a little later, “sud-denly five-six Kolkata Po-

lice officers entered the banquet hall where the programme was being held and stopped the screening midway,” the director claimed.

The filmmaker was also seen engaged in a heated argument with the police personnel and a hotel staff.

Agnihotri alleged that the screening was stopped at the behest of the ruling Trinamool Congress and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and that her party leaders also threat-ened the hotel manage-ment to halt the trailer midway.

Addressing reporters, Agnihotri asserted that ‘The Bengal Files’, “which is based on facts and has passed the censor hurdle”, is being prevented from screening by “the person who is at the helm of the ad ministration in Bengal”.

Asked if he meant Ban-erjee, he said, “Yes, you

are right.”

“The trailer is now being seen all over the country, but since it is based in Ben-gal, we wanted its launch here. They don’t want the atrocities on Bengali Hin-dus in 1946 and the fight-back of people like Gopal Mukherjee to be shown in cinema. If it is a part of his-tory, do you want to change history?” he told reporters.

“There can be only one reason behind such a move, to ignore the con-spiracy to divide Bengal again. I wish to believe this government is not anti-Hindu,” Agnihotri said.

‘The Bengal Files’ delves into the communal violence in undivided Bengal during the 1940s. The film is scheduled to release in theatres on September 5.

The producer of the film Abhishek Agarwal later told PTI that “no force can stop us to release the film on September 5.” -PTI

Cabbie holds family hostage in taxi to evade chasing cops

Noida: A cab driver has been arrested after he held a family “hostage” during their ride as Noida Police chased the speeding car for deliberately jumping bar-ricades, officials said on Saturday.

PCR sirens blaring in the background, a four-year-old frightened girl crying and her parents pleading the driver to stop the vehicle -- showed a video of the nerve-racking incident recorded by the family.

Noida Phase 3 Police said the accused has been arrested and two Aadhaar cards were found from his possession -- one in the name of ‘Nasim’ and an- other ‘Sonu’.

On Thursday at around 1.30 pm, Sanjay Mohan booked a cab for Delhi’s Connaught Place from his home in Greater Noida. Mohan, his wife and their four-year-old daughter sat in the cab and started their ride. However, at Parthala bridge in Noida, police sig-naled the driver to stop but he sped off, jumping the barricades, the police said.

Stunned by the driver’s sudden move, the couple

requested him to stop the car and drop them off. However, he ignored and began driving rashly for several kilometers to es-cape the PCR van chasing him, they said.

The couple kept plead-ing and when the driver managed to outrun the po-lice team, he stopped the vehicle for barely a few seconds at TP Nagar. As soon as the family got down, he fled, they said.

The entire incident was recorded by the family. It surfaced on social media on Friday, prompting offi-cials to identify and nab the accused, the police said.

Central Noida DCP Shakti Mohan Awasthy said, “A viral video of rash driving of a cab driver went viral on August 14. Police registered a case against him at Phase 3 Po-lice Station and later the driver identified as Nasim was arrested from Sahara cut.”

“The Wagon R has been seized and a challan of Rs 29,500 was issued,” he said.

According to Mohan, his wife suffered minor inju-ries in her hand. -PTI

Man arrested for murder in 1999

New Delhi: On the run for over 26 years, a man was arrested earlier this week by CBI on the charge of a 1999 murder in the King-dom of Saudi Arabia, an official said on Saturday.

Mohammad Dilshad was nabbed at the Indira Gan-dhi International Airport here on August 11 as he returned from Madinah via Jeddah under a new identity and passport.

According to officials, Dilshad, who worked as a heavy motor mechanic and security guard in Riyadh, allegedly murdered an in-dividual at his place of work in 1999.

He gave a slip to Saudi authorities and fled to In-dia, where he assumed a new identity and passport through deceptive means, they said, adding Dilshad continued to evade law enforcement using the new passport, which allowed him to frequently visit Gulf countries during the period.

The CBI took over the case in April 2022 at the re-quest of Saudi Arabia to trace and locally prosecute the absconder. The federal probe agency tracked Dil-shad’s native village in UP’s Bijnor district.



Artistes of Kendra Dance Repertory perform a dance drama depicting the journey of Lord Krishna in New Delhi on Saturday.

Pic: PTI

ISRO space laboratory in Arunachal

Itanagar: A state-of-the-art space laboratory was inaugurated by Arunachal Pradesh Education Minis-ter Pasang Dorjee Sona at remote Mechuka in Shi-Yomi district.

The lab at Mechuka Gov-ernment Higher Second-ary School, established in collaboration between the Indian Space Research Or-ganisation (ISRO) and Muskaan Foundation, aims to provide students with hands-on experience in space science and technology, fostering curiosity, innovation, and scientific thinking among the youth, an official statement said

on Friday.

The facility has been named Pasang Wangchuk Sona ISRO Space Labora-tory, in honour of the min-ister’s father and in recog-nition of his lifelong belief in the transformative pow-er of education, it said.

“Today marks an emo-tional and proud moment for me as I inaugurated the ‘Pasang Wangchuk Sona ISRO Space Laboratory’ -- dedicated to my late father. This laboratory is not just an educational facility, it is a tribute to his unwavering belief in the power of edu-cation and curiosity. I hope it becomes a place where

our children dream bigger, explore science fearlessly, and reach for the stars,” Sona said, while speaking after inaugurating the fa-cility on Friday.

He emphasised that the laboratory will serve as a hub for learning and inno-vation, inspiring genera-tions of students from Shi-Yomi to pursue excellence in the fields of science and technology.

Shi-Yomi Deputy Com-missioner LiyiBagra, De-puty Director of School Ed-ucation TadeDabi, Muskaan chief operating officer Pranesh Debnath attended the event. -PTI

‘Illegal’ human egg trading racket busted

Hyderabad: A major rack-et of commercial surro-gacy and “illegal” human egg trading allegedly operated by a network of seven women and a man in “col-lusion” with several ferti-lity centres in Hyderabad was busted here, Cy-berabad police have said.

Two agents—a woman (45) and her son (27), were arrested in connection with the racket and notices were issued to six donors, surrogate mothers, police said.

The accused were ex-ploiting childless couples for illegal monetary gain, a release from Cyberabad Police said.

Acting on reliable infor-mation, a special police team on Friday conducted a raid on a premises under the Pet-Basheerabad Po-lice Station limits in the presence of the District Medical and Health Offi-cer. During the operation, the two accused persons were apprehended, they added.

The ongoing investiga-tion revealed that the prime accused, the woman agent, had earlier worked as an egg donor and surro-gate mother, police said.

Using her experience and network of contacts

with other agents, fertility clinics, and centres, she began recruiting women to act as egg donors or surro-gate mothers and referred them to the different ferti-lity centres.

For each successful pro-cedure, she collected sub-stantial amounts. She tar-geted financially vulnerable women, per-suaded them to donate eggs or become surrogates, and kept them at her resi-dence, collecting addition-al maintenance charges from the hospitals, the re-lease said.

Her son, a Chemical En-gineering graduate, as-sisted her in running the illegal business, which served as their sole source of income, police said.

The donors and surro-gate mothers involved were aware that commer-cial surrogacy is prohibi-ted by law but were part of it for financial gain.

The alleged involvement of the fertility clinics and centres is still under investigation.

A case was registered against the accused under relevant sections of Surro-gacy Regulation Act, As-sisted Reproductive Tech-nology Act and BNS Act. -PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“We want to form an alliance between Hindus, who believe in the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar, and Muslims. Such an equation can easily defeat the BJP.”

Prashant Kishor, Founder, Jan Suraj Party

Shukla to return to India today, to meet PM

New Delhi: Astronaut Shub-hanshu Shukla is set to return to India on Sunday after his historic visit to the International Space Station (ISS) and is eager to share his experiences with friends and colleagues back home as ISRO eyes its maiden human spaceflight in 2027.

Shukla, who has been in the US, training for the Axiom-4 mission to ISS for the past one year, is expected to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and travel to his hometown Lucknow soon after.

He is expected to be back in the capital to participate in the National Space Day celebrations

on August 22-23.

Shukla posted on Instagram a smiling photograph of himself sitting in an aeroplane, and said in its caption that he was filled with mixed emotions as he left the US and could not wait to re-turn to India to share his experi-ences with everyone back home.

“As I sit on the plane to come back to India, I have a mix of emotions running through my heart. I feel sad leaving a fantas-tic group of people behind who were my friends and family for the past one year during this mission.

I am also excited about meet-ing all my friends, family and



everyone in the country for the first time post mission. I guess this is what life is -- everything all at once,” Shukla said in the post.

