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‘Price cuts on daily items by Diwali’

MOST OF THE ITEMS IN THE CURRENT 12 PER CENT GST SLAB WILL MOVE TO FIVE PER CENT BRACKET

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday announced plans for big bang reforms in the GST regime by Diwali, which will bring down prices of everyday items, as his government looks to overhaul the eight-year-old tax structure plagued by compliance issues, evasions and litigation.

The present GST tax rates of nil/zero on essential food items, 5 per cent on daily use products, 12 per cent on standard goods, 18 per cent on electronics and services and 28 per cent on luxury and sin goods will be replaced by a two tax slabs of 5 per cent and 18 per cent plus a special 40 per cent top bracket for 5-7 demerit goods.

While essential food items, medicines and education will continue to be taxed at zero rate in the proposed revamped goods and services tax regime, 99 per cent of items in the current 12 per cent slab will move to the 5 per cent bracket. Services will continue to be charged at 18 per cent, except insurance.

But the biggest beneficiary of the rejig would be electronics items like ACs,



TVs, fridges, washing machines and cement that, along with 90 per cent of the items currently being charged at a 28 per cent tax rate, would move to the 18 per cent bracket.

A special tax rate of 40 per cent - the maximum rate allowed under the GST law - would be charged for demerit and sin goods like tobacco, gutka, and pan masala, as well as online

gaming, highly placed sources told reporters soon after the Prime Minister's announcement of GST revamp in his Independence Day address to the nation.

Sources, however, did not say how automobiles, which are currently in the highest tax bracket, would be charged in the revamped regime.

They said tobacco and other such products would

continue to attract a total incidence of 88 per cent tax, the same as currently, and a separate levy will be brought in.

Petroleum products, such as petrol, diesel, natural gas, ATF and crude oil, will continue to remain outside the GST, as they remain a major source of revenue for states.

Reforms expected

“This Diwali, I am going to make it a double Diwali for you,” Modi said in his address.

Stating that over the past eight years, his government has undertaken major GST reforms, the Prime Minister said, “We have discussed with states and we are bringing next-generation GST reforms that will reduce the tax burden across the country.”

“Tax on items for the common man will be reduced substantially. Our MSMEs will benefit hugely. Daily use items will become cheaper, which will also strengthen our economy,” he said.

Soon after the Prime Minister's address, the Union Finance Ministry, in a statement, unveiled the

Centre's blueprint of GST revamp, standing on three pillars of structural reforms, rate rationalisation and ease of living.

The indirect tax regime, which at the time of implementation was hailed as a game-changing one-nation-one-tax, has led to the indirect tax base doubling to 1.52 crore, but tax rate cuts and the pandemic slowdown have meant net revenue collected has only recently converged to the pre-GST level. It has also seen alleged evasion cases and litigation swell while compliance, especially for small businesses, remains cumbersome.

To address this, the finance ministry has, in a proposal set to a group of ministers from states, called for “reduction of taxes on common man items and aspirational goods” to enhance affordability, boost consumption, and make essential and aspirational goods more accessible to a wider population. Significantly, it proposed moving to a “simple tax with two slabs - standard and merit. Special rates only for a select few items”.

-PTI



Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh volunteers take part in ‘Path Sanchalan’ on the occasion of the 79th Independence Day in Nagpur on Friday.

Pic: PTI

‘Someone working to destabilise Maharashtra’

Mumbai: Minister Chandrakant Patil on Friday wondered if some forces are working to destabilise the state or spread anarchy by creating unrest over any issue.

Whenever something happens in the state, attempts are made to destabilise the government and create anarchy, the minister for higher and technical education said.

“One wonders whether there are forces deliberately working to spread such chaos,” Patil, the guardian minister of San-



gli, told reporters there after taking part in an Independence Day event.

Responding to a query about opposition to the proposed Shaktipeeth Expressway, Patil said, without the Koyna dam, Maharashtra would not have had the same level of power generation or

irrigation.

“If the Samruddhi Expressway had not been built, could farm produce have reached Mumbai from Nagpur in eight hours,” he asked.

Patil, however, acknowledged that some of the Koyna dam project-affected persons were still awaiting compensation even after 40 years.

According to the state government, the project that passes through 12 districts will require 8,024 hectares of land from 371 villages.

Business as usual

INDIA BUYS 2 MN BPD RUSSIAN OIL IN AUGUST

New Delhi: India's purchase of Russian oil has risen to 2 million barrels per day in August, as refiners continue to prioritise economic considerations in their sourcing decisions.

As much as 38 per cent out of an estimated 5.2 million barrels per day of crude oil imported in the first half of August came from Russia, according to global real-time data and analytics provider Kpler.

Imports from Russia at 2 million bpd were up from 1.6 million bpd in July. The increase in Russian flow was at the cost of purchases from Iraq, which declined to 730,000 bpd in August from 907 bpd in July, and Saudi Arabia which fell to 526,000 bpd from 700,000 bpd last month.

The US was the fifth largest supplier at 264,000 bpd, according to Kpler.

“Russian crude imports into India have so far remained resilient in August, even after the Trump administration's tariff announcement in late July 2025,” said Sumit Ritolia, Lead Research Analyst (Refining & Modeling) at Kpler. “But the stability

we're seeing now is mostly a result of timing - August cargoes were locked in back in June and early July, well before any policy shifts.”

What's showing up in the data today reflects decisions made weeks ago, he said, adding any real adjustment in flows - whether due to tariffs, payment issues, or shipping friction - will only start becoming visible from late September through October arrivals.

He noted that there's been no government directive to cut Russian volumes. “So from a policy standpoint, it's business as usual”.

Arvinder Singh Sahney, chairman of Indian Oil Corporation - India's largest oil firm - too said the government has not given any instruction to go slow on purchases from Moscow in the aftermath of President Donald Trump's decision to slap an additional 25 per cent tariff on US imports from India -- raising the overall duty to 50 per cent -- as a penalty for the country's continued imports of Russian oil.

“Neither we are being

told to buy nor told not to buy,” he said. “We are not making extra effort to either increase or decrease the share of Russian crude.”

Russian oil accounted for about 22 per cent of the crude processed by IOC in April-June and the volumes are expected to remain the same in the near future, he said.

Separately, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) Director (Finance) Vetsa Ramakrishna Gupta on an investor call said imports from Russia had declined last month from 34 per cent of overall imports in June quarter, as discounts on it had narrowed to USD 1.5 per barrel.

“As long as there is no new sanction on Russian oil, our procurement strategy will be 30-35 per cent of Russian crude for the remaining year,” he had said.

India, the world's third-largest oil consumer and importer, had swiftly substituted market-priced oil with discounted Russian crude following Western sanctions on Moscow after its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

-PTI



Animal lovers hold placards during a protest in solidarity with stray dogs at Nehru Park in New Delhi on Friday.

Pic: PTI

Six killed as roof at dargah collapses

New Delhi: Six people, including an 80-year-old man, were killed, after part of the roof of a dargah, or the tomb of a Muslim saint, collapsed in Delhi's Nizamuddin area on Friday evening.

At least five others injured in the accident were admitted to the AIIMS Trauma Centre for treatment.

Officials said that people were visiting the dargah

for Friday prayers when the roof collapsed.

he Dargah Sharif Patte Shah is located near the Humayun's Tomb in Nizamuddin East.

Visuals from the site showed a small, lime-green building around an open courtyard as the roof on one side of the building appeared to have collapsed.

Multiple rescue agencies, including the Delhi

Fire Services (DFS), Delhi Police, NDRF and Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), were rushed to the site following the incident.

Unconfirmed reports say there were 15-20 people inside the building, including the ‘imam,’ when the roof of the building, which is believed to be about 25-30 years old, collapsed. The site has been cordoned off.

Rinku's Asia Cup spot likely to come under scanner

By Kushan Sarkar

New Delhi: The Indian squad for the Asia Cup T20, to be announced on Tuesday, could present a tricky challenge for Ajit Agarkar's selection panel, with some tough calls expected.

While Indian Test skipper Shubman Gill's place and designation in the squad remain a hot talking point, the position of Rinku Singh in the 15-member squad is also under scrutiny.

Rinku became the toast of the nation a few years back when he hit five consecutive sixes off a Yash Dayal over to win an IPL game for Kolkata Knight Riders and had since been looked upon as a designated finisher in the Indian team.

However Rinku's career graph has seen a bit a decline since he failed to make it to the Indian squad for the T20 World Cup (he was on stand by).

A low-key 2024 IPL, where he faced only 113

balls, and a similar 2025 season (134 balls) hinted at a reduced role.

Interestingly, in 2024, it was Gambhir who was the mentor and chief strategist of KKR.

The manner in which the erstwhile think-tank chief of KKR used Rinku was indicative that the Ali-garh southpaw's role in his scheme of things was very limited.

Going by the fight for each batting slot, one can't say with a degree of certainty that Rinku is an au-

tomatic choice going into the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka early next year.

But if only Asia Cup T20 is factored in at the moment, Rinku's position looks a bit untenable at the

moment.

If all are fit and available, Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (batter-keeper), Tilak Varma, skipper Suryakumar Yadav and Hardik Pandya are auto-



matic selections in top-five.

Compromise likely

Now with Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal, two players with proven IPL records are back in the mix, the selectors will have to make some compromise with regards to one or two slots.

And this is pretty clear that at least in this Asia Cup, both Gill and Jaiswal wouldn't be in the same squad till Abhishek and Sanju are automatic choices.

“We often hear people saying, one should pick so and so but no one would be able to definitively tell us ‘in place of whom?’ Shreyas Iyer has 600 runs at a strike-rate of 180 but he bats in top four. Where is the place for him. Even as you include Shubman as he is flavour of the season, where do you cut corners,” a former national selector told PTI. “You can't disturb your top five right now and also pick Shubman. And if you pick Shubman now, obviously the Test captain

won't sit out.

“I only see Rinku's spot being iffy as he isn't required as much some of the top order batters. And mind it, we aren't even talking about Jaiswal,” the former selector, said.

The logic could be even if Rinku is compromised, there would still be a Shivam Dube (as Nitish Reddy is unlikely to get fit) and a Jitesh Sharma (second keeper), who could well play that finisher's role.

-PTI

Opposition To Meat Ban

Protesters hold up roosters, chickens

Thane: Members of many opposition parties, meat sellers' associations and community groups on Friday protested outside the headquarters of the Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation in Thane district to oppose the civic body's meat ban.

Holding live roosters and chickens, they raised slogans to slam the local civic body's order to close meat shops and abattoirs on Independence Day.

Workers from the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) were among those who took part in the demonstration outside the KDMC head office in the Kalyan area.

The KDMC recently issued an order stating all slaughterhouses and licensed butchers of goats, sheep, chickens, and large animals must remain closed for 24 hours from



midnight of August 14 till midnight of August 15. It warned of action under the Maharashtra Municipal Corporation Act, 1949, if the order was violated.

Municipal Commissioner Abhinav Goyal said their decision was as per a government order, and "nothing new" was being introduced. Since early Friday, heavy security had been deployed between Shivaji

Chowk and Shankarrao Chowk in Kalyan, said Deputy Commissioner of Police Atul Zende.

Before the main protest began, police also detained several demonstrators as a preventive measure.

Congress district president Sachin Pote, who was among the protesters, told reporters, "A rooster wakes people up in the morning. Today, we brought roosters

to wake up the administration."

In Maharashtra, municipal corporations of Nagpur, Nashik, Malegaon and Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar too have issued similar orders, leading to a controversy and raising issues related to personal freedom.

Opposition parties have also criticised the move, while the BJP has argued that the policy of keeping abattoirs shut on Independence Day was first implemented in 1988 when NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar was chief minister, and sought to know if the Opposition would question the veteran politician about it.

Chief Minister Fadnavis had asserted on Wednesday that the state government was not interested in regulating people's food choices and described the row over abattoir closures as an "unnecessary" controversy.

Supported Jarange's demands: Pankaja

Mumbai: Minister Pankaja Munde on Friday said she has always supported demands of Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange that are within the "legal framework".

The BJP leader also said the state administration would prepare in such a way that Jarange's proposed protest later this month would not cause any inconvenience to people and participants.

"I have always supported his demands that fit in the legal framework," Munde told reporters.

She declined to comment on Jarange's plan to carry a Ganesh idol to Mumbai during the forthcoming Ganesh festival as part of his proposed sit-in agitation and immerse it in the sea.

Jarange, speaking to reporters in Nanded after meeting community leaders, asserted that Marathas will get quota under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category.

"Let anyone try to stop us, no matter whose descendants they are. We will ensure Marathas get sustainable reservation under the OBC category. On August 29, we will march to Mumbai and return only after securing it. The upcoming protest would be five times bigger than the previous one," he claimed. "Community members must not stay home. This is the final fight," he said while asserting he is determined to continue the agitation despite health issues from his continuous tours and meetings. The August 29 stir will be decisive and would ensure victory for the Maratha community, Jarange added.



Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, son Aaditya and others during the hoisting of the national flag at Shiv Sena Bhavan in Mumbai on Friday. Pic: PTI

Liquor on I-Day: Manager booked

Pune: A case was registered after a pub in Pune was found "selling" liquor in the early hours of Friday, which has been declared a 'dry day' on account of Independence Day, police said.

An official from Yerawada police station said that they were alerted around 12.30 am that alcohol was being sold in a pub named 'Ballr', located in the Kalyaninagar area.

"A police team visited the spot. During inspection of the premises around 1.10 am, it was found that alcohol was indeed being sold at the pub," the official said.

A case was then registered against pub manager Raymond D'Souza, he said, adding that police and excise officials subsequently took similar action against five to six pubs in Kalyaninagar and Bundgarden.

One Dies Of Dengue

Medical officer suspended

Gadchiroli: One person died of dengue and three others due to this suspected fever in Gadchiroli district over the past few days, prompting the authorities to suspend one medical officer and two healthcare workers for not taking timely preventive measures, officials said.

Talking to PTI, a senior Gadchiroli district health official said a total of 117 people have tested positive for dengue in 10 to 12 villages in Mulchera taluka, where these four deaths occurred.

"The first death occurred on August 6, followed by three other patients succumbing on August 8, 11 and 13. Three of them died in a private hospital," he said.

"One of these patients had tested positive for dengue, while three others from private hospital were suspected cases," the official said.

These deaths took place in villages under Lagam primary healthcare centre in Mulchera.

"One medical officer and two healthcare workers were suspended for delay in taking preventive measures," he added.

According to him, the health department came to know about the dengue outbreak in Lagam area on August 7.

About 15 health department teams are currently conducting a survey in 25 villages to collect samples for suspected dengue and malaria cases, he said.

"A total of 666 suspected samples were collected and 117 persons have tested positive for the NS1 test in the villages in Lagam PHC area. Following this, four additional doctors, two lab technicians and 22 additional health workers have been assigned in this PHC now," the official said.

-PTI

AIMIM leader organises 'biryani party'

Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar: AIMIM leader Intiaz Jaleel on Friday organised a "biryani party" at his residence here to mark his protest against the local civic body's order to keep the meat shops in the city shut on account of festivals. He also hit out at Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, seeking to know why he did not direct the municipal commissioner to withdraw the meat ban order.

This year, Independence Day and Gokul Ashtami, a Hindu festival marking the birth of Lord Krishna, are being

celebrated on Friday. The Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar Municipal Corporation on Tuesday announced the closure of slaughterhouses, outlets and shops selling meat within city limits on two days - August 15 and 20.

