

Aryan Age

PRGI No.- MHENG/25/A0943 | VOL - 2 | ISSUE 39 | 8 PAGES | ₹ 3.00



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Raj and Uddhav Thackeray announce joint Mumbai march on July 26 over NEET paper leak and student protests

Mumbai: In a rare and powerful display of political unity, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) Chief Raj Thackeray and Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray held a joint press conference to launch a scathing attack on the central government over the NEET exam paper leak controversy and the ongoing nationwide student protests.

Condemning the police crackdown on agitating students, both leaders announced a massive joint protest march from Shivaji Park to the Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai on July 26.

Raj stated that the nationwide student protests were entirely peaceful, yet students, including female students, are being subjected to intense pressure, brutal lathi-charges, and police brutality. Pointing out the BJP's past opposition stand, he recalled how the party had previously demanded resignations, citing the resignation of former Home Minister R.R. Patil after the 26/11 attacks and protests against then-Mumbai Police Commissioner Arup Patnaik.

Raj emphasised that if a department fails, the responsible minister must take accountability, noting that the resignation. Still, government mishandling has now escalated

for opting for repression instead of communication, drawing parallels with the handling of farmer protests, Manipur, and tribal issues, and adding that he had previously warned the Prime Minister that centralizing exams would lead to student suicides.

Uddhav echoed these sentiments, stressing that the agitation is no longer limited to just the NEET examination. Drawing from his interactions during a Delhi visit, he noted that citizens aggrieved by various government decisions, ranging from demonetisation

onward, are joining in because accumulated public frustration is now spilling over.

Expressing deep dismay, Uddhav and Raj highlighted reports from Delhi protests where female students were allegedly subjected to brutal treatment, including torn clothes and severe beatings, calling such actions entirely unbecfitting of a democracy.

Uddhav criticised the Prime Minister for relying on social media messages rather than personally meeting and engaging with protesting students, noting that talking to the nation's youth

shows no loss of dignity.

Addressing the upcoming July 26 march from Shivaji Park to Siddhivinayak, Uddhav urged participants to maintain absolute peace, warning that some elements and civil-dress individuals aligned with police are attempting to divert and derail the movement.

Both leaders clarified that the march will serve as a peaceful display of strength for students, parents, and citizens to offer prayers at Siddhivinayak for the government's collective wisdom while registering their strong democratic dissent.

CM's daughter Divija Fadnavis issues cautious warning to youth over NEET protests via Instagram story

Mumbai: As nationwide student protests and demands for union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over the NEET paper leak issue echo from the streets to Parliament, Divija Fadnavis, daughter of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, has stepped into the discourse.

Breaking her silence on the ongoing agitations, she took to Instagram to issue a sharp and cautionary message to the youth regarding digital trends and political opportunism.

Divija advised youngsters not to blindly jump into protests or rebellions merely because a particular movement is trending on social media. Acknowledging

that peaceful protest is a fundamental right of every citizen, she firmly maintained that violence—whether perpetrated by protesters against police or vice-versa—is entirely unacceptable and should never be permitted.

While supporting educational reforms is valid, she warned youths against blindly endorsing the specific political parties or ideologies

leading these campaigns without thoroughly understanding their true motives beforehand.

Expressing her perspective on democratic accountability, she noted that opposition parties should help the ruling administration make better decisions keeping national development in mind, rather than acting purely as malicious adversaries focused solely on defamation.

Stressing that student welfare must remain paramount, she warned youth to stay vigilant against ideologies that hijack core issues like the NEET paper leak and twist them toward communal or diverted directions.

said that numerous cases of alleged police brutality have been reported against student protesting in Mumbai.

"A major drug racket is operating in the state, and a video surfaced today where a policeman supposedly threatened youth against protesting by telling them that they will be framed in a narcotics case by planting drugs on them. This has further deepened suspicions whether this is happening under police protection. The police officer who threatened to implicate the protesting students in false drug cases should be immediately dismissed from service and arrested, after which an impartial investigation should be conducted," he said.

Sapkal further

stated that the DGP and the Mumbai Police Commissioner informed the Congress delegation that an investigation has

is visible across the country. Prioritising this as a serious issue, Rahul Gandhi was the first to launch a campaign for students. In Maharashtra, the



been initiated against the police officer involved, and necessary action will be taken after the investigation is completed.