“Having received incredible love and support from everyone during and after the mission, I can’t wait to come back to India to share my experiences with all of you. Goodbyes are hard but we need to keep moving in life. As my commander Peggy Whit-son fondly says, ‘the only con-stant in spaceflight is change’. I believe that applies to life as well,” he said.

Shukla also added, “I guess at the end of the day -Yun hi chala

chal rahi - jeevan gaadi hai sa-may pahiya’,” recalling the song from the Bollywood movie Swades that was on his playlist just before he embarked on the Axiom-4 mission to the ISS on June 25 from the US.

Shukla and his backup astro-naut Prashanth Nair partici-pated in the Independence Day ce-lebrations at the Indian Consulate in Houston on Friday.

Shukla was part of the Axi-om-4 private space mission that lifted off from Florida on June 25 and docked at the Interna-tional Space Station on June 26. He returned to Earth on July 15.

US may not impose secondary tariffs on India



Indian Tricolor hoisted at Seattle's 605 feet tall Space Needle celebrating India's Independence Day. Pic: PTI

New York: President Donald Trump has indicated that the US may not impose secondary tariffs on countries continuing to procure Russia crude oil.

There were apprehensions that additional secondary tariffs would have hit India in case the US decided to enforce them.

"Well, he (Russian President Vladimir Putin) lost an oil client, so to speak, which is India, which was doing about 40 per cent of the oil. China, as you know, is doing a lot...And if I did what's called a secondary sanction, or a secondary

tariff, it would be very devastating from their standpoint. If I have to do it, I'll do it. Maybe I won't have to do it," Trump said on Friday.

The US president made the remarks in an interview with Fox News aboard Air Force One en route to Alaska for a high-stakes summit meeting with Putin. The meeting concluded without any agreement on ending the Russia-Ukraine war.

On Wednesday, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had said if "things don't go well" between

Trump and Putin at the summit meeting, then secondary sanctions on India for purchasing Russian oil could go up.

In an interview with Bloomberg, Bessent said, "I think everyone has been frustrated with President Putin. We expected that he would come to the table in a more fulsome way. It looks like he may be ready to negotiate."

"And we put secondary tariffs on the Indians for buying Russian oil. And I could see, if things don't go well, then sanctions or secondary tariffs could go

up," he added.

On whether sanctions can go up or loosened, Bessent had said, "Sanctions can go up, they can be loosened. They can have a definitive life. They can go on indefinitely."

Trump imposed tariffs totalling 50 per cent on India, including 25 per cent for Delhi's purchases of Russian oil that will come into effect from August 27.

Responding to the tariffs, the Ministry of External Affairs has said that the targeting of India is unjustified and unreasonable. -PTI

Flight Attendants' Strike Air Canada suspends operations

Toronto: Air Canada suspended all operations as more than 10,000 Air Canada flight attendants went on strike early Saturday after a deadline to reach a deal passed, leaving travellers around the world stranded and scrambling during the peak summer travel season.

Canadian Union of Public Employees spokesman Hugh Pouliot confirmed the strike has started after no deal was reached, and the airline said shortly after that it would halt operations.

A bitter contract fight between Canada's largest airline and the union representing 10,000 of its flight attendants escalated on Friday.

The union turned down the airline's request to enter into government-directed arbitration, which would eliminate its right to strike and allow a third-party mediator to decide the terms of a new contract.

Flight attendants walked off the job around 1 am EDT on Saturday. Around the same time, Air Canada said it would begin locking flight attendants out of airports.

Federal Jobs Minister Patty Hajdu met with both the airline and union on Friday night and urged them to work harder to them to reach a deal "once and for all."

"It is unacceptable that such little progress has been made. Canadians are counting on both parties to put forward their best efforts," Hajdu said in a statement posted on social media. -AP

MONEY MATTERS

Financial Freedom – India at 78



By
Kaustubh Kale

As India celebrates 78 years of freedom, it's a perfect time to reflect on another kind of liberation - Financial Freedom.

Just as our nation's journey towards independence was long and purposeful, the path to personal financial independence requires vision, discipline, and persistence. While the terms financial independence and financial freedom are often used interchangeably, they have distinct meanings that are crucial to understand for long-term stability and security.

Here's my interpretation in financial parlance:

Financial Independence (FI)

FI is when an individual has the education, skill set, and expertise to earn a monthly income that exceeds their living expenses. This ensures they are not financially dependent on parents, spouse, or children, and can live life on their own terms.

Basically, as long as the person is able to actively work, the expenses are well taken care of. A financially independent person can cover current expenses comfortably while also saving for future goals - buying a house or car, going on vacations, funding children's education and weddings, and building a retirement corpus.

This is why we increasingly see women taking charge of their well-being, decision-making, and financial security. Because they are 'FI', they do not have to necessarily be dependent on their parents or spouse. Money does give a lot of power! Importantly, FI is the stepping stone to achieving Financial Freedom.

Financial Freedom (FF)

While incomes can be temporary, ex-

penses are permanent. Here, income refers to active income - money earned by actively working (devoting time, effort and resources). A financially independent person, as a virtue of consistently saving, investing, and staying invested, can build assets making him financially free.

Financial Freedom is when a person has built enough wealth or income-generating assets to cover their expenses for life, without relying on a job or external support. It's the stage where your investments pay your bills. Such a person is not dependent on their children to cover after-retirement expenses.

Key examples of such income streams:

- Mutual Funds: Systematic Withdrawal Plan (SWP)
- Stocks: Dividends
- Bank Fixed Deposits: Interest Income
- Insurance Pension Plans: Pension Income
- Real Estate: Rental Income

Achieving financial freedom allows an individual to break free from the need for a regular paycheck, enabling them to pursue passions, travel, start a business, retire early, or devote time to social causes and legacy-building.

Take Help from Financial Advisors

Consult a well-educated, full-time advisor who will guide and handhold you. Remember, it takes years of education, experience, expertise and wisdom to write a prescription - so don't self-medicate when it comes to money.

To Conclude

As India continues its march towards growth and self-reliance, the concepts of FI and FF have never been more relevant. Both demand careful planning, disciplined saving, and smart investing. The reward? A life of stability, choice, and abundance.

(The writer is a Chartered Accountant and CFA (USA), Financial Advisor. Views personal. He could be reached on 983133605.)

Modi to inaugurate highway projects

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate on Sunday two major national highway projects worth a total of nearly Rs 11,000 crore in the Rohini area of the national capital.

The PMO said on Saturday that the projects, the Delhi section of the Dwarka Expressway and the Urban Extension Road-II (UER-II), have been developed under the comprehensive plan to decongest the capital. The new stretches are expected to vastly improve connectivity, cut travel time, and reduce traffic in Delhi and its surrounding areas.

The 10.1 km-long Delhi section of the Dwarka Expressway has been developed at a cost of around Rs 5,360 crore. The section will also provide multi-modal connectivity to Yashobhoomi, DMRC Blue line and Orange line, the upcoming Bijwasan railway station and the Dwarka cluster bus depot. This project comprises a 5.9 km-section, from Shiv Murti Intersection to the Road Under Bridge (RUB) at Dwarka Sector-21.



A worker with a cylinder cart wades through a waterlogged road following heavy rainfall in Nala Sopara on Saturday. Pic: PTI

'Want it to be Good, Simple Tax'

New Delhi: The Congress Saturday demanded an official discussion paper on GST 2.0 soon for a wider debate on it and said the reform should be towards a "Good and Simple Tax" in letter, spirit, and compliance, and not the "Growth Suppressing Tax" it has become.

The opposition party's assertion came a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that GST rates will be lowered by Diwali, bringing down prices of everyday use items, as his government looks to

reform the eight-year-old regime that has been plagued by litigation and evasion.

Congress general secretary in-charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said that for well over a year and a half at least, the party has been calling for a radically transformed GST 2.0.

Noting that a transformed GST 2.0 was a key pledge in the Congress manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Ramesh on Friday said the prime minister seems to have fi-

nally woken up to the fact that economic growth will simply not accelerate unless this transformation takes place and increases private consumption and private investment.

"Over the last seven years, the spirit of GST has been vitiated by an increased number of rates and the granting of multiple exemptions. The structure also seems to have facilitated evasion. There must be a drastic reduction in the number of rates," he said in a statement. -PTI

Tax assessee must comply with summons: SC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has held that an assessee must comply with a summons and furnish a response to a show cause notice when it is issued by the central or the state tax authority.

"Assessee" under the Income Tax Act of 1961 refers to any individual or entity that holds the legal liability of tax payment or any other financial commitments as specified by the Act.

Thus, laying down guidelines to prevent duplication of adjudication by central and state GST authorities, a bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan said that mere issuance of a summons does not enable either the issuing authority or the recipient to ascertain that proceedings have been initiated.