Jaleel said, "I have cooked chicken biryani along with a vegetarian dish. If the municipal commissioner comes and asks for vegetarian food, then I will offer it to him. But the government should not tell us what we should eat and what we should not."

"Such things should be stopped. This unfortunate decision (of meat ban) was taken on account of Independence Day." Targeting Fadnavis over the issue, the AIMIM leader said had the CM directed the commissioner to withdraw the order, the matter would have ended there. "They say we can eat (meat) but it will not be made available in the market. What is the government trying to gain by issuing such orders?" When pointed out that the meat ban was being implemented in view of Gokul

Ashtami, he asked, "Is this festival being celebrated in some districts only? Hindus across the state are celebrating it. Had the government adopted a policy in this regard, then we would have respected it." "There are few over-enthusiastic municipal commissioners who issued these orders to make the government happy...Muslims have only two festivals (Ramzan and Bakri Eid). Will the government shut the liquor shops on these two festivals of Muslim community?" Jaleel asked.



People carry idols of Lord Ganesha ahead of the 'Ganesh Chaturthi' festival in Mumbai on Friday. Pic: PTI

Farmer's kin try to kill themselves

Nashik: Several members of a farmer's family tried to end their lives during Independence Day celebrations at Yeola tehsil office in Nashik district on Friday protesting against alleged government apathy over a road leading to their farm, an official said.

Sanjay Pathe, Vijay Pathe, Sulabha Pathe and Jawaharlal Bhosale, residents of Paregaon in Yeola who are related to each other, poured kerosene

and tried to set themselves ablaze but were stopped by police personnel and others attending the event, the official said.

"A road opened by the tehsildar has a huge pot-hole, because of which access to our field has been cut off. The road is the only one that goes to our field. We are not being allowed to fill the pothole and use the road. Women from another family also block our path. We do not have any other

means to earn our livelihood. As we are not getting justice, we tried to end our lives today," Sulabha Pathe said.

The official said the road has been blocked by a neighbouring family, which is causing distress to the Pathes.

"Yeola tehsildar Aba Mahajan has given orders to open the road immediately and conduct an inquiry into the matter and solve the issue," he added.

Khewalkar booked over woman's pics

Pune: Pranjal Khewalkar, the son-in-law of former Maharashtra minister and NCP (SP) leader Eknath Khadse, was booked in Pune city on Friday for allegedly photographing and shooting videos of a woman without her consent, a police official said.

Khewalkar, the husband of Khadse's daughter Rohini Khadse, is in jail after he was arrested along with others following a raid on July 27 on a flat in Kharadi area where cops claimed a "drug party" was underway.

"A woman has complained that Khewalkar clicked her photographs and shot videos without her consent. He has been booked under section 66E of Information Technology Act and section 77 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The case has been registered at cyber police station here," the official official said.

Speaking on the issue, Maharashtra State Women's Commission chairperson Rupali Chakankar said more cases of this nature are likely to be registered against Khewalkar, alleging that it could be the biggest "sex racket" in the state.

Bhagwat, Hosbale talk crisis, unity

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Sarkaryavah Dattatreya Hosabale hoisted the national tricolour at the Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini complex near Mumbai, while Sarsanghachalak Dr Mohan Bhagwat hoisted the flag at a program at the state RSS headquarters in Bhubneshwar on Friday.

While Hosbale spoke of India's 'phoenix-like soul' that helps it rebound after any crisis, Bhagwat emphasised on how Bharat's righteousness unites, connects and uplifts everyone.

While speaking at the program, Hosabale remembered the freedom fighters who made sacrifices for the country's independence. Expressing gratitude to all the paramilitary soldiers, includ-

ing the military soldiers, who are fighting for the external and internal security of the nation, he said that the country's borders remain intact only because of the mighty, brave soldiers.

He also elaborated how India, as a nation, has survived a multitude of crisis since ancient times and asserted the nation's innate ability to overcome any crisis and rise again, to progress and improve. "Bharat's soul is like a phoenix," he asserted.

The 'Global Outreach Program' of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has been organized at Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini. Volunteers and office bearers from all over the world who came for this program participated in the flag hoisting ceremony.

Righteousness unites

"Bharat always strives to

bring peace and happiness to the world and to share its Dharma with others... The reason we became independent was to ensure that everyone in our country could attain happiness, courage, security, peace, and respect", RSS Sarsanghachalak, Dr Mohan Bhagwat said while addressing the swayamsewaks at the RSS Karyalaya in Bhubaneswar on the occasion of 79th Independence Day. He hoisted the tricolour at the Utkal Vipann Sahayata Samiti in Bhubaneswar.

"Today, the world is faltering. Despite many experiments over 2000 years, solutions to its problems have not yet been found. It is our duty to provide the world with a solution and create a new world filled with happiness and peace based on our vision, rooted in religious principles," Bhagwat said.

"Our ancestors ensured

Bharat's Independence by making supreme sacrifices... We too need to be as hardworking to keep it alive and to make the country self-confident and emerge as Vishwa Guru' to guide the world engaged in quarrel," he said.

"When the system operates based on the 'swa', then freedom is achieved. Bharat is a unique country; It lives to give righteousness to the world. That is why the Dharma Chakra is at the center of our national flag. This righteousness unites everyone, connects everyone, and uplifts everyone. Therefore, It brings happiness to all in this world and the hereafter," he said.

"Bharat exists to give this righteousness to the world; this is our specialty. To give this, the system must be ours. It must operate based on 'Swa'," he added.

"We are becoming self-reliant and awakening our 'Swa'." He said this awakening begins with language. "It should be our own, our local tongue, our 'matrubhasha'. It should be Hindi, which is widely spoken. We have no objection to foreign languages, but their use should be limited to general interaction," he said.

In a first, flag hoisted in four hamlets

By Ashish Agashe

Nandurbar: Ganesh Pava had a challenging task on the eve of Independence Day. Managing with the feeble mobile network in his North Maharashtra hamlet where electricity is yet to reach, he downloaded a video explaining how to tie a flag to a pole, so that it unfurls without a hitch.

On Friday, leading a group of about 30 kids and locals, the 20-something Pava ensured that his remote Udadya hamlet,

nestled in the Satpura range in Nandurbar district, witnessed its maiden flag hoisting.

The hamlet, some 500 km from Mumbai and about 50 km from the nearest tehsil place, has a population of 400, but there is no government school. Pava teaches at an informal school run by the NGO YUNG Foundation.

"This region is endowed with natural beauty, fertile soil and the Narmada river flows through it. But being a hilly belt, it is very difficult to reach," says

Sandeep Deore, founder of the YUNG Foundation.

The foundation, which has been implementing education interventions in the region for three years, decided that the national flag should be hoisted in the hamlets of Udadya, Khaparmaal, Sadri and Manjnipada on Independence Day this year.

Over 250 children enrolled in the four schools run by the foundation were present at the flag hoisting ceremonies on Friday, besides local villagers.

There is no government school or a gram panchayat office in these hamlets, hence, a flag-hoisting never took place in the last seven decades.

The idea was not only to achieve a 'first', but also to educate the local people about their democratic rights, said Deore.

"The tribals here live a very independent life, but all of them may not know things like the rights guaranteed by our Constitution," he said.

They often get fleeced or exploited while working as

labourers or in day-to-day transactions, Deore pointed out.

Many settlements including Sadri do not have any road connectivity.

Bhuvansingh Pavra, a resident of Sadri, said people have to either walk for several hours, or depend on a boat which plies in the Narmada to visit other villages in the area.

The school of YUNG Foundation runs from his land. The lack of education is the biggest problem and the next generation should not suffer from it,

he said.

Electricity grid has not reached any of the hamlets, and a majority of households depend on solar panels.

Locals here speak the Pawari dialect, quite different from standard Marathi or Hindi, which makes it difficult for an outsider to communicate with them. Deore said it was difficult initially to win the trust of the people, but once they were convinced about the genuineness of the cause, it was easy to secure their cooperation.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The slogan of 'swadeshi' given by Narendra Modi belongs to the Congress. Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi had given this slogan first, and it was also the vision of Jawaharlal Nehru. By giving the slogan again today, Modi has followed in the path of Gandhi and Nehru."

Sanjay Raut, MP, Shiv Sena (UBT)



‘Pawar set up gang, took bribe to spare illegal buildings’

Mumbai: Former Vasai-Virar civic commissioner Anil Pawar, arrested in a money laundering case, took “substantial” bribe for not taking action against rampant illegal constructions in the twin-city, the Enforcement Directorate has told a special court.

The IAS officer formed a “gang” involving senior officers and junior engineers, among others, soon after taking charge as the civic commissioner three years ago and charged “huge” commission for granting permissions for construction of buildings, the probe agency alleged on Thursday.

Pawar and three others, including two builders, arrested in the case were sent to ED custody till August 20 by the court.

Besides Pawar, Vasai-Virar City Municipal Corporation (VVMC) town planner Y Shiva Reddy and two builders – Sitaram Gupta and Arun Gupta – were arrested on Wednesday by the central agency in connection with the case linked to illegal constructions.

They were produced before a special judge handling cases under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), Raju Rote, who remanded them in ED custody till August 20.

The case pertains to il-



legal construction of residential-cum-commercial buildings on government and private land under jurisdiction of VVMC.

The probe agency alleged that over a period of time, 41 illegal buildings were constructed on private and government land parcels reserved for a sewage treatment plant and dumping ground as per the approved development plan of Vasai-Virar, a twin-city on Mumbai's outskirts in Palghar district.

The accused developers (Sitaram and Arun Gupta) looted the general public at large by constructing illegal buildings and subsequently selling them by fabricating approval documents, the ED told the court while seeking their remand.

The developers deceived buyers by selling rooms in

these buildings in spite of knowing that the structures were unauthorised and slated for demolition, thereby committing fraud, the anti-money laundering agency added.

The ED sought the custody of the four accused for ten days to investigate and ascertain the role and involvement of other persons in the “huge scam”.

Identify beneficiaries

The central agency submitted in the court that they need to identify other beneficiaries of the proceeds of crime, trace the end utilization of the tainted money and identify the properties acquired through it.

Highlighting the alleged role of Pawar in the scam, the ED claimed the senior bureaucrat organized a “gang” with senior offic-

ers, junior engineers, architects, CAs and liaisons after joining as the municipal commissioner in 2022.

He was involved in an organized action plan to acquire the proceeds of crime by committing illegal omission to perform his public duty, the financial crimes probe agency said.

The probe agency stressed that the real estate developers who constructed the 41 illegal buildings, in their statements, have said a “substantial” amount of bribe money was given to senior officers of VVMC, including Pawar “for keeping a blind eye and taking no action over rampant illegal construction on government/private land”.

The IAS officer, as head of the demolition department of VVMC, didn't take action against illegal constructions over government/private land in his jurisdiction.

HC order

The ED pointed out that it was only after a Bombay High Court's order that illegal buildings were demolished.

Pawar would charge huge commission/bribe for granting development permissions required from the VVMC for construction of buildings, it submitted.

Further, the probe agency stated that the accused builders were the main persons behind illegal acquisition of land and construction of buildings without any approval from statutory authorities.

Realtor Sitaram Gupta layered money through fraudulent documentation and tax regularisation, and projected them as legitimate income. He used dummy owners and shell builder firms – often registered in the names of drivers, rickshaw pullers or employees – to shield them from legal scrutiny, said the ED.

The two arrested builders were ultimate beneficiaries of all customer funds generated from the sale of illegally constructed flats, it told the court.

On the role of town planner Reddy, the ED noted he also took “huge bribe” for not taking action against the illegal constructions.

As part of the probe into the case, the ED conducted raids late last month at multiple locations linked to Pawar, including his bungalow in Virar and residences in Mumbai and Nashik.

The raids were conducted a day after the senior bureaucrat was given a farewell at the VVMC following his transfer from the post of civic commissioner.

-PTI



A Parsi family at a Fire Temple on the occasion of Parsi New Year at Tardeo in Mumbai on Friday.
Pic: Bhushan Koyande

Gift Tax Rules

Same sex couple moves HC

Mumbai: A same sex couple has moved Bombay High Court challenging the Income Tax Act's differential treatment on taxation of gifts between spouses.

The plea filed by the couple sought to declare the term 'spouse' appearing in the explanation to the fifth proviso to Section 56(2)(x) of the Income Tax Act as unconstitutional as it excludes same sex couples from the scope and definition of the term 'spouse'.

Under Section 56(2)(x) of the Income Tax Act, any money, property, or asset received without adequate consideration, valued at over Rs 50,000, is taxed as 'income from other sources'.

However, the fifth proviso to the section exempts such gifts when received from 'relatives', including 'spouses'. The term 'spouse' is not separately defined in the Act.

A bench of Justices B P Colabawalla and Firdosh



Pooniwalla on August 14 said the plea challenges the constitutional validity of a provision of law and issued notice to the Attorney General of India.

The court posted the matter for hearing on September 18.

The petition also sought a declaration extending the benefit of the fifth proviso to Section 56(2)(x) of the IT Act to the petitioners who claim to be in a long-term, stable same sex relationship.

It also sought a relief to include same sex couples under the definition of 'spouse' in the provision.

CNG bus catches fire

Mumbai: A CNG-run bus operated by the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST), Mumbai's public transport service and electricity provider, caught fire in Vikhroli area here on Friday afternoon, officials said.

No passengers were injured in the incident.

This is the second such incident involving a bus in the BEST fleet in a month.

The CNG bus hired on lease from operator Maruti Travel was heading to Kanamwar Nagar from Vikhroli station when the driver's cabin got filled with smoke due to burning of wires around 3.25 pm, the BEST said in a statement.

The driver and conductor of the bus doused the fire using an extinguisher kept in the vehicle. The city fire brigade unit was also alerted, but the blaze was extinguished before the arrival of its team.

No passengers were injured in the fire as the crew had safely rescued them before the arrival of the fire brigade at the spot.

Maharashtra moving forward rapidly: CM

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Maharashtra is moving forward very rapidly in the entire development ecosystem of India, and that Viksit Maharashtra is making a special contribution to realise the dream of a Viksit Bharat, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Friday while presiding over the official flag hoisting ceremony at Mantralaya.

“The country is continuously progressing under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In just a decade, India has made a huge leap from the eleventh-largest economy in the world to the fourth-largest economy. Today, the state of Maharashtra is moving forward very rapidly in the entire development ecosystem of India. Viksit Maharashtra is making a special contribution to the dream of a Viksit India. This development story of the country will not stop anymore. The Prime Minister has given the slogan of Atmanirbhar Bharat, which is very important. We all have to make joint efforts to make India self-reliant,” Fad-

navis asserted.

Attracting FDI

Pointing out Maharashtra's pre-eminence in attracting the highest foreign direct investment, CM Fadnavis said the state has received 40 per cent of the total FDI at the national level. “This investment is generating a large amount of employment in the state. Maharashtra is at the top in the manufacturing, import-export and startup sectors. This is a big development race. Maharashtra has started efforts to develop human resources along with a good education system. The state will contribute to the entire development system of the country in the future through skilled and trained Human Resources,” he remarked.

CM Fadnavis said that Maharashtra has decided to provide free electricity to farmers so that they get electricity for 12 hours a day, and for this, the world's largest distributed solar project is underway in Maharashtra under the Mukhyamantri Saur Krishi Vahini Yojana. “After this project is completed in

December 2026, farmers will definitely get electricity for 12 hours a day. At that time, Maharashtra will be the first state to provide 100 per cent green electricity,” he noted.