"There is widespread anger among the youth regarding the question paper leak issue, and their anger

Congress delegation meets top cops demanding halt to repression of protesting students

Mumbai: A delegation, led by Maharashtra State Congress President Harshvardhan Sapkal, met Director General of Police Sadanand Date and Mumbai Police Commissioner Deven Bharti today, demanding an immediate halt to repressive police action against students who are protesting in various parts of Mmi.

The delegation, comprising Congress Working Committee (CWC) member Naseem Khan, MLA Bhai Jagtap and other Congress leaders, also demanded an immediate halt to incidents such as obstructing, manhandling and detaining journalists during media coverage.

Interacting with the media after the meeting, MPCC President Sapkal

Salman Khan supports students' education reform movement, calls for peaceful resolution

Mumbai: Actor Salman Khan has expressed support for students participating in the ongoing movement seeking reforms in the country's education system, stating that the issue should remain focused on students and education rather than turning into a political debate.

In a statement shared on social media regarding the Delhi student agitation, Salman Khan said it was deeply distressing to see a movement that had remained peaceful take a violent turn. He expressed his heartfelt sympathies to the students and their family members who were injured during the protest.

Describing the alleged examination paper leak as an extremely serious matter, the actor said it was encouraging

to witness students from across the country coming together to demand a stronger and fairer education



their honesty, dedication and desire to secure both their own future and the future of an educated India were truly inspiring. He said the movement was progressing in the right direction and noted that the students had conducted their protest in a completely peaceful manner. According to him, their courage, confidence and passion for education would help build a stronger future for the nation.

He further emphasised that the matter concerns students and the education system and should not be given a political colour. Salman Khan said the entire credit for the movement belongs to the students of the country, adding that he believes the government will also extend full cooperation to them and

take constructive steps to strengthen the education system. He expressed hope that such an approach would result in a positive outcome for everyone.

The actor said he was praying for a constructive resolution and extended his best wishes to every student striving to pursue education and build a better future.

Highlighting the long-term importance of education, Salman Khan said learning should become India's next major identity and the country's strongest future trend. He added that the value of education should continue to grow every year so that students from around the world choose India as their destination for higher studies, helping establish the country as a global centre of education.

Congress says PM under pressure over student protests

Jairam Ramesh targets Modi on paper leak issue

New Delhi: Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh on Thursday launched a fresh attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the issue of examination paper leaks and the ongoing student protests, alleging that the Prime Minister was avoiding parliamentary debate and had come under pressure due to the growing nationwide outrage over the issue.

In a post on social media platform X, Ramesh claimed that the Prime Minister lacked the courage to participate in a serious debate in Parliament, unlike his predecessors who addressed the House whenever the situation demanded.

"The Prime Minister does not have the courage to stand up in Parliament and participate in a serious debate, as all Prime Ministers before him did whenever the occasion demanded," Ramesh said.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's social media announcement earlier in the day on setting up fast-track courts for paper leak cases, the Congress leader alleged that the post was an attempt to project concern for students but reflected the government's defensive position.

"This morning, through a social media post, he tried to create the impression that he is concerned about the issues being raised by

students across the country. But in reality, that post shows that he is under pressure and completely rattled," Ramesh wrote.

Escalating his criticism, the Congress leader accused the government of presiding over a series of alleged irregularities, saying, "Vote theft, seat theft, donation theft, theft of examination papers... the list keeps getting longer."

The remarks came amid an intensifying political confrontation over alleged irregularities in competitive examinations and paper leak cases. The Congress has been accusing the Centre of failing to protect the interests of students and suppressing protests over the issue, while



demanding accountability from the government.

Earlier on Thursday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that fast-track courts would be established to ensure the speedy disposal of paper leak cases and said those responsible for jeopardising the future of the country's youth would face swift and stringent punishment. The government has maintained that it is committed to safeguarding students' interests through a series of administrative and legal measures to strengthen the integrity of the examination system.

PM announces fast-track courts for paper leak cases, vows strict punishment for accused

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday announced that the government will establish fast-track courts to ensure the speedy trial of paper leak cases, asserting that safeguarding the interests and future of students remains the government's highest priority and warning that those responsible for compromising the future of the country's youth "will not be spared."

In a post on social media platform X, the Prime Minister said the decision was aimed at ensuring swift justice and stringent punishment for those involved in examination paper leaks, which have triggered widespread concern over the integrity of competitive examinations and recruitment tests. "Nothing is more important than the welfare and future of our youth!" Modi said, adding, "We have decided to set up fast-track courts to ensure swift and stringent punishment for those involved in paper leaks. Have directed the

concerned authorities and officials to take all necessary steps in this regard. This continues our series



of steps for safeguarding the interests of students."