"Where a summons or a show cause notice is issued by either the Central or the State tax authority to an assessee, the assessee is, in the first instance, obliged to comply by appearing and furnishing the requisite response, as the case may be.



"Where an assessee becomes aware that the matter being inquired into or investigated is already the subject of an inquiry or investigation by another authority, the assessee shall forthwith inform, in writing, the authority that has initiated the subsequent inquiry or investigation," the bench said.

The top court said the respective tax authorities shall communicate with each other to verify the veracity of the assessee's claim after receipt of such intimation.

"We say, so as this course of action would obviate needless duplication of proceedings and ensure optimal utilisation of the Department's time, effort,

and resources, bearing in mind that action initiated by one authority enures to the benefit of all.

"If the claim of the taxable person regarding the overlap of inquiries is found untenable, and the investigations of the two authorities pertain to different 'subject matters', an intimation to this effect, along with the reasons and a specification of the distinct subject matters, shall be immediately conveyed in writing to the taxable person," the bench added.

The apex court said the taxing authorities are well within their rights to conduct an inquiry or investigation until it is ascertained that both authorities are examining the identi-

cal liability.

Any show cause notice issued in respect of a liability already covered by an existing show cause notice shall be quashed, it said.

"However, if the Central or the State tax authority, as the case may be, finds that the matter being inquired into or investigated by it is already the subject of inquiry or investigation by another authority, both authorities shall decide inter se which of them shall continue with the inquiry or investigation.

"In such a scenario, the other authority shall duly forward all material and information relating to its inquiry or investigation into the matter to the authority designated to carry the inquiry or investigation to its logical conclusion," the bench said in its August 14 judgement.

The judgement came on a plea by Armour Security, a public limited company providing security services and registered with the Delhi GST authorities, involved in a dispute concerning tax demands and investigations. -PTI

Hospitality majors explore eco-tourism

Port Blair: Top hospitality companies, including Tata group's IHCL and Hyatt Hotels Corp, have shown interest in developing eco-tourism resorts at four locations in Andamans, including the uninhabited Aves Island, which will be opened for tourism for the first time, officials said on Saturday.

The eco-tourism properties will be developed on a public-private partnership (PPP) basis at Neil Island, Aves Island, Long Island and Smith Island. Besides, the administration is also

looking to redevelop the Megapode Resort in Port Blair, they said.

The Andaman & Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Ltd (ANIIDCO) on July 28 invited bids for developing the resorts on a design, build, finance, operate and transfer basis, they added.

A virtual pre-bid meeting was held on August 14, and it was attended by officials of some of the biggest players of the sector, including The Leela, Indira Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), Club Mahindra,



Hyatt Hotels Corp, Ambuja Neotia Hospitality, Chalet Hotels, Juniper Hotels, The Park, Polo Hotels Ltd and GVK Group, officials said.

"The pre-bid meeting was organised to provide a platform to the potential investors to share their suggestions and seek clarifications, if any. The discussions covered the entire project life cycle for all the proposed developments," ANIIDCO MD Chanchal Yadav said.

and Nicobar Islands into a global destination of sustainable and nature-led tourism. I am happy to share that we are planning site visits for the investors during the first week of September," she added.

The bidding will take place on September 15.

It is for the first time that the Aves Island, which is known for its acres of coconut plantation, will be opened for tourism.

After the resort comes up, the administration believes that Aves Island will become the most sought-

after destination in the Andamans after Havelock Island. It is close to the Mayabunder town and has live and dead coral flat beds along with a 2-km coastline, making it an ideal destination for campers, officials said.

A land parcel of 2.75 hectare is owned by the administration, which will be handed over to ANIIDCO on lease for the development of the project. The property will involve an investment of nearly Rs 36 crore and have 50 rooms, they said. -PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The administration will take steps to regulate airfare so that airlines do not burden passengers with exorbitant charges, particularly during the harsh winter months. No stone will be left unturned in boosting tourism and strengthening connectivity."



Kavinder Gupta, LG, Ladakh

‘Deal Maker’ Trump fails to impress Putin

US PRESIDENT COULD NOT REACH AN AGREEMENT ON ENDING UKRAIN WAR

Alaska: President Donald Trump failed to secure an agreement from Vladimir Putin on Friday to end Russia's war in Ukraine, falling short in his most significant move yet to stop the bloodshed, even after rolling out the red carpet for the man who started it.

"There's no deal until there's a deal," the US President said, after Putin claimed they had hammered out an "understanding" on Ukraine and warned Europe not to "torpedo the nascent progress." Trump said he would call Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders to brief them on the talks.

Trump, who for years has balked at American support for Ukraine and expressed admiration for Putin, had pledged confidently to bring about an end to the war on his first day back in the White House. Seven months later, after berating Zelenskyy in the Oval Office and stanching the flow of some U.S. military assistance to Kyiv, Trump could not bring Putin even to pause the fighting, as his forces make gains on the battlefield.

The US President had offered Putin both a carrot and a stick, issuing threats of punishing economic sanctions on Russia while also extending a warm welcome at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, but he appeared to walk away without any concrete progress on end-



President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin before their meeting, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska.

Pic: AP/PTI

ing the war in Ukraine, now in its fourth year.

Instead, he handed Putin long-sought recognition on the international stage, after years of Western efforts to make him a pariah over the war and his crackdown on dissent, and forestalled the threat of additional U.S. sanctions.

In a sign that the conversations did not yield Trump's preferred result, the two leaders ended what was supposed to be a joint news conference without taking questions from reporters.

Deal-making skills

During a subsequent interview with Fox News Channel before leaving Alaska, Trump insisted that the onus going forward might be somehow on Zelenskyy "to get it done," but said there would also be some involvement from Europe-

an nations. That was notable since Zelenskyy was excluded from Trump and Putin's meeting.

The U.S. president had wanted to show off his deal-making skills, while Putin wanted to negotiate a deal that would cement Russia's gains, block Kyiv's bid to join the NATO military alliance and eventually pull Ukraine back into Moscow's orbit.

"We had an extremely productive meeting, and many points were agreed to," Trump said while standing next to Putin. "And there are just a very few that are left. Some are not that significant. One is probably the most significant, but we have a very good chance of getting there." He continued: "We didn't get there."

Russia's interests

For Putin, just being on U.S. soil for the first time in

more than a decade was validation after his ostracization following his invasion of Ukraine.

His meeting with Trump may stall the economic sanctions that the U.S. president had promised unless Moscow worked harder to bring the fighting to a close. It also may simply lead to more meetings, giving his forces more time to make progress on the battlefield.

Putin said Russia and the United States should "turn the page and go back to cooperation."

He praised Trump as someone who "has a clear idea of what he wants to achieve and sincerely cares about the prosperity of his country, and at the same time shows understanding that Russia has its own national interests."

"I expect that today's agreements will become a reference point not only for solving the Ukrainian problem, but will also mark the beginning of the restoration of business-like, pragmatic relations between Russia and the U.S.," Putin said.

Despite not reaching any major breakthrough, Trump ended his remarks by thanking Putin and saying, "we'll speak to you very soon and probably see you again very soon."

When Putin smiled and offered, "next time in Moscow," Trump said "that's an interesting one" and said he might face criticism but "I could see it possibly happening."

Face saving

During the interview with Fox News, Trump bragged that Putin echoed many of the U.S. president's longstanding grievances, including about the 2020 election. This suggests that Putin, a former KGB officer, may have left Trump with the impression that he'd notched a big win even as he left empty handed.

When Trump and Putin arrived in Alaska, they had greeted each other with a warm handshake, chatting almost like old friends, and gripped hands for an extended period on a red carpet rolled out at the military base. As they chatted, Putin grinned and pointed skyward, where B-2s and F-22s — military aircraft designed to oppose Russia during the Cold War — flew overhead. The two then shared the U.S. presidential limo for a short ride to their meeting site, with Putin offering a broad smile as they rolled past the cameras.

It was the kind of reception typically reserved for close U.S. allies and belied the bloodshed and suffering in the war Putin started in Ukraine. Although not altogether surprising considering their longtime friendly relationship, such outward friendliness likely raised concerns from Zelenskyy and European leaders, who fear that Trump is primarily focusing on furthering U.S. interests and not pressing hard enough for Ukraine's. **-AP**



Devotees walk carrying incense during a parade celebrating the birthday of Lord Krishna on Krishna Janmashtami in Bhaktapur, Nepal on Saturday. Pic: PTI

Tri-national nature reserve to protect Mayan jungle

MEXICO, GUATEMALA AND BELIZE TAKE THE INITIATIVE

Guatemala City: The leaders of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize announced on Friday that they were creating a tri-national nature reserve to protect the Mayan rainforest following a meeting during which they also discussed expanding a Mexican train line criticized for slicing through jungle habitat.