Infrastructure development

“Various infrastructure projects have been undertaken in Maharashtra. Along with roads and airports, the work of development of VadHAVAN Port has been undertaken. This port is among the top ten ports in the world, and it will make Maharashtra and India a new maritime power. At the same time, the work of constructing new airports or modernising airports in Pune, Mumbai, Nagpur, Gadchiroli, Amravati and Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar is also underway,” he said.

CM Fadnavis said that the 701 km Samruddhi Mahamarg and the proposed Rs 86,000 crore Shaktipeeth Mahamarg are creating a network of highways. It has also been decided to take concrete roads to every village with a population of up to 1,000.

-PTI



Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis after hoisting the national flag during the 79th Independence Day celebration in Mumbai.
Pic: PTI

Canara Bank scholarship program held

By Correspondent

Mumbai: The Circle Office Mumbai organised the Canara Bank Dr. Ambedkar Vidya Jyothi (CB-DAVJ) Scholarship Program on the eve of the 79th Independence Day. Thirty-five SC/ST girl students participated in it along with their teachers from various nominated schools under Regional Offices – North, Navi Mumbai, and Thane.

Anandrao Vithoba Adul, Chairperson, Maharashtra State Commission for SC & ST was the chief guest.

The event began with the lighting of the lamp and floral tributes to the bank's founder (Ammemba Subba Rao Pai). Ranjeev Kumar, Chief General Manager and Circle Head, Mumbai then gave a wel-

come address. In his address, Ranjeev emphasised the bank's commitment towards social responsibility and empowerment through education.

Adul spoke about Canara Bank's initiatives for uplifting underprivileged communities and encouraging students to excel in academics.

The event was attended by all RO Heads, RO FI Overseeing Executives, Section Heads, the Circle Deputy General Manager, other executives, the Circle Office FI Team, and all staff members of the Circle Office.

The program concluded with a vote of thanks by Sarvanan, the bank's Deputy General Manager, acknowledging the presence and contribution of all dignitaries, staff and guests.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

“I have a copy of the government resolution of 1987. One should read it and tell me where it is written about the ban on the sale of meat on Independence Day. It was a suggestion and not a decision of the then government.”



Jitendra Awhad, MLA, NCP (SP)

‘Felt very bad my scene with Gabbar was chopped’

Mumbai: Sachin Pilgaonkar was 16 when he was cast as Ahmed, the ill-fated son of Rahim Chacha, in Ramesh Sippy's 1975 classic “Sholay”, an experience that turned out to be both exciting and bittersweet.

“I'm very proud to be a part of ‘Sholay’, whoever has been a part of Sholay must be very proud of it,” Pilgaonkar told PTI on the 50th anniversary of the film, which changed the landscape of Indian cinema with its scale, storytelling, and unforgettable

characters.

As a newcomer, Pilgaonkar got to work with actors such as Amitabh Bachchan, Dharmendra, Hema Malini, Jaya Bhaduri, Sanjeev Kumar and Amjad Khan in the action-adventure drama, written by Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar.

In the film, Ahmed is killed by Gabbar, the dreaded dacoit of the fictional village Ramgarh.

It sets up one of the most poignant moments of “Sholay” as his blind father Rahim Chacha, por-

‘Sholay’ Turns 50



trayed by A K Hangal, is overwhelmed by the ominous silence in the village

and utters the heart-wrenching line, “Itna sanata kyun hai, bhai?” — a dialogue that has since been etched in Hindi cinema history.

Recalling the shooting of the scene, Pilgaonkar said, “It was not only me who didn't have any dialogue in that particular scene. Even Dharam ji, Amit ji, and Hema ji didn't have a single word to say in the whole scene but they did it (scene) because of conviction of Ramesh ji. We shot that scene for three days,” the 67-year-old

actor said.

The actor revealed that he had also shot a scene with Gabbar but it was removed from the final cut.

“I felt very bad about it. My age was such that I couldn't understand things that much. I felt very disappointed. But there were reasons for it to be deleted. One was the length of the film and another being Ramesh ji felt that killing a 16-17-year-old boy looked very cruel.”

Pilgaonkar first met Sippy in 1966, when he was starting out as a child art-

ist in “Brahmachari”, which was produced by the filmmaker along with his father G P Sippy. The director remembered that meeting years later, which eventually led to Pilgaonkar's casting in “Sholay”.

“When I came to know he wants to meet him, I was very happy. He told me, ‘I'm making a very big film with a lot of big actors but I want you to be part of it in the role of a villager, and he is ultimately killed by the villain, Gabbar. I said, ‘Okay, will do it’,” the actor recalled.

-PTI

Independence Day celebrated with fervour across India



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta with Delhi Police personnel during the 79th Independence Day celebration, amid rain, at Chhatrasal Stadium in New Delhi.



Armed forces personnel during the 79th Independence Day celebration at the Red Fort in New Delhi on Friday.



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta with Delhi Police personnel during the 79th Independence Day celebration, amid rain, at Chhatrasal Stadium in New Delhi.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath after hoisting the National Flag during the 79th Independence Day celebrations.



LoP in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during the 79th Independence Day celebration in New Delhi.

All pics: PTI

Teens rescued

Bareilly (UP): Three girls, who ran away from home, were rescued from Uttar Pradesh's Moradabad, six hours after they were reported missing.

The girls, who are cousins aged 15-16, and are cousins, left their homes in Bareilly's Baradari area on Thursday evening. When they did not return home at night, their family members registered a case at 10.30 pm.

SSP Anurag Arya formed a joint team of local police and a surveillance cell. Using mobile phone data and CCTV footage, the team tracked the girls to Moradabad Railway Station – some 90 kilometres away, from where they were rescued.

From 'self-sufficiency' to 'security'

New Delhi: From atmanirbharta (self-reliance) to suraksha (security), Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 103-minute Independence Day address was steeped in recurring themes that underscored his vision for a secure, confident and self-sufficient India.

Speaking from the ramparts of the Red Fort on Friday, Modi invoked 'atmanirbharta' more than 20 times, weaving it through India's defence, energy, technology and agriculture sectors.

'Security' too remained a dominant thread, with the Prime Minister linking national sovereignty to both military strength and economic resilience.

Throughout the speech, Modi shifted between multiple forms of address from "My dear countrymen", "Brothers and sisters", "Saathiyo (friends)" to "140 crore

Indians" -- each time seeking to reinforce unity and collective resolve.

"This festival of freedom is a festival of 140 crore resolutions," he said, calling the day one of "collective achievements and pride".

In his speech, the Prime Minister mentioned 'youth' over 25 times, in contexts ranging from innovation and start-ups to nation-building.

'Kisan' (farmer) appeared nearly 27 times, while 'jawan' (soldier) was invoked repeatedly, reflecting his theme of Suraksha, Jawan and Kisan.

The word 'reform' was used more than 20 times, as Modi positioned change and transformation as essential for a Viksit (developed) India.

On national security, Modi hailed the success of 'Operation



Sindoor', declaring that India had given terrorists "a fitting reply" by striking across borders.

He stressed that India's "new normal" was to respond decisively to terrorism, rejecting what he called "nuclear blackmail."

On the Indus Waters Treaty, he vowed that "blood and water will not flow together," underlining that the Indus river water belong solely to India and its farmers.

Farmers featured prominently in his vision of Viksit Bharat (developed India). Modi praised their role in making India self-sufficient in food production after Independence.

"The farmers of India are not only the providers of food, but the custodians of our dignity," he said.

Energy independence was cast as a cornerstone of 'atmanirbharta'.

The Prime Minister highlighted achievements in solar power, nuclear energy and green hydrogen, while announcing a National Deep Water Exploration Mission to reduce dependence on imported oil and gas.

He tied this push to India's broader focus on critical minerals, semiconductors, and clean technology, noting that the country had reached its 2030 clean

energy target five years ahead of schedule.

"We saw the power of Made in India during Operation Sindoor," Modi said, crediting indigenous weapons systems for the military's success. He called on India to produce its own fighter jet engines, EV (electric vehicle) batteries, fertilisers, and Information Technology platforms.

Women's contributions were woven into the larger narrative. Modi saluted women self-help groups whose products are finding markets abroad, describing them as a "pillar of atmanirbharta".

He also invoked women leaders of the freedom movement and constitution-making process, crediting them with shaping the foundations of modern India.

-PTI

Google's special I-Day doodle

New Delhi: From Jaipur blue pottery to terracotta relief work of West Bengal, search giant Google on Friday came up with a striking doodle that draws inspiration from the country's traditional tile designs, marking India's 79th Independence Day.

The digital artwork ingeniously embeds themes emphasising India's achievements in space, cricket, chess, and cinema.

The letters in 'GOOGLE' are made of six uniquely designed tiles from different regions of India, each symbolically representing a style. The doodle artwork is illustrated by artists Makarand Narkar and Sonal Vasave.

Sikkim CM awards people for parents' care

Gangtok: Sikkim celebrated the 79th Independence Day on Friday, with Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang hoisting the national flag at the Palzor Stadium here.

He took a ride in an open jeep to take guards from the Sikkim Police personnel.

The chief minister later handed over Rs 1 lakh each to 22, out of the total 199, as the Shrawan Kumar award for taking care of their elderly parents.

The other awardees received it in their respective districts during the 79th Independence Day celebrations.

Earlier in the day, Tamang also unfurled the national flag at his official residence Mintokgang.

"As we celebrate this historic day, let us reaffirm our pledge to uphold the sanctity of our constitution and dedicate ourselves to the welfare, unity, and development of our beloved nation," Tamang said.

In a message circulated earlier, the chief minister extended his heartfelt greetings and best wishes to all the people of the state.

"Today, we join the en-

tire country in celebrating the spirit of freedom, sacrifices of our freedom fighters, and strength of our great democracy," he said.

"The Independence Day is not just a reminder of our liberation from colonial rule, but also a call to uphold the values of unity, integrity, and resilience that define our nation," the CM said and called upon the citizens to remember with gratitude the countless men and women who had laid down their lives for the freedom of India.

Referring to Sikkim, he said that his government remains fully committed to building a self-reliant, equitable, and prosperous state where every child will have quality education, every youth opportunity, every farmer dignity, and every family a secure future.

"Our focus is on clean energy, organic farming, digital connectivity, skill development, and tourism will continue to drive our growth in the years ahead," Tamang said.

Independence Day was also celebrated elsewhere in the Himalayan state.

-PTI



Students perform 'Mallakhamb' during the 79th Independence Day celebration in Gurugram on Friday.

Pic: PTI

K'taka faces discrimination: Sidda

Bengaluru: Karnataka Chief Minister on Friday said that the state is facing discrimination in the distribution of resources from the Centre.

He also said that there is growing concern that Constitutional bodies like the Income Tax Department, Enforcement Directorate, CBI, and others are not working to uphold the true values of democracy and cooperative federalism as enshrined in the Constitution.

He said, every responsible citizen must raise their voice in this regard.

The Chief Minister

made these observations while delivering his address at the 79th Independence Day celebrations here.

Siddaramaiah said his government has built its own development model, which is widely recognised as the 'Karnataka Model of Development', and that its 'guarantee schemes' have got global recognition.

"The Basavadi Sharanas of the 12th century firmly believed that one must live by one's word. Guided by this principle, our government has built its own development model, now

widely recognised as the Karnataka Model of Development," he said.

"It is a matter of pride that even Philemon Yang, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, visited Karnataka and wholeheartedly praised our Guarantee Schemes, giving them global recognition," he added.

Noting that surveys by leading national institutions have revealed a stark truth that the wealthiest 10 per cent of our population hold 80 per cent of the nation's wealth, yet they contribute only about 3 per cent of the GST collected.

Modi lauds RSS; calls it 'world's biggest NGO'

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hailed 100 years of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as a "very proud and glorious" journey of the "world's biggest NGO" and lauded all its volunteers for their dedicated service to the nation.

Addressing the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the 79th Independence Day, he said the nation is not built by the government or those sitting in power only.

It is built by the efforts of crores of people, including saints, seers, scientists,

teachers, farmers, soldiers, labourers, individuals, and organisations, he said.

"Today I want to mention one thing with great pride that 100 years ago an organisation was born -- the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Its 100 years of national service has been a very proud and glorious page," said Modi, who has been an RSS pracharak in the past.

For the past 100 years, the RSS swayamsevaks (volunteers) have been dedicating their lives to fulfil the resolve of 'vyakti nirman' (character development) and 'rashtra nir-

man' (nation building) for the welfare of 'matrubhoomi' (motherland), he said.

"From the ramparts of the Red Fort today, I respectfully remember all the swayamsevaks who have contributed to these 100 years of national service," he added.

The PM said service, dedication, organisation, and unparalleled discipline are the identity of the RSS, "which is in a way the world's biggest NGO".

The country is proud of 100 years of "dedicated and glorious" journey of the RSS, he said, adding, "It will keep inspiring us".

Desperate attempt to appease Sangh: Cong

The Congress on Friday termed as "most troubling" Prime Minister Narendra Modi's praise for the RSS in his Independence Day speech, saying it is a "breach" of the spirit of constitutional and secular republic and a desperate attempt to appease the Sangh in the run-up to his 75th birthday.

"The PM was tired today. Soon he will be retired," Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said and slammed the prime minister's speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort as "stale, hypocritical, insipid", claiming he recycled his oft-repeated slogans of 'Viksit Bharat' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' with "little" to show as measurable outcomes.

"The most troubling element of the PM's

speech today was his name-checking of the RSS from the ramparts of the Red Fort - a blatant breach of the spirit of a constitutional, secular republic.

"It is nothing but a desperate attempt to appease the organisation in the run-up to his 75th birthday next month," AICC general secretary, communications, Ramesh said in a post on X.

The Congress leader's reference was to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Bhagwat's remarks that leaders should give a chance to younger leaders on attaining the age of 75 years, which many in the opposition feel are aimed at Prime Minister Modi.

Ramanagara celebrates 50 years of 'Sholay'

New Delhi: Fifty years after "Sholay" blazed onto the silver screen, the rocky hills of Karnataka's Ramanagara district still seem to hold its spirit -- the tyranny of Gabbar Singh, the camaraderie between Jai and Veeru, and Basanti's never-ending chatter.

The cult classic about two small-time criminals who are hired by a vengeful ex-policeman to capture the ruthless dacoit Gabbar Singh was released in theatres on August 15, 1975 and forever changed Indian cinema.

The action-adventure movie, directed by Ramesh Sippy from a script penned by iconic writers

Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar, was praised for its gripping storytelling, powerful dialogues and unforgettable characters played by Amitabh Bachchan, Dharmendra, Hema Malini, Jaya Bachchan, Sanjeev Kumar and Amjad Khan.

For Ramadevara Betta, the granite-strewn hillscape in Ramanagara that doubled as the fictional village of "Ramgarh", the film etched itself into the very soul of the land.

The rugged terrain of Ramadevara Betta (hill in Kannada) served as the backdrop for Gabbar Singh's lair.

It was the stage for some of



Hindi cinema's most quotable scenes, including the one where the menacing Gabbar asks his henchmen, "Kitne aadmi the?".

Filming began in October 1973

and lasted nearly two-and-a-half years, with an entire township built for the shoot and a road constructed from the Bangalore-Mysore highway to the sets.

The production transformed the area, with locals still recalling the nearly three-year-long presence of the cast and crew. Many also got a chance to be in front of the cameras as background characters.

Among them was Boramma, who was just seven when she faced the camera for a small role in "Sholay".

"I still remember everything. There's a scene with Hema Malini and Dharmendra in the man-

go orchards, it was filmed here. On the other side was the village. It used to be a dense forest, but for the film, they converted it into a village.