Reiterating the government's resolve to crack down on those responsible for such offences, the Prime Minister said, "Those who try to harm the future of our youth

will not be spared."

In his Hindi post, Modi said, "The welfare and future of the



country's youth are our highest priority. To ensure that those guilty in all paper leak cases receive strict punishment at the earliest, fast-track courts will be constituted for the speedy disposal of these cases. Directions

have already been issued to the concerned departments to ensure the necessary action."

be spared." The announcement comes amid heightened political and public focus on examination irregularities and paper leak incidents, with concerns over the credibility of recruitment and entrance examinations dominating public discourse in recent months. The issue has sparked protests by students and criticism from opposition parties, which have accused the government of failing to prevent repeated examination leaks.

The Centre has maintained that it is committed to protecting the interests of students through legislative, administrative and technological measures to strengthen the examination system. The proposed fast-track courts are expected to expedite the prosecution of those accused in paper leak cases and reinforce the government's efforts to deter such offences through quicker judicial proceedings and stricter punishment.

DMRC shuts down 16 metros again amid the ongoing CJP protests



New Delhi: Sixteen Delhi Metro stations were closed for operations from 7:30 am until further notice, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) said on Thursday.

At 6:55 am, the DMRC released a list of the 16 stations affected: Lok Kalyan Marg, Rajiv Chowk, Patel Chowk, Ramakrishna Ashram Marg, Barakhambha Road, Supreme Court, Seva Teerth, Janpath, Mandi House, Central Secretariat, ITO, Delhi Gate, Indraprastha, Khan Market, Jor Bagh and Shivaji Stadium. While entry and exit at these stations have been suspended, interchange facilities will continue to be available at Rajiv Chowk, Mandi House and Central Secretariat, the DMRC said. The announcement came after fresh tensions erupted on Sansad Marg on Wednesday night, away from the protest site. Security has also been tightened around Jantar Mantar, where the protest led by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) is continuing.

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▶▶ MAHARASHTRA

Fadnavis hits out at Thackeray cousins over their planned joint protest against alleged TET examination scam

Mumbai: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis today hit out at Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray as well as his cousin and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray over their planned joint protest against the alleged TET examination scam.

“Stop hiding your own misdeeds while pointing fingers at others,” Fadnavis said, recalling the alleged irregularities in the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) during Uddhav Thackeray’s tenure as chief minister.

He claimed that the TET scam during the previous government was one of the biggest scandals in the state’s history and alleged that officials, including IAS officers, were involved. He further alleged that candidates who had failed exam-



inations were helped to pass during the previous regime.



The Chief Minister said that his government had act-



ed against those allegedly involved in the TET irregular-

ities before the examination could take place, after detecting the suspected scam.

The remarks came ahead of a joint march announced by the Thackeray cousins on July 26 from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Park to the Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai. Raj Thackeray has appealed to students and parents to participate in the protest, saying that no political party flags would be allowed and that only the national flag would be carried. He also said that the issue should be resolved rather than allowed to escalate.

Uddhav Thackeray, meanwhile, said that leaders, including NCP founder Sharad Pawar and even Fadnavis, could potentially attend the protest, adding that the agitation would make it clear who stood with the students and who opposed them.

3,500 VBA workers detained ahead of Maharashtra Bandh: Ambedkar

Akola : Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) president Prakash Ambedkar on Thursday alleged that around 3,500 party workers were detained across Maharashtra ahead of the statewide bandh called by the outfit in protest against the Centre’s education policies and the alleged police action on students and protesters in Delhi.

Addressing reporters, Ambedkar claimed the detentions were carried out even as those responsible for the alleged NEET paper leak remained untouched.

“Nearly 3,500 VBA workers have been detained. However, no action is being taken against those involved in the NEET paper leak. Police have been deployed in large numbers across the state. This is unfortunate,” he said.

Ambedkar further al-

leged that a section of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was attempting to provoke clashes with



VBA supporters.

While announcing the bandh earlier, Ambedkar had accused the union government of pursuing education policies that discourage learning and critical thinking among the youth.

“The government does not want people to become educated because education broadens understanding and promotes critical thinking,” he had said, while urging cit-

izens across Maharashtra to support the shutdown.

He also clarified that the bandh was not discussed with any political party.