The nature reserve would stretch across jungled areas of southern Mexico and northern parts of the two Central American nations, encompassing more than 14 million acres (5.7 million hectares). Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum called the move "historic" and said it would create the second biggest nature reserve in Latin America, behind the Amazon rainforest.

"This is one of Earth's lungs, a living space for thousands of species with an invaluable cultural legacy that we should preserve with our eyes on the fu-

ture," Sheinbaum said, standing side-by-side with Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo and Belize Prime Minister Johnny Briceño.

The leaders also discussed a proposal by Mexico to expand a controversial train line, known as the Maya Train, from southern Mexico to Guatemala and Belize. The thousand-mile train currently runs in a rough loop around Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, and was created with the purpose of connecting Mexico's popular Caribbean resorts with remote jungle and Mayan archaeological sites in rural areas.

However, it has fueled controversy and legal battles as it sliced through swaths of jungle and damaged a delicate cave system in Mexico that serves as the area's main source of water. In a span of four years, authorities cut down approximately 7 million trees, according to

government figures.

Sheinbaum's mentor and predecessor former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador fast-tracked the train project without detailed environmental studies. The populist repeatedly ignored orders from judges to stop construction due to environmental concerns and publicly attacked environmentalists warning about damage done to fragile ecosystems.

López Obrador first proposed the idea of expanding the train to Guatemala, and Sheinbaum has continued to push for the project. On Friday, she said the extension would usher in development in rural areas with few economic opportunities.

But Guatemala's Arévalo was already on record saying his country's laws would not allow it to be built through protected jungle in the north of the country.

-AP

Jaishankar meets S Korean counterpart



New Delhi: India and South Korea on Saturday resolved to expand their strategic partnership by boosting co-operation in the areas of semiconductor, clean energy, defence and artificial intelligence.

Ways to ramp up the overall bilateral cooperation figured prominently in talks between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his visiting South Korean counterpart, Cho Hyun.

"Held productive discussions on advancing our bilateral cooperation in trade, manufacturing, maritime and people-to-people exchanges as well as new opportunities in AI, semiconductors, clean energy and defence," the external affairs minister said in a post on X.

Jaishankar said he and Hyun also exchanged perspectives on the Indo-Pacific region and contemporary global developments. "Appreciated our deepen-

ing convergences and growing engagement as our Special Strategic Partnership completes 10 years," he added.

In his opening remarks at the meeting, Jaishankar also thanked Seoul for its condemnation of the horrific Pahalgam terror attack.

The external affairs minister also made a mention of Seoul's support to an Indian parliamentary delegation that visited South Korea in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor.

"You have been barely a month in the job (as the foreign minister), the fact that you are here literally a day after your National Day, and our National Day, says a lot really about the value we attach to the relationship," Jaishankar said.

The India-South Korea ties have been on an upswing in the last few years, especially in the areas of trade and defence. **-PTI**

China's Minister to visit India

New Delhi: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will pay a two-day visit to India beginning Monday to hold border talks with National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Saturday.

Wang's visit comes days ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's planned trip to China to attend the annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

The Chinese foreign minister is visiting India primarily to hold the next round of Special Representatives (SR) dialogue on the boundary question.

Wang and Doval are the designated special representatives for the boundary talks. "At the invitation of National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will visit India on August 18 and 19," the MEA said in a statement.

"During his visit, he will hold the 24th round of the Special Representatives' (SR) talks on the India-China boundary question with India's SR, NSA Doval," it added.



A man performs a pyrotechnic show at the Palace of Versailles before the fireworks display in Versailles outside Paris.

Pic: AP/PTI

China gives third submarine to Pak

By K J M Varma

Beijing: China has delivered the third of the eight new "advanced" Hangor-class submarines to Pakistan as part of Beijing's efforts to upgrade Islamabad's naval strength to support its growing presence in the Indian Ocean, India's backyard.

The launching ceremony of the third Hangor-class submarine was held in Wuhan, Central China's Hubei province, on Thursday, the state-run Global Times reported on Saturday.

The second of the eight submarines China is building for Pakistan was handed over in March this year.

This is in addition to four modern naval frigates that China supplied to Pakistan in the last few years as part of its efforts to boost Pakistan's naval strength amid the Chinese navy's steady expansion in the Arabian Sea, where it is developing the Gwadar port in Balochistan, as well as in the Indian Ocean.

Speaking at the launch of the third submarine, Pakistan's Deputy Chief of Naval Staff Project-2 Vice Admiral Abdul Samad said the Hangor-class submarine's cutting-edge weaponry and advanced sensors would be instrumental in sustaining regional power equilibrium and ensuring

maritime stability, the daily quoted a Pakistan defence statement as saying.

According to a recent report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), China supplied over 81 per cent of Pakistan's military hardware.

Some of Pakistan's key orders in the past five years include the country's first spy ship, the Rizwan; more than 600 VT-4 battle tanks, and 36 J-10CE 4.5-generation fighters, according to the SIPRI database.

China supplied the first delivery of multi-role J-10CE fighter jets to the Pakistan Air Force in 2022.

-PTI

Pak Flash Floods

Death toll rises to 307

Peshawar: The death toll from the recent flash floods in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rose to over 300, with those killed also including 13 children, provincial authorities said on Saturday.

Torrential rains, which triggered flash floods in various districts of the province, are expected to continue intermittently until August 21, according to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA).

PDMA Spokesman Faizi said that in the past 48 hours, 307 people were killed by the devastating rains, cloud bursts and flash floods.

In a preliminary report, the PDMA said that those killed include 279 men, 15 women, and 13 children. It said that 23 people were also injured, including 17 men, four women, and two children.

The affected districts include Bajaur, Buner, Swat, Manahra, Shangla, Torghar, and Batagram. Buner was the worst-hit, recording 184 deaths.

Shangla reported 36 deaths, followed by Manahra with 23, Swat 22, Bajaur 21, Battagram 15, Lower Dir five, while a child drowned in Abbottabad.

A total of 74 houses have been damaged so far, of which 63 were partially and 11 completely destroyed, the PDMA said.

It added that relief teams and district administrations are in close coordination and are continuously monitoring the situation.

Relief funds have been released for flood-hit districts on the directives of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur.

He instructed all departments concerned to expedite rescue and relief operations in the affected areas. Instructions have also been issued to mobilise all available resources for the restoration of blocked highways and link roads in tourist areas.

Tourists have been advised to remain updated on the weather conditions and take necessary safety precautions, PDMA said.

On Friday, the PDMA spokesperson had said that the number of those dead or injured was expected to rise further as scores of people were still missing in affected areas.

Since late June, the beginning of monsoon season, torrential rains have wreaked havoc across the country. **-PTI**

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I believe that the ideals and teachings of Lord Sri Krishna will further strengthen the bonds of brotherhood. Let us, through our collective efforts, build a new Bangladesh enriched with communal harmony."

Muhammad Yunus,
Chief Adviser, Bangladesh



Astronauts, diaspora celebrate India's I-Day

By Seema Hakhu Kachru

Houston: India's 79th Independence Day was celebrated with patriotic fervor at the Consulate General of India in Houston on Friday, with a large turnout from the Indian diaspora in the early hours, despite it being a workday.

Consul General D. C. Manjunath hoisted the national flag and read out the President of India's address, emphasizing India's unity, resilience, and progress. The celebrations also featured an exhibition on

the history of the Tiranga as part of the Har Ghar Tiranga campaign, encouraging Indians to honor the national flag in their homes.

The event was graced by India's astronauts, Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla—who recently returned from a space mission—and Group Captain Prashanth Nair, along with Ajay Singh, Press Secretary to the President of India, and Indian American Dr. Renu Khator, President of the University of Houston. The astronauts, warmly



welcomed by the gathering, took pictures and selfies with members of the diaspora, creating memorable moments for the community.

Other dignitaries included Katherine Ho, Regional

Director of the Office of Foreign Missions, U.S. State Department; representatives from the offices of Senators John Cornyn and Ted Cruz; representatives of the Mayor of Houston and other precinct commis-

sioners; and Council Member Sanjay Singhal, on behalf of the Mayor of Sugar Land.

A cultural program showcased India's rich artistic heritage, featuring classical Odissi dance by senior dancers of the Mayor Dance Academy and a medley of patriotic songs by students of the Gandharva School of Music. Winners of a painting and essay competition, organized by the Consulate for children of the Indian community, were also felicitated.