"After 'Sholay', many more movies were shot here. Ramadevara became famous because of 'Sholay'. The shoot went on for three years. They built roads for filming and all the Gabbar Singh scenes were done here," Boramma, who is now in her 50s, told PTI.

"The film that was shot here fifty years ago has spread the name of Amitabh Bachchan and Ramanagar far and wide," a local said.

-PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Sometimes, just giving a citizen a patient hearing is an act of healing. Independence is not only freedom from colonial rule but also an internal liberation of the mind and spirit. Youths should nurture their entrepreneurial energy and transform it into self-motivation."

D Y Chandrachud, Former CJI



‘Vote chori se azadi’ DP campaign

New Delhi: Rahul Gandhi’s fight is to protect people’s mandate, expose the EC-BJP “conspiracy of vote chori” and save democracy, the Congress said on Friday as it urged people to put up a display picture on their social media accounts to show support for its campaign against alleged poll irregularities.

The Election Commission and the BJP have rejected the Congress’ “vote chori” claims.

In a post on X in Hindi, Congress general secretary in-charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said that “every stolen vote is a theft of our voice and identity”.

“Rahul Gandhi’s fight is to protect the people’s mandate, expose the EC-BJP conspiracy of vote theft, and save democracy,” Ramesh said.

He urged people to change their display picture (DP) on social media to show support against the alleged vote theft.

Ramesh also shared a link for getting the display picture that has “vote chori se azadi” and “stop vote chori” written in a circular manner.

Several Congress leaders have changed their DP on social media to express support for the party’s campaign.

The Congress has also launched a web portal for people to register and demand accountability from the poll panel against what it called “vote chori”, and express support for the demand for digital voter rolls.

-PTI

Cloudburst survivors recall ‘miraculous’ escape

By Anil Bhatt

Chositi (J-K): Nine-year-old Devanshi was among the hundreds of pilgrims who had gathered here for the last leg of the yatra to Machail Mata temple when tragedy struck on Thursday. Buried under mud and debris when a Maggi-point shop was hit by flash floods, she emerged hours later, rescued by her uncle and other villagers.

“I couldn’t breathe. My uncle, bouji, and others removed wooden planks after hours, and we all came out. Mata saved us,” she says, the terror still vividly reflected in her voice.

Like her, 32-year-old Sneha is still in disbelief that she is alive. Moments after loading luggage onto their vehicle, she and her four family members were swept away in a roaring torrent, buried under mud and crushed beneath a vehicle.

“I was trapped in mud under a vehicle, surrounded by bodies - some of them children with broken necks and severed limbs. I lost hope of my survival,” she says. Somehow, they clawed their way out.

At least 60 people lost their lives when a massive cloudburst led to flash floods in this remote mountain village in Jammu and Kashmir’s Kishtwar district.

Every survivor here carries a story about escaping from the very jaws of death.

“We stopped at a Maggi shop. People told us to run



Rescue work underway at an affected area following a cloudburst in Kishtwar district Jammu and Kashmir on Friday.

Pic: PTI

(because of the cloudburst), but we stayed back, thinking it was safe here,” Devanshi says, narrating her ordeal.

Within minutes, a large mass of mud collapsed over the shop. “Mata saved us,” she repeats as she recounts how her family members and villagers pulled her out of the debris. She was taken to a hospital along with other family members, where she was given first aid.

Sneha from Jammu says she had felt it was all over for her after being washed away and buried under a vehicle. “As we reached our vehicles, we heard a loud bang and saw a cloudburst over the hill,” she recalled.

In no time, a wall of mud, boulders, and trees swept them towards the Chenab River, trapping them.

“My father managed to free himself first, then

helped me out. I pulled my mother out from under an electric pole. She was barely conscious and badly injured,” she said.

She said some villagers were washed away into the Chenab. “Bodies lay everywhere. The entire hill had come down. Even the Thakur ji idol of Chitto Mata Temple was washed away before our eyes.”

Sneha says the swift action of officials, police, the Army, CRPF, and locals saved countless lives. “Within an hour, vehicles arrived to take the injured to hospitals. If they had been late, many more would have died,” she said. U n i m a g i n a b l e destruction

The sudden roar of water, the deafening blast, and the avalanche of mud, boulders, and trees turned Chositi village into a scene of unimaginable destruction within seconds. A cloudburst high above the

hills triggered flash floods that swallowed homes, vehicles, and lives, leaving survivors in shock and grief.

The shocking scenes of physical and psychological trauma unfolded on a massive scale as search and rescue operations were underway, digging out mud-buried bodies and rescuing the injured.

Sudhir from Udhampur was with a group of 12 when the “sky and earth seemed to collapse together”.

“After the blast sound, the whole area was filled with fog and dust,” he recalled. “Most of my group members were trapped in slush. My wife and daughter were buried under other people. At the bridge construction site, I saw dozens swept into the Chenab. It took seconds for the hill to bury everything.”

Blood-stained bodies,

Search intensifies for survivors

Kishtwar/Jammu: Despite rains, the rescue and relief operations resumed early Friday after a night-long pause to look for survivors feared trapped under rubble and mud in the cloudburst-hit village in Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said. Several earth-movers requisitioned by the district administration have joined the operation to move giant boulders, uprooted trees, and electricity poles to speed up the rescue and relief operation, the officials said. So far, 167 people have been rescued in injured condition, while 69 are reported missing by their relatives. Many more are believed to be trapped following the deluge, which flattened a makeshift market, a langar (community kitchen) site for the yatra, and a security outpost. At least 16 residential houses and government buildings, three temples, four water mills, and a 30-metre span bridge, besides over a dozen vehicles, were damaged in the flash floods in Chositi and downstream, the officials said. The rescue and relief operation was suspended late Thursday.

Omar says calamity claimed 60 lives

Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday said he has briefed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on a devastating cloudburst in a remote village in Kishtwar district that has claimed 60 lives and injured more than 100. “I just received a call from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. I briefed him about the situation in Kishtwar and the steps being taken by the administration,” Abdullah wrote in a post on X. He said his government and the people hit by the tragic cloudburst are grateful for the prime minister’s support and all the assistance provided by the Centre. Earlier, addressing an Independence-Day function at the Bakshi Stadium here, Abdullah said at least 60 people have lost their lives and more than 100 have been injured in the tragic incident that occurred on Thursday.

mud-filled lungs, shattered ribs, and deep wounds packed with stones — these are just some of the harrowing injuries sustained by people, including pilgrims and security personnel, caught in the aftermath of the catastrophic cloudburst in the foothill hamlet of Chositi.

Undergoing treatment at the hospital, Sunita Devi from Nanak Nagar

said, “I was running when I fell, and some women fell on me. An electric pole hit me and I got a severe shock. I was looking for my son the whole time. We all survived... Mata Rani saved us.”

Others were not so fortunate. Uma from Jammu clung to a vehicle tyre to avoid being swept away. “A policeman saved me. But my sister, Gahna Raina, is still missing,” she said.

RG Kar Case

Victim’s father moves HC for visit

Kolkata: The father of the R G Kar hospital rape-murder victim has moved the Calcutta High Court praying for setting aside a lower court order that refused permission to his lawyers to visit the crime scene at the state-run medical institution.

The petitioner claimed that he firmly believes that other persons were present along with Sanjay Roy, who has been convicted and sentenced to imprisonment till the end of his natural life by the trial court for the rape and murder of the doctor, when the crime was committed on August 9 last year.

The matter is likely to be taken up for hearing early next week before a single bench of the high court, his counsel said.

The petitioner stated that to assist the court in discovering any material lapse in investigation, it is crucial for an independent examination of the place of occurrence.

He prayed that his lawyer Phiroze Edulji along with six junior advocates be allowed to visit the place of occurrence at R G Kar Medical College and Hospital for two hours for the purpose.

The petitioner prayed that a Sealdah court order of July 9 refusing permission to his lawyers to visit the place of occurrence be set aside. The body of the on-duty doctor was found in the seminar room of R G Kar Hospital in north Kolkata on August 9, 2024, leading to protests across the country. Sanjay Roy, a former civic volunteer with the city police, was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment till the end of his natural life.

West Bengal Accident

Ten pilgrims killed, 35 injured



Burdwan/Patna: Ten pilgrims from Bihar died and 35 others were injured as their bus rammed into a truck parked on the roadside in West Bengal’s Burdwan town on Friday, officials said.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar expressed grief over the accident and announced ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh each for the next of kin of the deceased.

The pilgrims, who belonged to Motihari in Bihar’s East Champaran district, were returning home after visiting Gangasagar in South 24 Parganas district when the accident happened on NH-19 near Phaguipur in Purbha Bardhaman district, the officials said.

Among the deceased were eight men and two women, they added.

The injured persons, including six children, were admitted to the Burdwan Medical College and Hospital, officials said.

“There were 45 people on the luxury bus. Efforts are being made to contact their families,” an official said.

“The pilgrims began their journey from Motihari on August 8. They first visited Deoghar and then went to Gangasagar.”

A statement issued by the Bihar government said, “The CM has expressed condolences over the casualties in the road accident that took place on the roadside in Burdwan. He is deeply saddened by the deaths of Bihar natives in the incident, and announced ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh each for the immediate family members of the deceased.”

Besides, the CM also announced Rs 50,000 as compensation for each injured passenger.

The CM has also directed the officials to remain in touch with their counterparts in West Bengal and ensure proper treatment for the injured persons.

He also asked officials to ensure that bodies of deceased hailing from the state reach their native place in East Champaran.



Young boys dressed up as Lord Krishna on the eve of the ‘Janmashtami’ festival in Nadia, West Bengal on Friday.

Pic: PTI

Two drown in canal

Erode (Tamil Nadu): Two college students drowned in a canal in this district, police said on Friday.

According to Bengalapudur police, five students, all aged 19 years, including Sibiraj and Sakthineshan, of Goundan Palayam, Coimbatore, studying computer science in a private college at Coimbatore, came to Thooka Naicken Palayam (T.N. Palayam) on Thursday afternoon in a car, stopped near Vaniputhur Thottipalam area, and had their bath in the Arakkankottai canal.

The police said that, ex-

cept Sibiraj and Sakthineshan, three others came out from the canal, searched the two for more than 30 minutes and also informed the Bengalapudur police and Fire and Rescue Services, Sathyamangalam.

Soon the police and trained swimmers of the Fire and Rescue Service came to the spot and searched for the two for more than an hour and found only their dead bodies.

Bungalapudur police registered a case of death due to drowning.

Nurse found dead

Kolkata: A nurse was found dead at a nursing home in West Bengal’s Hooghly district, police said on Friday.

The body of the 24-year-old woman was found hanging from the ceiling in a room on the third floor of the nursing home in Singur on Thursday, they said.

Her family alleged that she was sexually assaulted and murdered as she uncovered irregularities in the operation of the nursing home.

-PTI

Petroleum ministry’s I-Day post features Savarkar

New Delhi: An oil ministry post featuring Swatantryaveer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar alongside Mahatma Gandhi and other freedom fighters evoked a sharp response from the Congress which said on Friday that the BJP makes it a point every Independence Day to “distort” history and make heroes out of “traitors”.

In a post on X, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas posted a picture featuring the faces of Savarkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh with the caption -- “Freedom was their gift, shaping the future is our mission”.

“As we celebrate our nation’s independence, let’s remember — liberty thrives when we nurture it every day, through unity, empathy, and action. Happy Independence Day,” the ministry said.

Hitting out at the government, Congress general secretary in-charge organisation K C Venugopal said, “Every Independence Day, the Modi-led BJP makes it a point to distort history and make heroes out of traitors.”

“This Orwellian image,

elevating a British mercy petitioner like Savarkar over Gandhi ji - the undisputed Mahatma who got us freedom, and completely eliminating Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel ji, shows their contempt for our freedom fighters,” Venugopal said.

“What else can one expect from those whose forefathers collaborated with the British to sow the seeds of division and hatred that haunts us to this very day?” he said.

Tagging the ministry’s post, Congress’ media and publicity department head Pawan Kherra said in a post in Hindi, “While mixing ethanol in petrol, now you’ve started mixing impurities even in freedom fighters. Those who couldn’t become great in history, you’re making them big on posters.”

Hitting back, BJP general secretary (organisation) B L Santhosh said in reply to Kherra’s post, “Sick brigade to the core... Veer Savarkar lived and died for the country.”

Congress whip in the Lok Sabha Manickam Tagore said, “No matter how hard you try, Mr. Modi, you can’t push Ma-

hatma, Netaji & Bhagat Singh below Mafiveer.”

“Don’t disgrace the martyrs who fought and died for freedom by glorifying those who begged the British with apology letters,” Tagore said on X.

CPI(M) MP John Brittas also slammed the oil ministry’s post.

“The deliberate elevation of VD Savarkar over Mahatma Gandhi is not a coincidence but a calculated act. The government’s actions undermine the nation’s commitment to its secular Constitution. It is pertinent to note that Savarkar was an accused in Gandhi’s assassination, though acquitted due to insufficient evidence.

“However, the Kapur Commission highlighted circumstantial evidence implicating Savarkar. Those who uphold the Constitution should unequivocally condemn this mockery of justice and secular values,” Brittas said.

In a post on X, Tushar Gandhi, great grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, said, “Shame on the Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry for placing the traitor and murderer Savarkar above patriots and martyrs.”

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“A decision has been made to bring uniformity in the fees for preliminary tests of competitive examinations. Rs 100 will be the fee for candidates appearing in preliminary test. Candidates who appear for the mains will no longer have to pay any examination fee.”

Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister, Bihar



Tribute to 114 soldiers, an example of bravery

By Sushmita Goswami

Rezang La (Ladakh): A few tent-like structures atop a nearby mountain are the first things to be noticed by a visitor at the Rezang La War Memorial on the high altitudes of the Chushul sector of eastern Ladakh.

Those are the last physical remnants of a daring battle fought by the Indian army against the invading Chinese forces in the winter of 1962 at over 16,000 ft above mean sea level, in which 114 officers and sol-

diers of the 13 Kumaon Regiment laid down their lives.

“Those are the very structures in which our forces were stationed when they took on the invading troops. It was the site where their bodies were recovered next spring,” pointed an official of the Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry (JAK LI), which is looking after the war memorial constructed on a nearby hillock.

The revamped Rezang La War Memorial was opened in November 2021



and is part of ‘Bharat Ranthoomi Darshan’, an initiative by the Indian Army

The Memorial is just a short distance away from the Rezang La (‘la’ means pass in Tibetan language), which serves as the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

At the centre of the War Memorial is the ‘Ahir Dham’, commemorating the soldiers killed in the battle of Rezang La.

“All the personnel of the Charlie company of 13 Kumaon Regiment who were martyred were from the Ahir community. This plaque has been erected at the site where they were cremated.”

Further inside is the memorial of Major Shaitan Singh, who had led the company and was awarded the country’s highest military honour Param Vir Chakra (posthumously).

“The body of Major Singh could be identified with the help of the tattered shoulder badge. Only his body was flown back to his native place for cremation,” the official said. The 114 personnel, led by Major Singh, had fought in sub-zero temperatures on November 18, 1962, against 5,000 Chinese troops. -PTI

First made-in-India semiconductor chip by year end: PM

New Delhi: First made-in-India semiconductor chip will be launched in the market by the end of this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday.

Addressing the nation on the 79th Independence Day, Modi said that six semiconductor units are already on ground and four new units have been given green signal.

"By the end of this year, made in India, made by the people of India, made in India chips will come to the market," Modi said.