Ambedkar additionally alleged that police had used pellet guns against protesters in Delhi, claiming the action violated United Nations advisories.

He further accused the authorities of using excessive force against students and protesters and said the bandh was intended to highlight alleged irregularities and corruption in the country’s education system. The bandh also witnessed protests in other parts of Maharashtra, including Nagpur, where over 100 demonstrators were detained after they allegedly refused to vacate Samvidhan Square. The detentions were made till 5 pm, when this report was filed.

Mumbai water storage nears 70 per cent as Modak sagar overflows following heavy Monsoon rains

Mumbai: Continuous monsoon rainfall over the past 24 hours has significantly improved Mumbai’s drinking water reserves, with the combined storage in the seven reservoirs supplying water to the city rising to 69.74% of their total live storage capacity, according to the latest data released by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation’s Hydraulic Engineer’s Department.

The city’s reservoir levels recorded a sharp increase of 7.84 percentage points between 6 am on Wednesday, July 22, and 6 am on Thursday, July 23, following sustained rainfall across the catchment areas.

Official figures show that the seven lakes; Upper Vaitarna, Modak Sagar, Tansa, Middle Vaitarna, Bhatsa, Vihar, and Tulsi now collectively hold 10,09,432 million

litres of water against their total live storage capacity of 14,47,363 million litres, bringing Mumbai’s available drinking water stock close to the 70% mark.

Modak Sagar reached its full storage capacity and began overflowing at 2:07 am on Thursday, becoming the fourth reservoir to overflow during the current monsoon season. Earlier this month, Vihar and Tulsi overflowed on July 7, while Tansa began overflowing on July 22.

Among the remaining reservoirs, Bhatsa, the largest source of Mumbai’s drinking water, has reached 65.01% of its useful storage capacity. Middle Vaitarna is currently at 62.27%, while Upper Vaitarna has filled up to 49.41% of its capacity.

Heavy rainfall continued across the reservoir catchment areas during the

24-hour period. Upper Vaitarna recorded the highest rainfall at 230 mm, followed by Middle Vaitarna at 207 mm, Modak Sagar at 185 mm, Tulsi at 163 mm, Bhatsa at 123 mm, while Tansa and Vihar each recorded 103 mm.

The Bhandup Complex, which houses Mumbai’s Master Control Centre for water supply operations, received 110 mm of rainfall during the same period. The cumulative seasonal rainfall recorded at the complex has now reached 2,116 mm.

The improvement in reservoir levels comes as Mumbai continues to witness widespread monsoon activity under the India Meteorological Department’s Yellow Alert. The steady rise in water storage has strengthened the city’s drinking water position.

Congress slams Maha govt over ‘police state’ tactics on protesters, backs July 26 agitation

Mumbai : Launching a scathing attack on the state administration, Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) President Harshwardhan Sapkal on Thursday accused the ruling Mahayuti of transforming Maharashtra into a tyrannical “police state”. Lashing out at the heavy-handed crackdown on student protesters, Sapkal announced the Congress backing for the upcoming statewide agitation on July 26, spearheaded jointly by opposition heavyweights Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray. Sapkal vehemently condemned the state machinery for what he termed as “suppressing democratic student protests”, sparked by nationwide youth outrage and demands including the resignation of union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. He

slammed authorities for “illegally detaining” underage students in custody without even notifying their families, warning that the grand old party will fiercely protect democratic rights.

Taking a direct dig at the state’s internal security apparatus, Sapkal remarked that the Home Department has been reduced to operating on the whims of low-level proxies rather than autonomous law enforcement, asserting that a “creeping dictatorship” is systematically replacing democracy. He also demanded the immediate suspension of a Mumbai police personnel featured in a controversial viral video that raised severe administrative red flags. Confirming unequivocal support for the July 26 joint agitation led by Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray, Sapkal stat-

ed that a unified roadmap will soon be chalked out in consultation with with opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) and INDIA bloc allies. Mocking Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s delayed response after 30 days of nationwide student unrest, Sapkal sarcastically urged social activist Anna Hazare to “stay awake this time.” Dismissing leader Sadabhau Khot’s remarks against student protesters, Sapkal quipped that Khot is speaking the RSS’ language and prescribed him a metaphorical “Get Well Soon.” Branding the state’s micro farmers’ relief package—restricted to a 36,566 farmers—as a “cruel joke”, Sapkal likened it to the proverbial “much cry and little wool”, mocking whether it was intended as an insulting birthday gift to the distressed agrarian community.