Attendees expressed pride and joy in celebrating India's independence abroad. One community member said, "Joining the early-morning celebration with the astronauts and the diaspora fills us with immense pride. It's a moment we will always remember."

The event reflected the vibrant spirit of the Indian community in Houston and underscored the importance of preserving cultural heritage while celebrating India's progress and global achievements. **-PTI**

RED FIREWALL

Document Number 9 and China's Ideological Cold War



By
Laurence Westwood

In April 2013, the General Office of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) circulated a secret document to Party members entitled ‘Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere’. The ninth document issued by the General Office that year, this document has since come to be better known as Document Number 9.

Secret though this document was meant to be, it was soon posted online and then translated into English by the US-based Chinese language news outlet Mingjing Magazine and published in September of 2013. Initially there was some debate whether this document was genuine, whether it properly reflected the thinking of Xi Jinping and the leadership of the CCP or perhaps just a faction within the Party. But twelve years on there seems to be little doubt that Xi Jinping meant every word.

Xi Jinping's secret manifesto against 'Western values' still shapes the Party's battle to preserve its grip on power.

Xi Jinping and others in the CCP were fearful perhaps, and remain fearful to this day, that the loss of control by Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) back in 1991 that led quickly to the Soviet Union's sudden collapse might well be replicated within China. Not to mention the more recent so-called colour revolutions that aimed to install Western-style democracies in some of those post-Soviet states – revolutions propelled by protesters and activist NGOs making powerful use of an unrestricted internet to ‘undermine’ incumbent authoritarian governments.

China's unease with alien ideologies long predates the Communist era. In the late Qing dynasty, reformers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao sought to graft Western constitutionalism onto Confucian tradition, only to be crushed by conservative mandarins who feared the dynasty's unravelling. The May Fourth Movement of 1919, when students demanded “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy” was another episode where imported ideas threatened established authority. Document Number 9, in this sense, is heir to a centuries-old reflex of treating foreign philosophies not as enrichment but as existential contagion.

So, what does Document Number 9 actually say?

Essentially the document is a blueprint for the CCP's defence against what it sees as ‘Western values’ – values that if left to take root in Chinese society could potentially lead to the CCP's demise.

Document Number 9 lays out seven political ‘perils’: the promotion of Western constitutional democracy; the promotion of ‘universal values’ (for example, democracy, human rights, freedom etc.); the promotion



of ‘civil society’; the promotion of neoliberalism; the promotion of the West's ideas of journalism; the promotion of historical nihilism (meaning that the only true history is that which is written by the CCP); and, finally, questioning Reform and Opening and the socialist nature of socialism with Chinese characteristics (which basically means questioning anything that China does). Document Number 9 instructs all Party members, especially those in government at any level, to pay close attention to the ‘ideological sphere’ and always to adhere to the CCP's total control of the media.

It seems strange in 2025 to look back on comments regarding the Internet made by former US president Bill Clinton, the late Nobel prize-winning Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo, and even the artist Ai Weiwei, for example, how each of them thought the Internet could not be controlled, that the Internet would finally bring freedom to China. Indeed, with the launch of Sina Weibo in 2009 – China's equivalent of Twitter, as was –

the prophecies made by people such as Bill Clinton, Liu Xiaobo, and Ai Weiwei seemed for a time to be coming true. Weibo brought an unprecedented opening-up of the public sphere in China, people utilising Weibo to criticize the Government (and therefore the CCP), tired of all the corruption and, as they saw it, bureaucratic incompetence.

By 2012, the CCP had had enough. Censorship of the Internet in China – what has come to be known as the Great Firewall of China – had begun years before. Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube had all been banned in China back in 2009. But now it was decided, that if the CCP was going to survive in power, it had to take full control if it was going to prevent any further encroachment of ‘Western values’ into China. This is the context in which Document Number 9 was drafted in secret in 2012 and then circulated to every Party member in April 2013 (the Internet explicitly mentioned in the document), leading to the CCP reasserting its control over all messaging and media, as well



as every other aspect of civil society.

Document Number 9 should not be seen as a watershed moment in Chinese politics – just CCP policy and intention made suddenly clear for all Party members to see. The reaction of Xi Jinping and the CCP to the new freedoms promised by the Internet and the encroachment of ‘Western values’ was years in the making. It had already begun under Xi Jinping's predecessors. Some China watchers continue to point out the vulnerabilities of the CCP, that China's internal contradictions and moments of public unrest – more common than might initially be imagined – must eventually bring about its demise. But the CCP doesn't seem to be going away anytime soon. Under Xi Jinping the crackdown on journalists, human rights lawyers, NGOs, and activists has been merciless – and very effective. And the strengthening of the CCP's influence in local governments, the legal system, and the military continues apace to this day. The ideological Cold War is here to stay, Document Number 9 as rele-

vant now as it was back in 2013.

At the age of 71, the outspoken journalist Gao Yu was convicted in April 2015 of leaking state secrets (meaning Document Number 9) to foreign news media. She denied being the source of the leak – as did Mingjing Magazine. Document Number 9 had already been posted online at the time of the supposed leak. But Gao Yu had been a longtime critic of the CCP elite and despite her ill-health and advanced age – the elderly being usually venerated in China and often treated leniently under the law – the CCP took its chance to make an example of her. In November 2015 she suddenly confessed to the crime and expressed her regret. Her sentence was reduced to five years and she was allowed to spend her imprisonment in her own home.

The Party is in charge – and no one in China is allowed to forget it.

(The author is a novelist and retired investigator with an abiding passion for Chinese history. Views personal.)

NEWSMAKER OF THE WEEK

Arsonist in Uniform



By
Kiran D. Tare

Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir is the rare kind of man who can threaten to burn half the planet alive and still get a standing ovation. In Tampa, Florida, far from the dusty parade grounds of Rawalpindi, Pakistan's unelected strongman stood in full dress uniform and promised just that, if his country faced defeat in a future war with India, “we'll take half the world down with us.” This was nuclear blackmail delivered under chandeliers, with wine glasses in hand, from the soil of a nation that calls itself India's “strategic partner.”

The moment encapsulates the ‘Munir doctrine’ rather well: weaponize apocalyptic threats, dress them in the language of national honour and rely on foreign indulgence to avoid consequences. Ostensibly in town for the retirement of CENTCOM's commander, Munir chose instead to deliver not just nuclear threats but vows to smash any Indian-built dam on the Indus with “10 missiles.” For dramatic flourish, he likened India to a Mercedes and Pakistan to a dump truck full of gravel: collision would leave the road strewn with wreckage, never mind who “won.”

Days before the April 22 Pahalgam

Asim Munir thrives on nuclear blackmail, jihadist venom and shameless self-glorification while his enablers in Washington look the other way.



Self-glorification is his reward. Munir is not bluffing when he talks about destroying dams or starving millions but reminding the world that Pakistan's military thrives on the threat of mutually assured destruction, and on the West's fear of testing whether the threat is real.

And yet, Munir's recklessness is sustained by a web of enablers. In Donald Trump's America, he is indulged as a ‘stabilising’ figure. In India, the left-liberal establishment reflexively shields Pakistan (and by extension, Munir) from ideological scrutiny, conveniently preferring to talk about ‘peace’ than confront the jihadist foundation of Pakistan's state. In the Western media, he is regrettably mentioned in the same breath as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with one prominent magazine lazily lumping him and the Indian PM in the category of “South Asia's nuclear strongmen,” as though a three-time elected prime minister and an unelected military dictator of

a rogue state are morally interchangeable.

Munir's career is a study in Pakistan's militarised pathology. A former chief of military intelligence and the ISI, commissioned into the Baloch Regiment, Munir rose by navigating the murky intrigues of Rawalpindi. His elevation to army chief in November 2022 came at the cost of Imran Khan's premiership and nearly his life. For Washington, the return of military rule was a relief. Civilian governments in Pakistan tend to be unpredictable while generals can be bought and cajoled.

Nothing makes this clearer than Munir's private meeting with Donald Trump during his US visit. Trump has embraced Munir, promising “expanded cooperation” and an oil deal.

Munir's mix of nuclear brinkmanship, Islamist chauvinism and self-worship makes him far more than a regional nuisance. He has proven himself a calculated risk-taker whose threats are not idle; Pakistan's military has long used calibrated instability to keep Western aid flowing and India off balance. But Munir's willingness to talk openly about destroying dams, starving millions and taking “half the world” down marks a dangerous escalation from veiled menace to explicit invitation to catastrophe.

The tragedy is that Munir's recklessness is not punished but actively courted by Trump's Washington. The US, eyeing Pakistan's role in the mineral-rich Afghan corridor, and eager to keep a pliant army chief in Rawalpindi, looks the other way. Donald Trump's tariff tantrums against India only sweetens the bargain, making Munir a convenient lever in a bigger game of trade wars and resource grabs.