Semiconductors, key components for any electronic device, have diverse applications ranging from mobile phones and computers to home appliance and electric vehicles.

The prime minister said that the thought process for semiconductors in the country started 50-60 years ago but it got stuck in the files while several countries have mastered it and are dominating the world.

"My dear youth, you will be surprised to know that today, the semiconductor, which has become the strength of the world, 50-60 years ago, that thought process, those files, got stuck. They got stuck. The thought process of the semiconductor itself was feticide 50-60 years ago. It lost 50-60 years. After us, many countries, in semiconductors, today, have mastered the technology and consolidated their power," Modi said.

The PM said that he is not at the Red Fort to criti-



“We have also undertaken reforms to make life easier for citizens. Income tax refund, faceless assessment, raising tax-free income limit to Rs 12 lakh per annum are all result of tax reforms. No one ever imagined that tax relief on income up to Rs 12 lakh is possible. When a nation's capability increases, its citizens benefit.”

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

cise any government but it is equally important for youth to know about it.

He said that the country has now freed itself from the burden of the past and is moving forward in the area of semiconductors in a mission mode.

Market growth

The first known attempt to set up a semiconductor plant in India was made by American physicist and entrepreneur Robert Noyce in late 1960s before he co-founded Intel with Gordon Moore.

India's semiconductor market is expected to more than double to grow in the range of USD 100-110 billion by 2030, according to industry estimates, an official statement said on Sunday.

The Indian semiconductor market was about USD

45-50 billion in 2024-2025 against USD 38 billion in 2023, according to an official statement which cited industry estimates.

The Union Cabinet this week approved four semiconductor plants, including a unit backed by US technology major Intel and Lockheed Martin, entailing a total investment of Rs 4,594 crore in three states of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab.

The Cabinet approved a 3D glass semiconductor packaging unit to be set up by 3D Glass Solutions Inc -- which is backed by US technology majors such as Intel, Lockheed Martin and Applied Materials, entailing an investment of Rs 1,943 crore with an annual production capacity of 5 crore units.

This is the first semiconductor project that in-

volves personal computer chip maker Intel Corporation along with other technology partners.

Several approvals

The Cabinet approved the country's first commercial compound fabrication unit by SiCsem for making silicon carbide semiconductors. The plant will be set up in Bhubaneswar with an investment of Rs 2,066 crore with capacity to produce 9.6 crore chips per year.

A chip packaging plant in Andhra Pradesh, to be set up by Advanced System in Package Technologies with an investment of Rs 468 crore, was also approved by the Cabinet. It will have a capacity to produce 9.6 crore chips per year.

The Cabinet also cleared a semiconductor project of electronics component maker firm CDIL. The facility will be set up in Punjab with an investment of Rs 117 crore, having an annual production capacity of 15.8 crore units.

The new semiconductor projects raise the total number of chip plants in India to 10 with cumulative investment commitment of around Rs 1.6 lakh crore.

The chip plants that are setting up factories in advance stages include semiconductor wafer manufacturing units by Tata Electronics (TEPL) in partnership with Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp (PSMC) of Taiwan with a proposed investment of around Rs 91,000 crore. -PTI

BRAND ME

Your Brand's Hidden Power



By
Divyaa Advani

In the journey of building a career, a business, or even a legacy, something curious tends to happen. People watch. Quietly. From a distance. Without always making their presence felt. They notice the small wins, the occasional setbacks, the grit that carries you forward when the odds lean against you. And then, at some point, they speak up.

One day, you might find yourself in conversation with a long-time acquaintance who has quietly been observing your progress. They remark on your resilience, your dedication, your refusal to abandon your vision despite challenges—personal and professional alike. They tell you they are proud. Not because they've been with you in the trenches, but because they've been witnessing your climb, step by step.

But the truly striking moment often comes when others—friends from years past, acquaintances who once barely shared a word beyond polite greetings—suddenly reappear. Their messages land in your inbox, their friend requests surface, their enthusiasm for “catching up” becomes surprisingly urgent. The timing is rarely random.

You were the same person years ago. The same ideas. The same fire. The same desire to create something meaningful. Yet back then, many of these same people had no time, no interest, no inclination to connect. Your struggling phase rarely attracted a crowd. In fact, it often repelled it.

It's only when progress becomes visible—when the world starts to

take note—that the ripple effect begins. Success, or even the perception of it, has a magnetic pull. People are drawn not to the grind, but to the glow it produces.

This isn't about cynicism or bitterness. It's about recognising a truth: visibility changes everything. And in business, visibility is often the difference between being overlooked and being in demand.

That's where personal branding comes in—not the shallow kind that's all show and no substance, but the kind that communicates who you are, what you stand for, and why you're worth remembering. Because here's the thing: people are watching you. Even when



you think they aren't. Even when the engagement on your posts is low, the attendance at your events is sparse, or the phone stays silent after a pitch. They may not act in the moment, but they are quietly filing away their impressions of you.

A strong personal brand ensures that what they remember is worth recalling. It makes your name, your work, and your values stick. Over time, it positions you as someone whose growth is not a surprise, but an expectation.

And when those long-lost contacts reach out again, it's often not just because you've “made it.” It's because they've begun to see you as

credible, consistent, and aligned with the identity you've been projecting. They may want to collaborate. They may want to learn from you. Or they may simply want to be connected to someone they perceive as moving forward.

For business owners, this should be less a complaint and more a reminder: the world works in patterns. Visibility begets opportunity. Growth invites attention. And attention, when paired with trust, can be converted into partnerships, sales, and influence.

But here's the nuance. Your brand cannot be built solely for these eventual reconnects or sudden admirers. It has to be built for the moments when no one is clapping, when the path feels uphill, when the audience is a handful of silent observers rather than a cheering crowd. Because that is the stage where your brand's foundation is laid—authentically, consistently, and without the distortion of external validation.

In the end, personal branding is not about creating a version of yourself for others to like. It's about making visible the version of yourself that is already worth liking, respecting, and trusting. Whether they support you in the quiet years or show up only when the glow becomes undeniable, your responsibility is the same: keep building, keep showing up, and keep making the version of you they see today an honest reflection of the one you've always been.

Because people may not walk with you every step of the way—but they're almost always watching. And what they see will determine how they show up when they finally decide it's time to connect. But why are you still waiting to connect with me? Book a free consultation call now!

<https://spect.com/pro/divyaaadvani>

(The author is a personal branding expert. She has clients from 14+ countries. Views personal.)

‘GST Diwali bonanza timely, strategic move’

New Delhi: The announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding GST 2.0 is a timely and strategic move to build a resilient Indian economy, according to experts.

From the ramparts of the historic Red Fort, Modi announced that the GST rates will be lowered by Diwali, bringing down prices of everyday use items, as his government looks to reform the eight-year-old tax regime that has been plagued by litigation and evasions.

Later, the Finance Ministry said it has proposed that most goods and services be taxed in two slabs - standard and merit - and a select few items be charged special rates. This is to replace the current goods and services tax (GST) structure, where the sale of goods and rendering of services are taxed in four different brackets - 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent, with luxury and sin goods attracting a levy on top of the highest rate of 28 per cent.

"The Prime Minister's vision for GST 2.0 is a timely and strategic move to

build a resilient Indian economy. These are not merely procedural changes; they are essential structural reforms designed to mitigate the risks arising from global trade tensions. By addressing the inverted duty structure, we are unlocking crucial working capital and making our exports more competitive on the global stage," said Saurabh Agarwal, Tax Partner, EY India.

Simultaneously, rationalising rates will boost domestic consumption, creating a powerful buffer against external shocks, Agarwal added.

Krishan Arora, Partner-Tax Planning & Optimisation, Grant Thornton Bharat, said GST rate structure rationalisation has been on the cards for a while now.

"With the announcement by the Prime Minister, it seems the rate fitment work is complete and one could expect the rate rejig of items of daily consumption falling in 12 per cent to 5 per cent, which could help not only reduce end-product prices but also boost consumption

and demand, especially for MSMEs," Arora said.

The eight-year-old tax regime, which merged central taxes like excise duty and state levies like VAT into one tax, has led to the indirect tax base doubling to 1.52 crore, but tax rate cuts and the pandemic slowdown have meant net revenue collected has only recently converged to the pre-GST level.

Vivek Jalan, Partner, Tax Connect Advisory Services LLP, said the GST Council has not met for the last eight months as a massive exercise for rate rationalisation is underway, and a Group of Ministers (GoM) are reviewing the comprehensive rate rationalisation programme.

"It is expected that this Diwali, items of mass consumption by the common man will be brought into the lower slab of 5 per cent GST. For example, small sachets of Rs 10 or less supplied by FMCG players may be considered to be brought under the lower tax bracket of 5 per cent," he added.

Jalan said a lower GST rate will augur well for the overall economy. -PTI



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman inspects the Guard of Honour during the 79th Independence Day celebration in New Delhi.

Pic: PTI

Air Canada starts cancelling flights

By Rob Gillies

Toronto: Air Canada started cancelling flights on Thursday ahead of a possible work stoppage by flight attendants that could impact hundreds of thousands of travelers.

A complete shutdown of the country's largest airline threatens to impact about 1,30,000 people a day.

The union representing around 10,000 Air Canada flight attendants issued a 72-hour strike notice Wednesday. In response, the airline issued a lockout notice.

Mark Nasr, Chief Operations Officer for Air Canada, said the airline has be-

gun a gradual suspension of Air Canada and Air Canada Rouge operations. "All flights will be paused by Saturday early morning," he said.

Nasr said this approach will help facilitate an orderly restart "which under the best circumstances will take a full week to complete."

He said a first set of cancellations involving several dozen flights will impact long-haul overseas flights that were due to depart Thursday night. "By tomorrow evening we expect to have cancelled flights affecting over 1,00,000 customers," Nasr said. "By the time we get to 1 am on Saturday morning we will be

completely grounded."

He said a grounding will affect 25,000 Canadians a day abroad who may become stranded. They expect 500 flights to be cancelled by the end of Friday. He said customers whose flights are cancelled will be eligible for a full refund, and it has also made arrangements with other Canadian and foreign carriers to provide alternative travel options "to the extent possible."

The union has said its main sticking points revolve around what it calls flight attendants' "poverty wages" and unpaid labour when planes aren't in the air. -AP

S&P upgrades ratings of 10 institutions

New Delhi: S&P Global Ratings on Friday upgraded ratings of top 10 financial institutions, including SBI, HDFC Bank and Tata Capital, a day after the US-based agency raised India's sovereign credit rating.

"India's financial institutions will continue to ride the country's good economic growth momentum. These entities will benefit from their domestic focus and structural improvements in the system such as in the recovery of bad loans," S&P said.

S&P has raised long-term issuer credit ratings on seven Indian banks -- State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Axis Bank Ltd, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Union Bank of India, and Indian Bank -- and three finance companies -- Bajaj Finance, Tata Capital, and L&T Finance.

"We expect India's banks to maintain adequate asset quality, good profitability, and enhanced capitalization over the next 12-24 months. This is despite some pockets of stress," S&P said, adding, credit risk in the system has reduced.

S&P had on Thursday upgraded India's credit

rating to 'BBB', after a gap of over 18 years, as it expects India's sound economic fundamentals to underpin growth momentum over the next 2-3 years.

It also said monetary policy settings have become increasingly conducive to managing inflationary expectations.

The ratings on many Indian financial institutions are capped by our sovereign rating on India.

This is due to the direct and indirect influence that the sovereign has on financial institutions operating in the country, S&P said.

It also said that the insolvency and bankruptcy code (IBC) has improved the payment culture and rule of law in India.

The code, introduced in 2016, has tilted the balance in favour of the creditors. It has also promoted a credit culture that encourages restructuring of going-concern entities.

On Thursday, S&P Global Ratings had also raised credit ratings on Oil and Natural Gas Corp. Ltd. (ONGC), Power Grid Corp. of India Ltd., NTPC Ltd., and Tata Power Co. Ltd. to 'BBB' from 'BBB-'. The outlooks are stable. -PTI

Japan's economy grows despite Trump's tariffs

Tokyo: The Japanese economy grew at a better than expected 1% annual pace in the last quarter, boosted by exports that held up despite US President Donald Trump's higher tariffs.

The US has imposed a 15 per cent tax on imports from Japan. That's higher than before for some products but down from the 25 per cent tariff Trump announced earlier.

Real gross domestic product, or GDP, which measures the total value of a nation's goods and ser-

vices, expanded 0.3 per cent in the fiscal first quarter compared to the previous quarter, beating analysts' estimates.

It was Japan's fifth straight quarter of growth. Japan's exports grew 2.0 per cent in the period, according to preliminary data from the Cabinet Office. A 90-day pause on higher tariffs for most goods and most trading partners enabled companies to rush some exports to try and beat the higher import duties.

But the 15% tariffs took



effect as of last week, closing that window.

A surge in visits by for-

eign tourists has also helped, though it has also raised resentment among

some Japanese upset over various aspects of dealing with outsiders.

Apart from exports, capital investment rose 1.3 per cent from a year earlier, helping to drive faster growth. But consumer spending remained relatively weak, growing just 0.2 per cent.

Prices have been rising steadily while wages have stagnated.

The stronger than expected economic performance in the last quarter raises the likelihood that Japan's central bank may

push ahead with raising its benchmark interest rate from its longstanding level near zero to help cap inflation.

The higher tariffs that Trump has imposed to try to get companies to increase manufacturing in the United States have added to pressure on Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who is facing calls to resign after the ruling Liberal Democrats and their coalition partner the Komeito failed to win majorities in both houses of the parliament. -AP

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"For New Delhi, the choices ahead are stark - negotiate, retaliate, diversify markets, or trade concessions such as ending purchases of Russian oil for tariff relief. Each option carries a different mix of gains and risks."



Ajay Srivastava,
Founder, GTRI

Afghans suffering after four years of Taliban's rule

By Niamatullah Ibrahim, Arif Saba, Safiullah Taya

Melbourne: On August 15, 2021, Afghanistan's democratic republic collapsed. As the last US and NATO troops departed the country, the Taliban swept back into power and the Afghan people braced for an uncertain future.

Despite promises of moderation and inclusion, four years later, the Taliban has established a repressive, exclusionary regime – one that has dismantled institutions of law, justice and civil rights with ruthless efficiency.

As the Taliban regime has tightened its grip, international attention has waned. Crises in Ukraine, Gaza and elsewhere have dominated the global agenda, pushing Afghanistan out of the spotlight.

With the Taliban seeking to end its isolation and gain legitimacy, can the international community find the will now to exert real pressure?

Emirate of repression

After coming back into power, the Taliban discarded the country's 2004 constitution, allowing the regime to operate without a transparent rule of law. Instead, Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, the reclusive Taliban leader, rules by decree from his base in Kandahar.

The Taliban's repression of women and girls has been so severe, human rights groups now call it



“gender apartheid” and argue it should be a new international crime.

Edicts have erased women from public life, banning them from education beyond primary school (with the exception of religious education), employment and public spaces. Women also cannot move freely in public without a mahram, or male guardian.

The Taliban also dismantled the Ministry of Women's Affairs, replacing it with the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. As a central instrument of repression, the ministry reinforces institutionalised gender discrimination through regular raids and arrests, surveillance and monitoring of public spaces.

Taliban rule has also led to the exclusion and persecution of minority ethnic and religious groups such as Hazaras, Shias, Sikhs and Christians.

More broadly, the Taliban has decimated the civic space in the country. Journalists and activists have been silenced

through fear, violence and arbitrary arrests.