Maharashtra bandh evokes good response to VBA’s shutdown call

Nagpur : The statewide bandh called by the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) on Thursday in protest against the alleged NEET paper leak and the reported police lathi charge on students during a demonstration at Delhi’s Jantar Mantar witnessed a significant response across several parts of Maharashtra.

The shutdown affected normal life in many districts, with markets, commercial establishments, and educational institutions remaining closed in various locations. The bandh was organised to express solidarity with protesting students and demand accountability over the alleged examination irregularities. Among the districts that witnessed the strongest impact were Akola, Yavatmal, and Gadchiroli, where the bandh was reported to be nearly complete. Most shops, business establishments, and local markets remained shut throughout the day as traders responded to the call.

Several schools, colleges, and other educational institutions also suspended

their operations in view of the bandh, while local administrations closely monitored the situation to prevent any law and order issues.

Public transport services experienced partial disruptions in some areas due to demonstrations and road protests organised by VBA workers and supporters. However, essential services, including healthcare and emergency services, continued to function without interruption.

Large numbers of VBA workers and supporters assembled at major squares and public places across different districts, raising slogans against the Central government and condemning the alleged use of force against students protesting in the national capital.

Protesters demanded a fair investigation into the alleged NEET paper leak and called for accountability from those responsible for the controversy. Demonstrators also criticised the police action taken against students during the protest at Jantar Mantar.

PI (Athawale) to hold ‘maha morcha’ demanding SC Sub-Classification only after caste census

Pune: The Republican Party of India (Athawale) today demanded that any decision on sub-classification among Scheduled Castes be taken only after the completion of the national caste census and publication of accurate population data.

The party has announced a grand protest march on July 27, starting from the statue of Bharat Ratna Dr B R Ambedkar near the District Collectorate office in Pune.

The announcement was made at a press conference by RPI (Athawale) Pune city president Sanjay Sonawane, Pune Deputy Mayor Parshuram Wadekar and state secretary Balasaheb Janrao.

Party general secretary Mahipal Waghmare, along

with Sham Sadafule, Mohan Jagtap, Nilesh Rokade and other office-bearers, were present at the press conference held at the Pune Shramik Patrakar Bhavan.

Sonawane said the party was committed to preserving social unity among the 59 communities included in the Scheduled Caste category.

He said the process of sub-classification should be undertaken only after the national caste census so that decisions could be based on accurate population figures and justice could be ensured for all communities.

Wadekar said various Scheduled Caste communities had fought together for social justice, equal rights and reservation for decades.

Mumbai BJP leader claims anti-India forces have hijacked student movement

Mumbai: Mumbai BJP President Amit Satam stated here on Thursday that “anti-India international forces” have hijacked the student movement and are conspiring to obstruct India’s progress and revolutionary transformation under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. Satam appealed to students and youth not to fall prey to this conspiracy.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP state office here on Thursday, Satam said: “The Modi government took action within four days of the NEET paper leak. The NEET exam was cancelled on May 3. The Education Ministry handed over the investigation to the CBI and union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan accepted

moral responsibility.” Today, the Prime Minister has also clarified that action will be taken against those guilty of the NEET paper leak by setting up a fast track court.” “The budget for this education sector, which was Rs 8,225 crore during the previous government, has now increased to Rs 1.39 lakh crore. Modi has brought about a revolution in the education sector in the last 12 years, and immediate action was taken after this paper leak,” Amit Satam said.

“There is an international conspiracy to stop India’s progress. These anti-national forces have realised that the people of India have completely rejected opposition leaders like Rahul Gandhi, the Congress Party, Akhilesh

Yadav, Mamata Banerjee of Trinamool Congress and opposition leaders in Maharashtra. “They have been defeated in elections. Therefore, it is an attempt by anti-national forces to create trouble,” Satam said. He said that the same people who raised slogans like ‘Bharat Tere Tukde Honge Inshallah Inshallah’ and ‘Afzal Hum Sharminada Hai Tere Qatil Zinda Hai’ are supporting BJP and Abhijit Dipke today. “Khalistanis, All India Student Association, Student Federation of India, SIMI founder Syed Qasim Rasool Ilyas and Advocate Colin Gonsalves who filed a mercy petition for Ajmal Kasab, Nandita Narayan, Arundhati Roy who said that Kashmir is not a part of In-

dia, are conspirators against India. The Tukde Tukde Gang receives foreign funds and those who want to bring back Article 370 are supporting Abhijit Dipke,” Amit Satam said. “People like Dhruv Rathi who is stationed in Germany, Gajabhau from Maharashtra who is in America are conspiring against India. Those who are attacking the police, smashing their cars and tearing the clothes of female cops and throwing stones at them are not students, but anti-India forces, who hijacked the student movement,” Satam said. “How many cases were registered and how many resigned and how the accused were arrested, after the CBSE Pre-Medical question paper leaked in 2004,