Munir in turn understands this ecosystem and exploits it, with every standing ovation abroad reinforcing his legitimacy.

The danger is that by treating Munir as a legitimate partner, Washington is wagering that he will choose restraint. It is a gamble staked on the good faith of an arsonist who knows the blaze is his most potent weapon.

DEEP DIVE

Silicon Crossfire



By
Ruddhi Phadke

In the 21st century's hierarchy of strategic resources, semiconductors have replaced oil as the most contested commodity. They power the world's most vital systems - from MRI scanners and fighter jets to smartphones and satellites. As digitalisation and automation advance, microchips are today cornerstones of both economic security and strategic independence.

The pandemic, followed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, laid bare a sobering truth that the global economy is dangerously dependent on an industry concentrated in a handful of places. Taiwan alone produces more than 60 percent of the world's semiconductors and close to 90 percent of the most advanced ones. South Korea, Japan, China and America fill most of the remaining market. Such concentration leaves supply chains perilously exposed to pandemics, earthquakes and geopolitical sabre-rattling across the Taiwan Strait.

This vulnerability has set off a worldwide scramble to build domestic chipmaking capacity. America has rolled out lavish subsidies under its CHIPS and Science Act; the European Union has pledged billions to foster a ‘chips sovereignty’ of its own; Japan and South Korea are reinforcing their foundry capabilities. India, with its growing electronics industry and geostrategic ambitions, is pitching itself as a reliable alternative in an era of fractured supply lines.

Yet even as countries court new fabs and tout industrial strategies, an older battle has re-ignited in form of the ‘Chip War’ (to use the title of Chris Miller's bestseller on the topic) - the technological cold war be-

tween Washington and Beijing, though now in a fresh and more convoluted phase.

In May, the two sides declared what looked like a modest truce. The Biden administration agreed to lift its ban on certain Nvidia chip exports to China, including the H20 - a deliberately watered-down processor designed to skirt earlier American export controls. In return, Beijing would resume exports of rare earths, minerals vital for electronics production and over which China holds a near-monopoly. The agreement, reportedly sweetened by revenue-sharing terms that would see chipmakers give the White House a 15 percent cut of sales to China, was greeted with relief in Silicon Valley. Jensen Huang, Nvidia's boss, flew to



Beijing in July, lavishing praise on China's technological prowess.

The truce quickly crumbled. Rather than snapping up the newly approved H20s, Chinese authorities quietly told domestic firms to avoid buying American chips altogether, Nvidia's and AMD's in particular. The reasons appear two-fold. First, security concerns: Chinese policymakers fear the chips could contain hidden ‘kill switches’ or tracking capabilities, a suspicion bolstered by past moves such as banning Teslas near government sites and discouraging officials from using iPhones. Second, industrial policy: Beijing has poured billions into nurturing its own semiconductor sector, with Huawei leading the charge. While Chinese firms cannot yet match Nvidia's most sophisticated models, they can compete with the mid-range H20.

From Beijing's vantage point, the calculation is obvious. Why import

an inferior chip that could be compromised when domestic alternatives, however imperfect, would strengthen local industry? For Nvidia and AMD, this is a nasty blow. China accounts for about 13 percent of Nvidia's revenue and nearly a quarter of AMD's. Both firms had banked on renewed Chinese demand to justify their concessions in the May accord. No sales mean no revenue, and no reason for Beijing to honour the spirit of the deal.

For Washington, the ‘mini-deal’ that Donald Trump championed now looks less like a clever compromise and more like a concession China never actually sought. It is also, characteristically, vague.

The fallout may yet force Beijing to soften. If Huawei and its peers cannot meet China's domestic chip demand, particularly for artificial-intelligence workloads. China may have to turn back to Nvidia and AMD. American officials are betting on exactly that, hinting that more revenue-sharing arrangements could be floated if sales resume.

This dispute also carries lessons for the broader semiconductor race. First, that technology controls are blunt instruments. Efforts to hobble Chinese AI development by restricting chip sales have spurred, not stymied, China's industrial policy. Second, supply chains built on mutual suspicion are brittle. If Taiwan's chip foundries are the “single point of failure” in the current system, an emerging world of bifurcated tech ecosystems (one American-led, one Chinese-led) may prove even more fragile.

Meanwhile, the world's appetite for chips is only growing. Cars are becoming rolling computers. Power grids and hospitals depend on sensors and processors. Artificial intelligence, with its voracious data-crunching needs, will require ever more sophisticated silicon. The more essential chips become, the more tempting it will be for governments to weaponise them.

For now, the silicon crossfire will continue and the rest of the world had better be ready for the shrapnel.



- KALEIDOSCOPE**
1. An artiste dressed as King Mahabali walks by children during 'Onam Sadhya', a feast served on a banana leaf, amid 'Onam' festivities at St. Mary's Higher Secondary School Pattom in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday.
 2. A man with his child, who is dressed up as Lord Krishna on the occasion of 'Janmashtami' festival in Indore on Saturday.
 3. A man showers flower petals on cows on the occasion of 'Janmashtami' festival in Bikaner on Saturday.
 4. Women with their children dressed up as Lord Krishna and Radha on the occasion of 'Janmashtami' festival in Chikkamagaluru on Saturday.
 5. Young boys dressed up as Lord Krishna on the occasion of 'Janmashtami' festival in Nadia on Saturday.

All Pictures: PTI, AP

READERS' VOICE

Healing Lines



By
Supriya Roy

We live in an age when technology is habitually accused of corroding human intimacy. It is the mobile phone that often stands in the dock for this 'crime.' It is blamed for fractured attention spans, compulsive scrolling the erosion of in-person conversations and the rise of a culture that trades emotions for emojis. The charges are familiar: children hunched over screens, families silent at the dinner table, friendships reduced to push notifications.

And yet, for millions of people separated from their loved ones by distance, work or circumstance, that same glowing rectangle is less a tool of alienation than a lifeline. I know this because, for me, the mobile phone – far more than just a device – is the only bridge to the one voice that has never ceased to care – that of my mother's.

Like so many others, I work far from my hometown, detached from the everyday warmth of my mother's kitchen, her gentle counsel and her wordless acts of care. My days are consumed by deadlines and meetings, the demands of a city that is remorselessly impersonal.

Critics of technology often forget that tools are only as alienating as the purposes to which they are put. The same screen that hosts shallow scrolling can carry the most profound human exchanges.



And yet, each evening, I anticipate one thing above all else: her call. It is never long and rarely elaborated. "Did you have lunch?" "What did you eat for dinner?" "How's your health today?"

Simple questions, often repeated. But embedded in them is an unselfish investment of time and thought in my well-being. These calls are, in the most literal sense, 'medicinal.' They quieten the static of my day and remind me that someone, somewhere, loves without condition.

Once, midway through a crucial meeting, my phone began to buzz. The screen flashed "Ma." My pulse quickened. Her unexpected calls during odd hours always carry the shadow of alarm: has something happened at home?

Is she unwell? I excused myself, stepped into the corridor, and answered. "Everything is fine," she said, "I just wanted to hear your voice." The surge of relief I felt in that moment eclipsed any professional triumph that day.

It is fashionable to decry mobile phones as the great disconnector. But for those of us who live apart from our families, they perform the opposite function. A simple voice call, unadorned by filters or multimedia, can inject human warmth into a day otherwise dominated by strangers and steel.

The real power of these calls lies not in their content but in their

constancy. My mother's inquiries about my meals are not mere dietary checks. They are a coded assertion that she is still part of my daily life, however far away she may be.

High-speed data and instant messaging have their uses, but they cannot match the impact of a familiar voice saying, "Take care of yourself." That phrase, repeated countless times, has become a kind of anchor. It cuts through the blare of a city's ambitions and reminds me of the soil from which I grew.

On the most draining of days, when I can scarcely summon the energy to speak, I still take her call. Sometimes she talks about her day, a recipe she has perfected, or the flowering of a plant in her garden. In those minutes, the geography between us collapses. I am home again.

This is not merely sentimentality dressed up as pretentious technological commentary, but an overlooked truth. For critics of technology often forget that tools are only as alienating as the purposes to which they are put. The same screen that hosts shallow scrolling can carry the most profound human exchanges. The same network that streams entertainment can also sustain bonds that might otherwise wither in silence.

Every call from my mother is proof that I am not alone, even in a metropolis where anonymity is the default. Her voice is reassurance in real time, a reminder that care travels faster than any courier and crosses any distance without a passport.