Despite the immense risks, activists, journalists and ordinary citizens continue to resist the Taliban. Women have staged peaceful protests in the face of harsh crackdowns, while others run secret schools for girls and document abuses in the hope of future accountability.

Aid dwindling

Although most countries do not recognise the Taliban as the formal and legitimate government of the country, some regional states have called for an easing of its international isolation.

Last month, Russia became the first country to recognise the Taliban. China is also deepening its economic and diplomatic ties with the group. India's foreign minister recently met with his Taliban counterpart, after which the Taliban called New Delhi a “significant regional partner”.

International aid continues to flow into Afghanistan, but a report from a US watchdog this week

documented how the Taliban uses force and other means to divert it.

This has crippled essential services and threatens to plunge the country into one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Health facilities have closed and malnutrition is rising. The mass deportation of hundreds of thousands of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan has only further added to the humanitarian catastrophe.

Courts make progress

The Taliban's systematic human rights abuses have global repercussions. Experts warn of a rising trend of similarly styled repression, dubbed “Talibanisation”, taking root in other countries.

While individual states have failed to agree on a coordinated response to the Taliban, international institutions have taken steps in the right direction.

In July, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Akhundzada and the Taliban chief justice, accusing them of crimes against humanity for gender-based persecution.

Separately, four countries – Australia, Germany, the Netherlands and Canada – have begun the process of bringing a case against the Taliban to the International Court of Justice for gender discrimination. This would be a first for the court.

Jimmy Lai's Trial Final arguments delayed

Hong Kong: The final arguments in prominent Hong Kong activist Jimmy Lai's national security trial were postponed on Friday after his lawyer said the former pro-democracy newspaper founder had experienced heart palpitations and the judges wanted him to receive medical treatment first.

Lai, the 77-year-old founder of the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper, was arrested in 2020 under a national security law imposed by Beijing following anti-government protests in 2019.

He faces charges of colluding with foreign forces to endanger national security and conspiring with others to issue seditious publications. If convicted, he faces up to life imprisonment.

Lai's landmark case – which has already lasted over 140 days, far beyond the original estimate of 80 days – is widely seen as a trial of press freedom and a test for judicial independence in the Asian financial hub.

Closing statements were initially scheduled to begin on Thursday, but were postponed due to heavy rains from Tropical Storm Podul.

On Friday, Lai's lawyer, Robert Pang, told the court that Lai had not received medication and a heart monitor, as recommended by a medical specialist. The judges decided to postpone the hearing until Monday.



Thirty-two killed as heavy rains lash Pakistan

Peshawar/Islamabad: At least 32 people were killed and many went missing as heavy rains lashed several parts of Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir over the past 24 hours, officials said on Friday.

At least 16 people were killed and eight others injured as torrential rains on Thursday night triggered flash floods and landslides in multiple districts, including Lower Dir, Bajaur, and Abbottabad, of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, rescue officials said.

In Lower Dir's Maidan Sori Pao area, the roof of a house collapsed, killing five people and injuring four others, including women and children. Rescue workers retrieved seven people from the debris, five of whom were declared dead.

The water level in the Panjkora River has risen alarmingly due to continued rainfall, officials said.

In Bajaur district, flash floods and landslides in the Jabrari and Salarzai areas caused widespread destruction. Nine bodies and four injured individuals have been recovered so far, while at least 17 others are reported missing, according to local sources.

A cloudburst in Jabrari village triggered a massive flood, injuring several people. Rescue teams reached the site promptly, recovered five bodies, and shifted the injured to a local hospital after providing first aid.

Bajaur's District Emergency Officer, Amjad Khan, is overseeing the ongoing rescue operations. Deputy Commissioner Shahid Ali confirmed that nine people were killed in the Salarzai incident, and two critically injured persons have been shifted to Khar Hospital.

In Mansehra, two people were killed and one was injured when a car was swept away by a swollen stream at Basyan point on the Kaghan Highway. Three others were rescued. Authorities have advised tourists to avoid unnecessary travel during the ongoing rains.

A helicopter has also been dispatched to aid in the rescue mission.

Eight people died and two others went missing as flash floods hit Ghizer district in Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

The floods damaged more than a dozen houses,

several vehicles, schools, and health units, while blocking major arteries, including the Karakoram Highway and Baltistan Highway, at several points.

The northeastern Neelum Valley also faced major disruptions, where tourists were shifted to safety.

More than 600 tourists camping at the Ratti Gali lake base were advised to remain in place after the link road was damaged.

In the Jhelum Valley, a cloudburst over Palhot unleashed a flash flood that damaged part of the road and left dozens of vehicles stranded.

With the Neelum River rising rapidly, authorities issued a flood warning and plan to relocate vulnerable riverside families.

In PoK's Muzaffarabad district, a massive landslide in Sarli Sacha village hit a home, leaving six members of a family buried and feared dead. In Sudhnoti district, a 26-year-old man died after being swept away by a stream, while in Bagh district, a 57-year-old woman was killed when her home collapsed.

-PTI

Alleged Coup Plot

Mali's military rulers arrest two generals

A SUSPECTED FRENCH AGENT, OTHERS ALSO HELD

By Baba Ahmed

Bamako (Mali): Mali's military rulers said on Thursday they have arrested a group of military personnel and civilians, including two Malian generals and a suspected French agent, accused of attempting to destabilise the country.

The announcement followed rumors in recent days of arrests of Malian army officers and was made by Mali's security minister, Gen. Daoud Aly Mohammedine on the evening news on the local media. He assured the audience that a full investigation was underway and that “the situation is completely under control.”

The development comes amid an ongoing crackdown on dissent by Mali's military following a pro-democracy rally in May, the first since soldiers seized power nearly four years ago.

The military provided few details about the alleged coup plotters, what it

entailed and the French national implicated in it, beyond identifying the man as Yann Vezilier. The security minister said the Frenchman acted “on behalf of the French intelligence service, which mobilised political leaders, civil society actors, and military personnel” in Mali.

There was no immediate word from France, Mali's former colonial ruler, on the man's arrest.

“The transitional government informs the national public of the arrest of a small group of marginal elements of the Malian armed and security forces for criminal offenses aimed at destabilising the institutions of the Republic,” Mohammedine said.

“The conspiracy has been foiled with the arrests of those involved,” he said, adding that the plot began on August 1.

The national television broadcast photos of 11 people it said were members of the group that planned the coup. The minister also

identified the two Malian generals he said were part of the plot.

One, Gen. Abass Dembéle, is a former governor of the central Mopti region who was abruptly dismissed in May, when he demanded an investigation into allegations that the Malian army killed civilians in the village of Diafarabé.

The other, Gen. Néma Sagara, was lauded for her role in fighting militants in 2012.

Mali, along with neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger, has long battled an insurgency by armed militants, including some allied with al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

Following two military coups, the ruling junta expelled French troops and instead turned to Russia for security assistance. But the security situation remains precarious, and attacks from extremist groups linked with al-Qaida intensified in recent months.

-AP



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer pushes a veteran in a wheelchair during the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day in Alrewas, England on Friday. Pic: AP/PTI

WWII Surrender

Japan marks 80th anniversary

Tokyo: Japan is paying tribute to more than 3 million war dead as the country marks its surrender 80 years ago, ending the World War II, as concern grows about the rapidly fading memories of the tragedy of war and the bitter lessons from the era of Japanese militarism.

In a national ceremony Friday at Tokyo's Budokan hall, about 4,500 officials and bereaved families and their descendants from around the country will observe a moment of silence at noon, the time when the then-emperor's surrender speech began on Aug 15, 1945.

Just a block away at Yasukuni Shrine, seen by Asian neighbours as a symbol of militarism, dozens of Japanese rightwing politicians and their supporters came to pray.

PM Shigeru Ishiba stayed away from Yasukuni and sent a religious ornament as a personal gesture instead of praying at the controversial shrine.

Some lawmakers' denial of Japan's military role in massive civilian deaths on Okinawa or the Nanking Massacre have stirred controversy.

In an editorial Friday, the Mainichi newspaper noted that Japan's pacifist principle was mostly about staying out of global conflict, rather than thinking how to make peace, and called the country to work together with Asian neighbours as equal partners.

Trump, Putin to meet in Alaska

Alaska: U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin are scheduled to meet in Alaska.

The sit-down offers Trump a chance to prove to the world that he is both a master dealmaker and a global peacemaker. He and his allies have cast him as a heavyweight negotiator who can find a way to bring the slaughter to a close, something he used to boast he could do quickly.

For Putin, a summit with Trump offers a long-sought opportunity to try 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.

There are significant risks for Trump. By bringing Putin onto U.S. soil, the president is giving Russia's leader the validation he desires after his ostracization following his invasion of Ukraine 3 1/2 years ago. The exclusion of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy from the summit also deals a heavy blow to the West's policy of “nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine” and invites the possibility that Trump

could agree to a deal that Ukraine does not want.

Any success is far from assured, especially as Russia and Ukraine remain far apart in their demands for peace. Putin has long resisted any temporary ceasefire, linking it to a halt in Western arms supplies and a freeze on Ukraine's mobilization efforts, which were conditions rejected by Kyiv and its Western allies.

Trump on Thursday said there was a 25 per cent chance that the summit would fail, but also floated the idea that if the meeting succeeds he could bring Zelenskyy to Alaska for a subsequent, three-way meeting, a possibility that Russia hasn't agreed to.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russia “never plans ahead.”

“We know that we have arguments, a clear, understandable position. We will state it,” he said in footage posted to the Russian Foreign Ministry's Telegram channel. The Kremlin said Trump and Putin will first sit down for a one-on-one discussion, followed by the two delegations meeting and talks continuing over “a working breakfast.”

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“To prevent accidental clashes between South and North Korea and to build military trust, we will take proactive, gradual steps to restore the (2018) Sept 19 military agreement. The wealthier South will not pursue any form of unification.”



Lee Jae Myung, President, South Korea

Sexual violence in conflicts worldwide increased

United Nations: Sexual violence in conflicts worldwide increased by 25 per cent last year, with the highest number of cases in the Central African Republic, Congo, Haiti, Somalia and South Sudan, according to a UN report.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' annual report said more than 4,600 people survived sexual violence in 2024, with armed groups carrying out the majority of the abuse but some by government forces. He stressed that the UN-verified figures don't reflect the

global scale and prevalence of these crimes.

The report's blacklist names 63 government and non-government parties in a dozen countries suspected of committing or being responsible for rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict, including Hamas militants, whose attack in Israel on October 7, 2023, sparked the war in Gaza.

Over 70 per cent of those listed have appeared on the report's blacklist annex for five years or more without creating steps to prevent



the violence, the UN chief said.

For the first time, the report includes two parties

that have been notified the UN has “credible information” that could put them on next year's blacklist if they don't take preventive actions: Israel's military and security forces over allegations of sexual abuse of Palestinians primarily in prisons and detention, and Russian forces and affiliated armed groups against Ukrainian prisoners of war.

Israeli UN Ambassador Danny Danon, who circulated a letter Tuesday from Guterres about the country's forces being put on

notice, said the allegations “are steeped in biased publications.”

“The UN must focus on the shocking war crimes and sexual violence of Hamas and the release of all hostages,” he said.

Russia's UN mission said it had no comment on the secretary-general's warning.

The 34-page report said “conflict-related sexual violence” refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced sterilisation, forced marriage and

other forms of sexual violence. The majority of victims are women and girls.

“In 2024, proliferating and escalating conflicts were marked by widespread conflict-related sexual violence, amid record levels of displacement and increased militarization,” Guterres said. “Sexual violence continued to be used as a tactic of war, torture, terrorism and political repression, while multiple and overlapping political, security and humanitarian crises deepened.”

-AP

EDITORIAL

Fraying Welcome

Ireland likes to think of itself as a land of *céad míle fáilte* or ‘a hundred thousand welcomes.’ However, in the past few months, a string of vicious racist assaults on Indian nationals has cast a shadow over that cherished self-image. The violence has been both targeted and brutal: a senior data scientist beaten by a gang of teenagers; a 40-year-old stripped and humiliated in a Dublin suburb; taxi drivers pelted with bottles and most disturbingly, a six-year-old girl in Waterford punched in the face and told to “go back to India.”

Ireland’s President, Michael D. Higgins, has condemned the attacks as “despicable,” praising Indians for their immense contribution to Irish life. Yet, official warmth contrasts starkly with ground reality. The India Council of Ireland now receives at least two hate crime reports daily. Victims describe slow or inconclusive police action. Perpetrators, often in their teens, act with impunity.

The bond between Ireland and India is neither recent nor superficial. In the early 20th century, both were struggling to loosen Britain’s imperial grip. Both peoples saw in the other a mirror of their own colonial experience. In the 1990s, when Ireland’s ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy began roaring, a shortage of skilled labour prompted hospitals, universities and technology firms to recruit heavily from India, particularly the southern states. Nurses and engineers arrived in large numbers, filling labour gaps in critical sectors. Today, Indians are among Ireland’s largest non-EU immigrant groups, prominent in fields without which the country’s public services and export industries would be weaker.

That history makes the current wave of hostility all the more jarring. Many of the attacks have been carried out by boys scarcely into adolescence. Far-right groups, until recently a fringe presence in Ireland, have capitalised on the country’s acute housing shortage to fuel resentment against migrants. Social media has amplified their message, borrowing tropes from Britain and America about “taking back” communities.

The irony is that Ireland’s own history should inoculate it against such sentiments. Millions of Irish emigrated in the 19th and 20th centuries, fleeing famine, poverty and repression. They encountered signs reading “No Irish Need Apply” and faced systemic discrimination.

The official stance remains broadly pro-immigration. Civic marches have drawn crowds demanding an end to racist violence. Yet the gap between rhetoric and enforcement is wide. Hate crime legislation passed in 2023 has yet to be applied robustly in many of these cases.

Ireland competes globally for skilled migrants. Indian nurses, doctors and engineers are in demand across the Anglosphere. A perception that Ireland is indifferent to their safety will undoubtedly compel them to go elsewhere. That would hurt not just hospitals and tech firms, but the country’s own narrative of being modern, open and globally engaged.

Repairing the frayed welcome will take more than presidential speeches. It will require better policing and confronting prejudice early before it hardens into hatred. For a nation that once depended on the kindness of strangers abroad, the stakes could hardly be clearer.

LET’S TALK POLITICS

By
Abhijit Joshi

As India marked its 79th Independence Day, the flutter of tri-colours in the monsoon breeze masked a less uplifting sight of an officer of the elite Indian Administrative Service being led away in handcuffs. Anil Kumar Pawar, until recently Commissioner of the Vasai-Virar City Municipal Corporation (VVMC), was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a sprawling money-laundering and illegal construction racket.

His fall, far more than just another corruption story, is a parable about the rot in India’s municipal governance, the pliability of urban planning laws and the political patronage networks that enable them.

The ED alleges that under Pawar’s watch in 2022, no fewer than 41 residential and commercial buildings sprouted illegally on land meant for sewage treatment plants and dumping grounds. These were not shanties hastily assembled under tarpaulin, but concrete blocks sold to unsuspecting middle-class buyers. Many put their life savings into flats they believed carried proper approvals. Courts later deemed the buildings illegal, and demolition

A municipal scam in Vasai-Virar lays bare how India’s urban governance often serves builders and politicians better than its citizens.

crews reduced them to rubble. The families were left with neither home nor hope.

Such projects, prosecutors say, were not the product of clerical oversight. They were the output of a ‘rate card’ system in which builders allegedly paid bribes of Rs. 20-50 per square foot for speedy, unimpeded clearances. The payments, channelled through a web of middlemen, architects and complicit municipal officials, were allegedly collected by Pawar and his deputy, Y. S. Reddy.