In an era when algorithms seek to mimic human connection, it is worth remembering that nothing digital can replace the cadence of a familiar voice that loves you. My mother's calls are like rituals. And rituals, unlike trends, endure.

And so, when the next complaint about mobile phones surfaces, when someone sighs about society glued to screens, I will think of my own screen lighting up with that most welcome word: "Ma."

(The writer is a cybersecurity professional and an avid traveller.)

EXPLAINER

Takeaways from Trump-Putin meeting

The much-anticipated summit between US President Donald Trump and Russian leader Vladimir Putin began with a warm welcome and a flyover by screaming jets at a US military base in Alaska but ended with a thud Friday after they conceded that they had failed to reach any agreements on how to end the Russia-Ukraine war.

After about 2 1/2 hours of talks at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, the two men appeared before reporters for what had been billed as a joint news conference — but they took no questions.

"We had an extremely productive meeting and many points were agreed to, there are just a very few that are left," Trump said. "We didn't get there, but we have a very good chance of getting there."

Putin, welcomed into the US after being shunned by Western allies since early 2022 for ordering the invasion of Ukraine, thanked Trump for hosting the meeting and suggested with a chuckle that the next time the two sit down it could be in Moscow.

Here are key takeaways from the summit:

A warm welcome

Putin got a red carpet welcome and even rode in Trump's presidential limousine from the tarmac to the summit venue. There, the pair were joined by two of their top aides: Secretary of State and national security adviser Marco Rubio and special envoy Steve Witkoff for Trump and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and national security adviser Yuri Ushakov for Putin.

Putin, who spoke first after the meeting concluded, lauded the historical relationship between the United States, Russia and the former Soviet Union, recalling joint missions conducted by the two countries during World War II.

He said the US and Russia share values, a standard talking point for Russian officials when trying to woo Trump and his aides. Putin also noted that Trump has frequently said the Ukraine war wouldn't have happened had he won the 2020 election.

"I think that would have been the case," the Russian leader said, a



comment sure to please Trump.

However, there is no indication and no way to prove that Moscow would have acted differently toward Ukraine had Democrat Joe Biden not been elected.

There was no deal

Trump had gone into the meeting hoping to get Putin to agree to a ceasefire with Ukraine — or at least a commitment from Russia to enter into negotiations to reach one.

Instead, Trump conceded that "we haven't quite got there" and said he would be conferring with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and NATO leaders about next steps.

Trump said he and Putin had made some significant progress toward the goal of ending the conflict but gave no details on what that entailed and had to acknowledge that they had been unable to bridge substantial gaps.

"I believe we had a very productive meeting," Trump said. "We haven't quite got there, but we've made some headway. So, there's no deal until there's a deal." In a subsequent conversation with Sean Hannity of Fox News Channel, Trump again offered no details on his discussions with Putin.

Time is on Putin's side

Amid drawn-out diplomatic moves to end the war, time appears to be on Putin's side. That gives a leg up to Russian forces, who have used their larger numbers to slowly grind down defences in eastern Ukraine 3 1/2 years into the conflict.

Putin got a pleasant reception from the leader of the free world on US soil and walked away hours later without either providing details on what they discussed, whether a ceasefire was any closer to reality or what the next steps would be.

Putin praised Trump for the "friendly" tone of the talks — Trump said nothing publicly about the killing of Ukrainian civilians in Moscow's attacks — and for "understanding that Russia has its own national interests."

Putin said Moscow and Washington should "turn the page," with relations having sunk to the lowest point since the Cold War.

Putin appearing in the US for the first time in 10 years was celebrated as a sign that Moscow was no longer a pariah on the global stage. In a social media post, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told followers that the Western press would be on the verge of "losing their minds."

"For three years, they talked about Russia's isolation, and today they saw the red carpet being rolled out to greet the Russian president in the United States," she said.

No details, no questions

Both men said the talks were "productive" but the lack of any announcement of solid achievements was revealing.

The news conference ended up being less than 15 minutes of rather standard diplomatic comments — and gave no indication that any concrete results were achieved — and offered little departure from their previous comments on the war in Ukraine.

Trump has made it a feature of his second term to parry questions from reporters in front of world leaders, but in the clearest sign of his disappointment, the president abruptly cut short his plans to take questions.

-AP

Lesson I’ve reflected upon is to convert my starts: Karun

By G Unnikrishnan

Bengaluru: The underwhelming Test series against England might have been “frustrating” for Karun Nair at that time, but the India batter says it has also strengthened his resolve to “convert” the starts when the next opportunity comes his way.

Nair, who went to England with a truckload of domestic runs under his belt, returned from the Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy with 205 runs from eight innings at an average of 25.62, including the top-score of 57 at the Oval.

But he had scores of 40, 31, 26 and 21 in some of the other innings, indicating a palpable lack of conversion of good starts.

So, what happened against England?

“Nothing like that. It was not like I was trying to prove anything. You know, it sometimes happens that you get starts in most of the games and then you find a way to get out. So, it was just that case for me in England,” Nair told PTI.

But the top-order batter is now determined for a course correction.

“I was batting really well throughout the series and I was getting starts in most games. I got to 30s and 40s. But I was just not able to convert it, which was frustrating for me more than anyone else. You know, I was reflecting on that, for me, to understand why that was happening and why I was getting out in 30s, 40s.

“You know, the one lesson which I have reflected upon is, you know, making sure that I convert the start that I get. I’ve spoken to a lot of people about it and they’ve given me some suggestions. I’m going to work on it very soon, so that, whenever I get a start next time, I can convert it,” he noted.

Continuing momentum

Nair has little doubt this new crop of

players will do well in the ongoing World Test Championship cycle (2025-27), beginning with the series against England.

“Yes, we have made a great start. We played really well throughout the series. But it’s all about, you know, continuing this momentum and doing all the right things that we did against England.

“And improving on all the things that we need to improve on. So, we as players are trying to improve day by day as well and, hopefully, you know, we can do well in the current cycle,” he added.

Nair also believes that in skipper Shubman Gill and head coach Gautam Gambhir, India has the right combination to guide the team in the transition phase, and cited the recent series against England as a pointer to that.

“You know, the best part was that the messaging was clear (from Gill and Gambhir), and the communication to the team was always clear from them. We showed that we never give up and our attitude was to always keep fighting. And that was exactly the messaging that was given to us. And we all bought into that.

“And, you could see that attitude from the players and from the team out there during the series. Like I said, it’s just a start and I am sure that we are only going to improve on that. And hopefully, we can also work on the lessons that we have learned from the series,” he added.

-PTI



Padma Shri’s medals stolen from home

Kolkata: Padma Shri awardee former swimmer Bula Chowdhury said thieves have stolen medals and mementos from her ancestral home in West Bengal’s Hooghly district.

Chowdhury said she lost everything she had earned in her entire life.

“Thieves have taken away everything I earned in my entire life through my hard work and dedication. All medals, including the six gold medals I won at the SAAF Games and the Padma Shri brooch, have been stolen,” Chowdhury told PTI on Friday.

The former swimmer alleged that the thieves had also stolen all the mementos but left the Arjuna Award and the Tenzing Norgay medals.

“Probably they did not recognise the Arjuna Award and the Tenzing Norgay medals, as they were smaller in size,” she said.

Chowdhury alleged that it was the third theft at her Hindmotor residence, which remained under lock and key, and she visited the property periodically.

Currently living in Kolkata’s Kasba area with her family, Chowdhury’s ancestral home is looked after by her brother, Milon Chowdhury, who lives some distance away and occasionally visits to check on it.

“On Independence Day, which was a holiday, Milon went to the house to clean it on his sister’s instructions. On entering, he was shocked to find the rear gate broken and the rooms ransacked,” police said.

-PTI

Top Indian shooters set for Asian Championships

New Delhi: Leading shooters, including double Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker, Sift Kaur Samra, Arjun Babuta and Saurabh Chaudhary, will vie for continental honours when a record 182-member Indian contingent begins their campaign in the Asian Championships (Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun) in Shymkent, Kazakhstan, on Monday.

India are fielding their biggest-ever contingent in the tournament, which will have competitors across senior, junior and youth categories. Medals will be up for grabs in 58 events -- 46 individual and 12 mixed team -- across various categories.

India had finished with 59 medals overall (21 gold, 22 silver and 16 bronze), including 19 at the senior level at the last edition in Changwon.

Of the 19 medals, India had bagged six gold, eight silver and five bronze medals to finish third behind powerhouse China, who topped with 14 gold (total 33), and hosts South Korea, who bagged nine gold (total 24).

India’s only individual gold came in 50m rifle 3-positions event, where Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar had a top-podium finish, while the other gold medals came in team and mixed team events, something the senior shooters would be aware of going into the competition.

Manu, following her grand success at the Paris Olympics where she won the women’s 10m air pistol individual and besides Asian Games gold medallist 10m air pistol shooter Saurabh Chaudhary, who is on a comeback trail.

In 25m rapid-fire pistol, Olympian Anish Bhanwala will lead the charge, while Manu will compete for medals in 10m air pistol and 25m pistol.

Besides Chinese and Korean shooters, India will also have to contend with hosts Kazakhstan, who are fielding the second-largest contingent after India with 111 entries, while Korea (70), China (41), Iran (29), Chinese Taipei (24) and Vietnam (20) have also fielded strong sides.

India will be fielding five shooters each in each event in the senior category, with three vying for medals and the remaining two for ranking points.

In the junior section, six shooters will compete per event, with three in medal contention and the others participating for qualification and ranking.

While most Indians will be in the Olympic disciplines, several will also compete in non-Olympic events such as centre-fire, standard, free pistol, rifle prone and double trap.



Anahat enters NSW Bega Open final

Bega (Australia): Teen-age Indian squash player Anahat Singh overcame strong challenge from Egypt’s Nour Khafagy to enter the final of the NSW Bega Open 2025, here on Saturday.

The 17-year-old double Asian Games bronze medallist, who became the youngest Indian to win a medal in the continental showpiece, won the grueling semifinal 3-2 (10-12, 11-5, 11-5, 10-12, 11-7) in 54 minutes.

The top-seeded Anahat, who became the first Indian woman to reach a PSA Copper final, will take on another Egyptian, Habiba Hani, in the title showdown of the USD 25,000 event.

Habiba, seeded second, defeated fifth-seeded Indian Akanksha Salunkhe 3-1 (11-9, 7-11, 12-10, 11-6) in 42 minutes.

Anahat picked up an injury during the match but she continued to fight against her Egyptian opponent, who recently won the HCL Tournament.

Anahat was the youngest member of the Indian contingent for the 2022 Commonwealth Games.



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma tries his hand at cricket during the inauguration of Assam Cricket Association (ACA) Cricket Academy at Uttarfulung village in North Guwahati.

Pic: PTI

Warne’s legacy lives on with heart health checks

Brisbane: Cricketer Shane Warne’s legacy lives on more than three years after the death of the great spin bowler from a heart attack at the age of 52.

Warne died in March 2022 after suffering cardiac arrest while on holiday on the Thai island of Koh Samui.

The cause of his sudden death led his business team and family to unite to honor his life and create Shane Warne Legacy. The charity set up free heart health checkup machines at the Melbourne Cricket Ground during the past two Boxing Day tests.

The results of the stadium checks along with 311 community pharmacy stations across Australia were analyzed as part of a Monash University-led study. A total of 76,085 people were screened across seven weeks from mid-December 2023 to the end of January 2024, including 7,740 at the MCG.

The research published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology on Friday showed almost seven out of 10 (68.9%) had at least one uncontrolled

risk factor for heart disease. Factors were elevated blood pressure readings (37.2%), elevated body mass index (60.5%) and being a smoker (12.1%).

Cricketer spectators who did the free checks, mostly men aged 35 to 64, had higher rates of elevated blood pressure and body mass index than those screened at pharmacies.

Warne revived and elevated the art of leg-spin bowling when he emerged on the international scene in the 1990s and was a central character in one of Australia’s most successful eras in the sport. He also was one of cricket’s larger-than-life showmen.

Warne held the record for the most test wickets with 708 when he retired in 2007 after his 145th match. Only Sri Lanka off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan has passed him, with 800.

“Meeting people where they are, whether that’s at their local pharmacy or the MCG, can make all the difference to health outcomes,” said Dr. Sean Tan, a cardiologist and researcher at the Victorian Heart Institute.

-AP

Bob Simpson dies at 89

Sydney: Bob Simpson, a former player, captain and coach and one of the most influential figures in Australian cricket, has died at the age of 89.

Cricket Australia on Saturday confirmed the death of Simpson, who represented Australia in 62 Tests and two One-Day Internationals between 1957 and 1978.

Simpson scored 4,869 test runs, including 10 centuries and 27 half-centuries, and took 71 wickets, while captaining Australia in 39 tests. Simpson was just 16 when he made his first-class debut for New South Wales state against Victoria.

He also coached Australia from 1986 to 1996 and under his firm and steady guidance, Australia won the 1987 World Cup, four Ashes campaigns and in 1995 the Frank Worrell Trophy, ending a 17-year drought against the West Indies.

Cricket Australia said the Australian team will pay tribute to Simpson with a moment’s silence before Saturday night’s one-day international against South Africa at Cairns in northern Australia and will also wear black armbands.

-AP

Gukesh ends tied 6th; Aronian wins title



St. Louis (USA): World champion GM D Gukesh finished tied sixth as Levon Aronian of USA convincingly won the St. Louis Rapid and Blitz that concluded here.

Gukesh raised visions of a great comeback on the final day of the event as he raced to 3.5 points from his first four games.

Conceding a draw to Aronian in the first game, the Indian accounted for Americans Shankland, Wesley So and Uzbek Grandmaster Nodirbek Abdusattorov before losing steam.

In the last five games, Gukesh drew three and lost two games to end his overall campaign on 18 points.

Aronian started the day with two points lead and won the event two rounds to spare scoring 24.5 points.

Fabiano Caruana of United States finished a distant second on 21.5 points, a half point more than the French Maxime Vachier-Lagrave who finished third.

Abdusattorov ended fourth on 20.5 while Wesley So finished on 19 to finish fifth ahead of Gukesh and Liem Le Quang of Vietnam.

For Aronian, this was the second back-to-back title after the 42 years old had won the Freestyle Grand slam at Las Vegas also quite easily in the end. The winner got USD 40,000 out of a total pool of USD 175,000.

Gukesh will now train his sights for the next event that starts in just two days. The Sinquefeld cup is the last event before the finals of the Grand Chess tour.

Owings Mills (US): Indian-American golfer Akshay Bhatia is on the edge of qualifying for the Tour Championship as he shot 1-under 69 and improved from Tied-46h to Tied-37th at the midway stage of the BMW Championship here.

Bhatia (75-69) is now 4-over for 36 holes and is just outside the Top-30, who qualify for the grand finale.

After a superb first day with the putter, Scotsman Robert MacIntyre, who added a 6-under 64 to his first round 8-under 62, took a five-shot lead over Scottie Scheffler (66-65) going into the weekend.

Bhatia, a Hero golfer, who played with Viktor Hovland in the second round, was sixth

Bhatia closes with birdie-birdie to be in fray

last week at St. Jude Championships.

He had three bogeys and a birdie on the front nine and then two birdies and one bogey over the next six. He was 1-over at that stage.

A birdie-birdie finish with putts from six feet and 12 feet on the last two holes saw him salvage the round to 69. He is now projected to finish on 32nd and needs to get into Top 30 to play the Tour Championship for the second year running.

MacIntyre, who closed with six straight birdies in the opening round for a 62, started the second round with a shot to 5

feet on the 476-yard first hole for another birdie. He kept bogeys off his card this time and set a massive target at 14-under 126.

MacIntyre, with 62-64, set career low 36-hole score on the TOUR and it was his second 36-hole lead/co-lead in stroke-play events on TOUR.

The previous was at the 2024 RBC Canadian Open, which he won. He has five top-10 finishes in 21 starts this season including a runner-up finish at the US Open.

Scheffler spent the steamy afternoon trying to stay in touch. He had six pars at the

end for a 65 and is now 9-under 131. He will play in the final group. Ludvig Åberg shot 64 and is another stroke back.

The five-shot lead is the latest 36-hole lead at the BMW Championship since Jason Day led by five shots in 2015 at Conway Farms. Day went on to win by six.

Aditi Ashok makes cut in Portland

Portland (Oregon): Indian golfer Aditi Ashok made the cut at the Standard Portland Classic on the LPGA after an action-packed second round of 2-under 70, here.

Aditi had five birdies and



three bogeys in her 70 and is now Tied-27th at the halfway stage with an aggregate of 5-under for two days.

Indian-American Gurleen Kaur (65-68) is still Tied-second while Savannah Grewal, a Canadian with Indian origins is T-11 with cards of 69-67.

Korea’s Jeongeun Lee5 shot a 6-under 67 to take the lead while 65-year-old Juli Inkster fell short in her bid to become the oldest player to make a cut in LPGA Tour history.

Lee5, the 36-year-old South Korean player, had a 12-under 132 total at Columbia Edgewater. Winless on the LPGA Tour, she birdied the final five holes on her front nine in the morning round.

-PTI