The trail of money, investigators claim, did not end at brown envelopes. Shell companies in the names of Pawar’s wife, daughters, and other relatives acted as laundering vehicles. Funds from ‘redevelopment projects’ - a favourite avenue for mingling illicit and legitimate earnings - were routed through these entities to give the cash a veneer of legality.

The paper trail was accompanied by a physical one. ED raids on a dozen premises tied to Pawar, including homes and offices in Mumbai, Nashik and Vasai-Virar, turned up Rs. 1.33 crore in cash and property documents allegedly linked to the scam. Earlier raids on Reddy’s Hyderabad residence had produced Rs. 8.6 crore in cash and gold and jewellery worth Rs. 23.2 crore.

When agents came knocking, Pawar reportedly refused to open his door for over two hours and tried to erase WhatsApp chats and call logs. The encrypted messages that survived revealed code names: “D” for the Deputy Director of Town Planning, Reddy; “C” for the Commissioner (Pawar himself) who, the ED says, was the final collector.

The case might have stayed a bureaucratic scandal but for an inconvenient family tree. Pawar is a distant relative of Maharashtra’s School Education Minister, Dadaji Bhuse. That link was enough to set off a political dogfight. Sanjay Raut of the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray faction) accused Bhuse of greasing Pawar’s appointment as Commissioner. Bhuse has admitted to the connection (his niece married into Pawar’s family) but in-



Anil Kumar Pawar

sists he had no role in the posting. Political rivals seem unconvinced.

For the buyers who have lost homes, the political theatrics are cold comfort. In Vasai-Virar, as in much of India’s urban periphery, the promise of affordable housing is often tethered to the hazards of opaque approvals. Municipalities are meant to be custodians of the public interest; instead, they often resemble auction houses where zoning and safety norms are traded to the highest bidder.

The scandal also exposes the vulnerability of development-plan safeguards. The land that hosted these doomed buildings was officially reserved for sewage treatment and waste disposal—public-health essentials in a city of 1.3 million. Once those safeguards were bypassed, the city was left not only with dispossessed residents but also with diminished capacity to manage its waste and sewage in the future.

There is a cyclical logic to such scams. Political leaders lobby for pliant officials in municipal bodies. Those officials enable illegal projects, which in turn generate funds that grease political machines. By the time enforcement agencies arrive, the victims are too numerous and too cash-strapped to litigate effectively. Builders declare bank-

ruptcy or vanish. Buyers cannot reclaim their investments.

Pawar’s arrest comes at a time when public confidence in local governance is already fragile. The Maharashtra government’s general administration department is now reviewing all major decisions he took as Commissioner. More heads could roll. Opposition parties are certain to keep the story alive in the Assembly, drawing attention to ministerial connections and the apparent ease with which checks and balances were sidestepped.

There are larger lessons. First, urban planning enforcement needs insulation from political interference. Without independent oversight, municipalities will remain fertile ground for such rackets. Second, buyers need better legal recourse. In countries with more mature housing markets, escrow systems or insurance guarantees protect purchasers if projects are later deemed illegal. In India, the burden falls almost entirely on the individual.

Finally, there is the question of deterrence. The Prevention of Money Laundering Act, under which Pawar has been booked, is one of the country’s most stringent. Yet it is only as effective as its prosecutions.

For all the symbolism of Independence Day, the Vasai-Virar episode reminds citizens that freedom is more than the absence of colonial rule. It is also freedom from the petty tyrannies of local corruption, from the predations of well-connected middlemen, and from the bureaucratic collusion that can turn a dream home into a demolition site.

Who else, beyond the two arrested officers, benefited from this network? Why did internal auditors or planning committees fail to flag the illegal approvals? How many similar schemes tick away quietly in other municipal jurisdictions? Until these questions are answered, the scandal will remain more symptom than cure.

(The Writer is a communication professional. Views personal.)

SATTIRE WITH SWAG



Achievements, challenges, plans highlighted in states

The 79th Independence Day was celebrated across the country on Friday with heads of governments recounting the achievements, challenges and plans of the respective states and Union Territories (UTs) as they hoisted the national flag.

In their speeches, the chief ministers and governors of the states and UTs spoke about the efforts being made to bring law and order under control, and check terrorism, militancy and Naxalism. They also expressed gratitude to the freedom fighters and the armed forces, while recounting development plans.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah delivered a forceful Independence Day speech, criticising the practice of linking

terror attacks to the UT’s political future and asserted that Pakistan should not be allowed to influence it through terrorism.

In his first speech since Jammu and Kashmir was downgraded to a UT, he announced a signature campaign would be launched to press the demand for restoration of statehood.

Abdullah’s remarks came a day after a Supreme Court bench, led by Chief Justice of India BR Gavai, said “incidents like Pahalgam” must be considered when deciding on statehood.

J-K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha hoisted the national flag at Raj Bhavan in Srinagar and paid tributes to freedom fighters and bravehearts of police, Army and Central Armed Police Forces. He

also paid homage to the citizens who lost their lives in the cloud-burst in Chashoti, Kishtwar.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami hoisted the national flag at the Parade Ground in Dehradun to mark the 79th Independence Day. Earlier, he also hoisted the national flag at his official residence and expressed his gratitude to the Indian Army, NDRF, SDRF, ITBP and all the agencies engaged in the challenging rescue operations underway in disaster-ravaged areas of Dharali and Harshil. He said Uttarakhand distinguished itself as the first state in Independent India to implement a Uniform Civil Code, the country’s toughest anti-copying law, an anti-riot law and a strict land law.

-PTI

HIGH SPIRITS

Why the Red Fort Rhetoric Still Matters



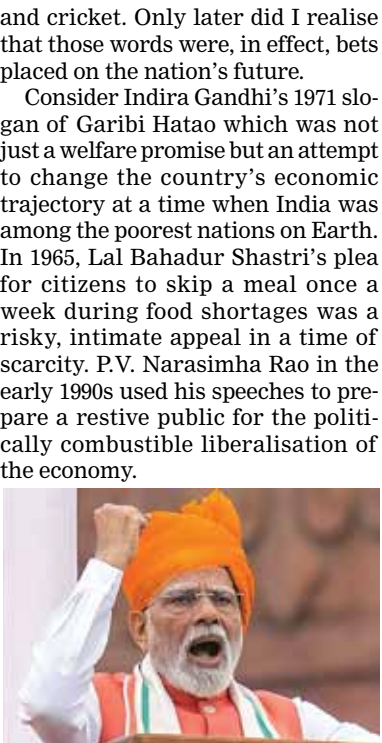
By
Anuradha Rao

Every August 15, India’s Prime Minister steps onto the ramparts of the Red Fort to speak to the nation. It is a ritual heavy with history: the fluttering tricolour, the parade of the armed forces, the long address broadcast into homes and streets across the country. For some, it is an exercise in ceremony; for others, a moment to take stock. Yet the real significance is that it is one of the rare occasions when a leader uses the most symbolic platform in the land not merely to mark time, but to gamble with it.

Magician Amit Kalantri once remarked that the Earth “is risking and flourishing by circling around a fierce ball of fire, and you are afraid of taking even small risks.” In its own way, the Red Fort has been the nation’s launchpad for similar gambles: declarations that are politically dangerous, economically ambitious or simply improbable.

For nearly eight decades, prime ministers have used the Independence Day address to announce ventures that other leaders might have kept for a party conference or a closed-door meeting. From the vantage point of history, these speeches form a pattern: public commitments that dared ridicule or failure, but were made anyway.

As a child, the ritual was not one I relished. My father would sit glued to the radio on 15th August, later to the television, insisting we watch. I heard words like “self-reliance” and “poverty eradication” that floated above my comprehension. They felt remote from my world of homework



and cricket. Only later did I realise that those words were, in effect, bets placed on the nation’s future.

Consider Indira Gandhi’s 1971 slogan of Garibi Hatao which was not just a welfare promise but an attempt to change the country’s economic trajectory at a time when India was among the poorest nations on Earth. In 1965, Lal Bahadur Shastri’s plea for citizens to skip a meal once a week during food shortages was a risky, intimate appeal in a time of scarcity. P.V. Narasimha Rao in the early 1990s used his speeches to prepare a restive public for the politically combustible liberalisation of the economy.

After the Pokhran nuclear tests of 1998, Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke from the Red Fort to defend India’s right to strategic autonomy in the face of sanctions. Rajiv Gandhi in the 1980s backed computerisation and telecom reforms when his own party elders bristled at the idea. Even V.P. Singh’s emphasis on social justice and the Mandal Commission’s recommendations in 1990 was a political live wire, risking social division.

These were not safe themes. They invited political backlash, economic uncertainty, and — occasionally — international condemnation. But they were deemed worth the risk, like the Earth’s unhesitating orbit.

Nor has the tradition faded. Narendra Modi’s 2014 debut speech placed toilets for women — a subject wrapped in social taboo — at the centre of national discourse, tying sanitation to dignity and gender justice. The Jan-Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion and the Jal Jeevan Mission for rural piped water similarly used

Independence Day to elevate everyday indignities into matters of state priority.

This year’s address was no different. From the Red Fort, the Prime Minister pledged a Made-in-India semiconductor chip by year-end, challenging global tech incumbents; GST reforms by Diwali, targeting structural bottlenecks; a Rs.1 lakh crore youth employment scheme, betting on demographic dividend; the Sudarshan Chakra defence system, blending civilisational imagery with military innovation; and a High-Power Demography Mission, tackling the sensitive issue of illegal immigration and demographic change.

Each is a high-wire act in technology, governance or diplomacy. To announce them publicly is to invite scrutiny and create political ownership.

Few nations use their national day address to place open defecation alongside nuclear science, or rural water schemes alongside strategic missile systems. India does. In doing so, it acknowledges its own gaps before the world, then stakes its credibility on closing them.

The Red Fort, then, is much more than a relic of Mughal grandeur or a backdrop for patriotic sentiment. It is a stage for audacity, a place where leaders have been willing to speak aloud what others might whisper, taking on risks that range from the logistical to the existential.

From the reluctant child forced to listen by the radio to the adult who now pores over the transcript each year, one truth has become clear to me: this is not mere rhetoric. It is the nation’s annual declaration that courage is not the absence of danger, but the embrace of risk as a condition for growth.

The Earth does not flinch in its orbit. Nor, on its better days, does India.

(The author is a learning and development professional. Views personal.)



KALEIDOSCOPE

1. **Border Security Force (BSF) personnel exchange sweets on the occasion of the 79th Independence Day at the Attari-Wagah border post between India and Pakistan on Friday.**
2. **A man with his face painted in tricolour takes part in 79th Independence Day celebrations at the Lal Chowk, in Srinagar on Friday.**
3. **Police personnel perform 'Dare devil' stunt during the 79th Independence Day celebration at Indira Gandhi Sarani in Kolkata, West Bengal on Friday.**
4. **Students gather during the 79th Independence Day celebration at the Red Fort in New Delhi on Friday.**
5. **People perform 'Nati' dance during the 79th Independence Day celebration in Shimla on Friday.**



All Pictures: PTI, AP

WASTE TO BEST

How Hospitals Safely Handle Biomedical Waste



By
Dr. Sanjay Joshi



In my previous article, we discussed how hospitals must segregate waste according to the prescribed colour-coding system to ensure safe disposal. Building on that, the next step is its transportation to a common treatment facility for further processing and final safe disposal. Before this can take place, the waste must be stored temporarily within the hospital. Hospitals generally have a designated central waste-collection room located within their premises. This room should be away from public or visitor access.

A water supply should be available adjacent to the central waste-storage area to allow for cleaning and washing of the room and its containers. Drainage from the storage and washing area must be directed to the Effluent Treatment Plant. Signage displaying relevant details—such as the emergency contact number, the name of the person in charge, and a biohazard logo—should be clearly posted. No general waste should be stored in this room, and access must be restricted to authorised personnel only.

Biomedical waste generated in wards, laboratories, operating thea-

Biomedical waste handling is now hi-tech, with the MPCB pioneering real-time tracking of over 140 GPS-fitted trucks across the state from its control centre.

tres, and other areas should be transported to the central storage room in covered trolleys or carts. These should travel along a route isolated from public areas. This ensures that patients and visitors are not exposed to the waste. The trolleys or carts should be dedicated solely to biomedical waste collection. Patient trolleys must not be used.

The operator of a common facility for the treatment of waste is responsible for transporting the waste collected in the hospital's central storage. The most commonly used vehicles are four-wheeler tempo trucks. These must be modified according to specifications from the state pollution control boards under the Motor Vehicle Act of 1988. The vehicles must be covered, have proper labelling, and display biohazard logos on all sides to show that infectious biomedical waste is being transported. Sometimes, the vehicle may need refrigeration if the ambient temperature is high, and the waste has to travel a long distance. The Bio-Medical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules (BMW Rules) mandate the use of GPS for tracking vehicles transporting biomedical waste. A tracking system

has multiple benefits, such as:

Monitoring and control: GPS allows authorities to monitor vehicle movements in real-time and calculate the number of trips made by vehicles from the pickup source to the common facility.

Accountability and transparency: GPS tracking provides a record of vehicle routes and disposal locations, increasing accountability and transparency in the waste management process.

Preventing environmental and health hazards: By ensuring proper waste disposal, GPS tracking helps mitigate the risks of environmental contamination and public health issues associated with improper biomedical waste management.

The Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) was among the first to implement this. It is monitoring the movements of more than 140 trucks online from a control centre through such GPS devices.

Now, what happens to the waste after it reaches the common facility? Please hold on until next Saturday. Until then, have a good weekend!

(The author is an environmentalist.)

EXPLAINER

Why Global Plastics Treaty Process Has Fallen Flat

Progress towards a legally binding global treaty on plastics pollution stalled and went into reverse this week. The United Nations Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, ran overtime. It's likely to conclude this evening, without agreement.

This is an incredibly disappointing result. As a member of the Scientists' Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty, I was hoping for action to genuinely curb plastic pollution. Our priorities included considering the whole life cycle rather than just disposal, setting targets to reduce plastic production, and regulating the use of harmful additives to reduce risks to human health.

Unfortunately, vested interests hijacked the negotiations. Countries with major petrochemical producers resisted caps on virgin plastic production. We've seen this before. Legitimate scientific concerns about harm have been downplayed by powerful interests time and time again — with tobacco, PFAS, asbestos, and climate change.

When it comes to plastics — especially the micro- and nanoplastics now invading our bodies — awareness and early action could make all the difference. But we can still take action into our own hands as consumers, to minimise exposure and reduce waste. It we act together, we can also send a powerful message to the plastics manufacturing industry.

Why do we need a plastics treaty?

An ambitious plastic treaty could have a positive, lasting impact on the environment and human health.

The Montreal Protocol, adopted in 1987 to phase out ozone-depleting aerosols, is a great example of what can be achieved.

The original Kyoto Protocol for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, on the other hand, was not ambitious enough. It had fewer signatories and its effectiveness varied between countries. The plastics treaty is at a similar



crossroads.

This treaty is a unique opportunity. It could ensure harmful additives are disclosed, new materials are proven safe before use, and upstream measures — such as reducing production and simplifying plastic chemistry — are prioritised.

Dissecting changes

A promising draft treaty, circulated in December after two years of negotiations, was revised at the end of the first week of the summit, and then cut in half midway through the second week. All items of contention had been removed.

Words such as “target”, “chemicals”, “harmful” and “phase out” were absent. Article 19 — the one addressing human health — was deleted altogether. References to public awareness disappeared from the waste-management section.

Gone are plans to globally phase out specific products such as plastic bags and straws. So is the section on sustainable production and reduction targets. There is no mention of chemicals of concern, or transparency around additives. Even basic language about improving recycling rates, banning open burning and dumping, or encouraging behaviour change has been removed.

On a positive note, the revised draft still encourages innovation and research. But without safeguards, there's a risk efforts will simply consist of finding loopholes to dodge penalties. We've seen this before too: replacing one banned chemical with another unregulated, equally harmful one.

What can we do?

In the absence of a strong treaty — at least for now — we shouldn't underestimate the power and influence we have as consumers.

Industry does respond to public demand. Just look at what happened with plastic microbeads. These tiny pieces of plastic were once common in personal care products such as exfoliants, body scrubs and toothpastes. But when people started to reject products containing microbeads, recognising them as a source of microplastics, manufacturers took note.

Governments also stepped in. The Netherlands was the first country to ban them, soon followed by many others. Eventually, manufacturers phased plastic microbeads out of their product lines worldwide.

That shift was largely driven by popular pressure. It's a small win, but a telling one — a reminder that our choices can make a difference.

Did you know some of the biggest sources of microplastics are synthetic textiles and tyres? Together they contribute more than 60% of primary microplastics. Microplastics are released not just when an item is discarded and decays in the oceans, but every time it's worn or washed.

Seemingly small actions — such as buying fewer clothes, choosing natural fibres where possible, washing less often, and walking or cycling instead of driving — can make a difference if we all act collectively.

It's also worth looking at other sources of microplastics in our surroundings, to limit exposure. Carpets are generally made of synthetic fibres that constantly shed microplastics. Exposure is significantly higher indoors, including inside cars — another reason to walk.

-The Conversation

Messi’s India tour greenlit; first stop Kolkata

Kolkata: Lionel Messi’s much-anticipated visit to India has received its final seal of approval with the Argentine superstar set to kick off his three-city tour in Kolkata on December 12, promoter of the event Satadru Dutta said on Friday. As earlier reported by PTI, the football-mad city of Kolkata will be the first stop in Messi’s whirlwind trip named ‘GOAT Tour of India 2025’, followed by Ahmedabad, Mumbai and New Delhi. The visit will conclude after a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence on December 15. This will be the Argentine great’s first trip to India since 2011 when he visited the country with his national to play a FIFA friendly against Venezuela at the Salt Lake Stadium

here. “I got the authorisation and afterwards made it official (on social media). Messi will post any day between August 28 and September 1 with the official poster with all details and a small introduction of his tour,” Dutta told PTI, confirming his visit. Dutta met Messi’s father earlier this year to present the proposal, and on February 28, Messi himself met him at his residence for a 45-minute discussion. “I explained the plan and what we wanted to do. He seemed convinced it was worth it and committed to



coming,” Dutta said. Messi’s entourage may also include Inter Miami teammates Rodrigo De Paul, Luis Suarez, Jordi Alba and Sergio Busquets among others but Dutta refused to divulge any name. Messi’s visit will feature masterclass with children in each city, aimed at inspiring the next generation of Indian footballers. He will land in Kolkata on the night of December 12 and spend two days and one night in his longest stop on the tour. His December 13 schedule begins with a meet-and-greet in the morning, which will also feature a special food and tea festival. The day’s highlight will be the unveiling of Messi’s statue, followed by the ‘GOAT Concert’ and ‘GOAT Cup’ at either Eden Gardens or Salt Lake Stadium.

will have a huge mural (dimensions of 25 feet height and 20 feet width) for him, which will be kept at strategic Durga Puja pandal-hopping locations so that all his fans will have an opportunity to paint and post messages in a nearby message box. That mural will be presented to Messi when he’s inside the stadium for the GOAT Concert,” Dutta said. He added that two-three possible mural locations have been shortlisted and awaits police clearance. Salt Lake Stadium is also under consideration as a backup venue for the Kolkata concert which is originally planned at Eden Gardens. “We have pencilled in both venues, and the final confirmation will come within 15 days,” Dutta said. The GOAT Cup at Eden Gardens will be a celebratory seven-a-side soft-touch football match, with Messi teaming up alongside Sourav Ganguly, Leander Paes, John Abraham and Baichung Bhutia. Organisers expect a sell-out crowd, with tickets likely to start from Rs 3,500. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is expected to felicitate Messi during the programme. Security will be the top priority, he said. -PTI

Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Delhi legs

On the evening of December 13, Messi will travel to Ahmedabad for a private event hosted by the Adani Foundation. The Mumbai leg on December 14 will feature a meet-and-greet at CCI Brabourne followed by the GOAT Concert and GOAT Cup at the Wankhede Stadium. The new addition will be the Mumbai Padel GOAT Cup at the CCI, Brabourne. The Maharashtra Cricket Association is also planning a ‘GOAT moment’ pairing Messi with Sachin Tendulkar, MS Dhoni and Rohit Sharma in GOAT Captain’s moment along with a Bollywood line-up featuring Ranveer Singh, Aamir Khan and Tiger Shroff. In Delhi on December 15, Messi will meet PM Modi at his residence before attending the GOAT Concert and GOAT Cup at Feroz Shah Kotla. Sources revealed that the Delhi District Cricket Association is also inviting Virat Kohli and Shubman Gill, who is a big ‘Messi fan’, a day after playing India’s third T20I against South Africa in Dharamsala.

India-Pak Asia Cup Matches Aaditya calls BCCI “greedy”

Mumbai: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Friday targeted the BCCI over India Pakistan cricket matches in the Asia Cup and said after so many efforts of the Union government to tell the world that Islamabad is behind the Pahalgham attack, the “greed for money of the cricketing body stands above the sacrifice of the armed forces”. He said it will be a real shame if the BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) thinks it’s above what Prime Minister Narendra Modi said from Red Fort during the Independence Day speech. “After so many efforts of the Union Government and our country to tell the world that Pakistan is behind the Pahalgham attack, the greed for money of the BCCI stands above the sacrifice of the Armed Forces, the Nation and even the PM saying blood and water cannot flow together,” Thackeray said. “With all the might that BCCI has in the ICC (International Cricket Council), it’s a joke to say we are bound by the Asia Cup



Rules,” he added. The two marquee India versus Pakistan games will be held in Dubai during the Asia Cup scheduled to start in the UAE from September 9. India and Pakistan will square off on September 14 in Dubai and one more time, potentially on September 21, at the same venue. The final will be held in Dubai on September 29. The tournament will be held in T20I format keeping in mind the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka early next year. -PTI

BOB U-13 School Chess Manas, Deep, Swaroop score wins

By Correspondent
Mumbai: FIDE rated sub-junior chess players Manas Hathi, Deep Funge, Swaroop Belemkar, Shlok Pawar and Maitreyi Bera won the opening matches in the Bank of Baroda (BOB) trophy school chess tournament organised by the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMMS) and the Ideal Sports Academy. In the tournament, which started on Independence Day, Manas Hathi, who was ranked first in the under-13 age group, made aggressive moves and defeated Ayushman Chakraborty in the 19th minute. In other matches, Deep Funge registered a sensational victory by defeating FIDE rated second seed Divit Modii in the 24th minute. However, another FIDE rated Swaroop Belemkar scored a win against Dhruv Yadav. Shlok Pawar defeated George Sherwin, whereas Maitreyi Bera beat Husaina Raj to earn the first league point in the tournament.



MCC teams excelled on England tour

By Correspondent
Mumbai: The Mumbai Cricket Club (MCC) trained by coach Jwala Singh played brilliantly on their recent tour of England. MCC had organised the England tour to provide their players an experience of playing in English conditions. Their two teams, one consisting of the age group between 19 to 23 and another under-16 team, played 22 matches, won 18 games and lost just four games. Sahil Jadhav and Ayaz Khan excelled on the tour scoring 400 runs each whereas Dev Jamula scored 600 runs with two centuries on this tour. The teams played against different clubs and schools like Eton College, Harrow School, Hampton School, Chase Cricket Club, Store School etc. on the tour.



Former Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar holds the national flag during the 79th Independence Day celebration. Pic: PTI

India A clinch one-day series against Australia A

Brisbane: Fine half-centuries from Yastika Bhatia, Radha Yadav and Tanuja Kanwar propelled India A to a thrilling series-clinching two-wicket victory over Australia A after Alyssa Healy’s brilliant knock had set the bar high for the visitors in the second women’s one-dayer, here on Friday. Following the win, achieved with just one ball to spare, India has taken a 2-0 lead in the three-match series of the multi-format tour. India A had lost the three-match T20 series 0-3. Chasing a healthy 265 for 9, built largely on Australian skipper Healy’s 87-ball 91, India were in doldrums at 193 for 7 after losing Yastika (66 off 71 balls) and Radha (60 off 78 balls).

But spin-bowling all-rounder Tanuja rose to occasion by batting responsibly for her 50 (57 balls) to fashion a fight back as India A won on the second-last ball of the match. Left-arm spinner Tanuja forged a 68-run stand for the eighth wicket with Prema Rawat (32 not out), who has been brilliant with the ball in the series, as the duo took it upon themselves to thwart the home team’s challenge. The pair subdued their attacking instinct and focused on the huge task on hand. They relied on quick running between the wickets, and gradually their partnership blossomed into a match-winning stand. Prema was unlucky to be dismissed with the tar-

get in sight. But Tanuja and pacer Titas Sadhu weathered the Australia A challenge in the final over to score the five precious runs for victory. India A had won the opening one-dayer at the same venue by three wickets. It was wicketkeeper-batter Yastika who displayed the intent to fight early on after she saw opening partner Shafali Verma (4) and Dhara Gujjar (0) head back to the dressing room in quick succession. **Brief scores:** Australia A: 265 for 9 in 50 overs (Alyssa Healy 91, Kim Garth 41 not out; Minnu Mani 3/46). India A: 266 for 8 in 49.5 overs (Yastika Bhatia 66, Radha Yadav 60, Tanuja Kanwar 50, Prema Rawat 32 not out; Amy Edgar 2/55). -PTI

ICC bans former player for fixing

Dubai: Former Sri Lankan domestic cricketer Saliya Saman has been banned from all cricket for five years after an ICC Anti-Corruption Tribunal found him guilty of breaching the Emirates Cricket Board (ECB) Anti-Corruption Code. Saman was among eight people charged in September 2023 for breaching the Code. The ban is backdated to 13 September 2023, when Saman was provisionally suspended and hence he has already served two years of his sentence. The 39-year-old Saman played 101 first-class and 77 List A games. The charges relate to the 2021 Abu Dhabi T10 Cricket League and attempts to corrupt matches in that tournament which were disrupted by the ICC, the Designated Anti-Corruption Official (DACO) for the purposes of the ECB’s Code for the tournament. Saman has been charged on three counts 2.1.1, 2.1.3 and 2.1.4. Article 2.1.1 states: “Being party to an attempt to fix, contrive or influence improperly matches or aspects of matches in the Abu Dhabi T10 2021.”

Golf: Bhatia lags behind at 46th

Owings Mills (US): Indian-American golfer Akshay Bhatia, who is looking to make the Tour Championship for the second straight year, struggled to 5-over 75 and was placed tied-46th among the 49 starters at the BMW Championship, the second event of the FedEx Cup Playoffs here. Bhatia struggled to find rhythm as he started on the front nine and dropped a shot on the fifth and then a double bogey on the sixth. A birdie on the ninth reduced the damage but he dropped shots on 12th, 14th and 16th holes that saw him finish at 75. Bhatia, who entered the week sitting on the edge of the Top 30 in the FedEx Cup standings, needs to move up the leaderboard and secure his place at East Lake for the Tour Championship. Scotland’s Robert MacIntyre was in great form at the Caves Valley Golf Club as he finished with a spectacular closing stretch, carding an 8-under 62 to seize a three-shot lead after the first round. MacIntyre’s day began on the front nine with a birdie on the first and a bogey on the second. He

also birdied the fourth and the seventh and ended the front nine at 2-under. The fireworks started on the back nine. He birdied the 11th and gave back that shot on the 12th. Standing at 2-under through 12 holes, the left-hander had a remarkable run of six consecutive birdies from the 13th to 18th, including a 66-foot putt on the 15th that had the crowd roaring. The 28-year-old’s final tally put him three clear of England’s Tommy Fleetwood, who signed for a bogey-free 65. Fleetwood sits second at 5-under with five birdies and no bogeys. It was a nice start for Fleetwood, too, particularly after another tough finish last week when he had a two-shot lead with three holes to play and finished one shot out of a playoff at the FedEx St Jude Championship in his bid for his first PGA TOUR title. World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler was tied for the lead when he returned from the storm delay and birdied three of his final four holes for a 66. He was third. -PTI

FC Goa drawn with Ronaldo’s Al Nassr

New Delhi: Indian Super League side FC Goa was on Friday drawn along with superstar footballer Cristiano Ronaldo’s Al Nassr of Saudi Arabia in Group D of the AFC Champions League 2, the continent’s second tier club competition, beginning September 16. Captained by Ronaldo, the Portuguese five-time Ballon d’Or winner, Al Nassr failed to qualify for AFC Champions League Elite after finishing third in the Saudi Pro League. They are now clubbed in

Group D of ACL 2, along with FC Goa, Al Zawraa SC of Iraq and FC Istiklol of Tajikistan. The draw for the tournament was conducted at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Friday. FC Goa are the Super Cup 2025 winners and semi-finalists in the ISL 2024-25. Al Zawra’a SC are the Iraq Stars League 2024-25 runners-up, and FC Istiklol are the Tajikistan Higher League 2024 champions. The tournament will be played in home and away format. But, it is difficult to

know just yet whether Ronaldo will play in India in FC Goa’s home match. **Earlier slot** In 2023, Mumbai City FC was clubbed along Neymar Junior’s Al Hilal, also of Saudi Arabia, but the Brazilian superstar did not play his club’s away match at DY Patil Stadium in Mumbai as he suffered an injury before the fixture. Mumbai City FC lost that match 0-6 on November 6, 2023. At that time, India was guaranteed a slot in the

group stage of AFC Champions League (ACL), then the continent’s top tier club competition, but the country does no longer get a slot in the rechristened ACL Elite. Currently, it gets a direct spot as well as a play-off slot in the ACL2. FC Goa secured the group stage qualification after beating Al Seeb Club of Oman 2-1 in the play-off match in Margao on Wednesday. They will play continental football for the second time, having represented India in the 2021 AFC Champions League

(ACL), then the continent’s top tier club competition. Meanwhile, Mohun Bagan Super Giant, the ISL 2024-25 Shield Winners, were drawn in Group C alongside Sepahan SC of Iran, Al Hussein SC of Jordan and Ahal FC of Turkmenistan. Sepahan SC are the Persian Gulf Pro League 2024-25 runners-up, while Al Hussein SC are the Jordanian Pro League 2024-25 champions, and Ahal FC are the runners-up of the Yokary Liga 2024. This will be Mohun



Bagan SG’s eighth appearance in Asia’s second-tier club competition earlier called AFC Cup. Thirty-two teams, 16 each in the West and the East Zone, have been di-

vided into eight groups of four each. The top two teams from each group will qualify for the Round of 16. The group stage will run from September 16 to December 24. The Round of 16

will take place between February 10-19, 2026. The quarter-finals and semi-finals are set for March 3-12 and April 7-15, respectively, with the final scheduled for May 16, 2026. -PTI