Police crack down on Maharashtra Bandh organisers as stir evokes mixed response

Mumbai: Thousands of students, citizens and workers of the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) participated in a protest march across Pune on Thursday, responding to the statewide Maharashtra Bandh called by VBA president Prakash Ambedkar to protest the police action against students demonstrating at Delhi’s Jantar Mantar and demand the resignation of union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

The Maharashtra Bandh evoked a mixed response across the state, though Mumbai was relatively unaffected. Still, shops remained closed in the suburbs of Mumbai where VBA has a presence.

Interacting with media persons here on Thursday, VBA chief Prakash Ambedkar claimed that nearly 3,500 of his party’s workers were detained in Mumbai on Wednesday night, just before the Thursday, July 23 Maharashtra Bandh called by the outfit.

“Shops stayed shut, though vehicles were seen plying. Some schools linked to the RSS are functioning. A section of the RSS appears to be trying to create a situation which could lead to unrest, similar to what happened in Delhi’s Jantar Mantar, where a lathi charge was carried out to create an atmosphere of fear. However, we instructed our workers to remain peaceful,” VBA chief Prakash Ambedkar said.

“In Mumbai alone, nearly 3,000 of our workers have been detained by the police, served notices, and their family members have been threatened with action if they step out of their homes. The government has created an atmosphere of repression through the police. Our demand is that strict action should be taken against the recurring question paper leaks and against those responsible for them,” he said. “I told state intelligence department officials who came to meet me that the

people are angry about the government’s action against Jantar Mantar protesters and that their anger is likely to be directed against the police,” Ambedkar said.

In Mumbai, workers of the VBA’s Kurla unit blocked the Mumbai–Sion–Mulund National Highway on Thursday as part of the Maharashtra Bandh. Several party workers, including Swapnil Javalekar, Swapnil Waghmare, Sandhya Pagare, Anil Mhaske and Malti Wagh, participated in the protest.

The bandh had a greater impact in VBA strongholds like suburban Chembur, Ghatkopar and Dharavi, while parts of Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, Akola district and Nagpur were also affected, besides Pune, where a large protest demonstration was organised by the VBA.

In Mumbai, the police intervened and removed VBA protesters who attempted to block the East-

ern Express Highway. VBA Mumbai President Chetan Ahire was taken into police custody during the



shutdown in Mumbai. VBA chief Prakash Ambedkar’s son and VBA leader Shujaat Ambedkar was also detained by the police in Mumbai, along with other protesters.

In Bhandup, Mumbai Regional President of the VBA Snehal Sohni and other activists visited different

localities to assess the response to the Maharashtra Bandh. Several shopkeepers supported the protest by



keeping their establishments closed.

The vegetable market at Vashi Naka in suburban Chembur remained completely shut, while residents and traders in Byculla and Mazgaon also reportedly observed a shutdown.

The VBA alleged that

police had served notices on several party leaders and workers ahead of the protest. The VBA also claimed that some of its office bearers were placed under virtual house arrest, with police personnel deployed outside their residences to prevent them from participating in the agitation.

The bandh had some impact in the Mohane area near Kalyan, near Mumbai. Many traders in Mohane, Ambivali and Titwala areas kept their shops closed, even as VBA activists shouted slogans against the government, demanding justice for Jantar Mantar students and NEET question paper leak-affected students. In Pune, a VBA-led protest march began at around 10 am after leaders and workers paid floral tributes to the statue of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj at the Deccan area. Carrying the Indian tricolour and raising slogans against the central government, protesters marched through Laxmi

Road and Bhawani Peth before concluding the march at the statue of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar near Pune Railway Station.

As the procession moved through Bhide Wada and Shivaji Road, protesters appealed to shopkeepers to voluntarily shut their establishments in support of the bandh. VBA had also urged parents not to send their children to schools and colleges for the day. Party leaders claimed that more than 30 organisations, including student groups, social organisations, traders and like-minded political parties, had extended support to the protest. VBA workers in Pune also staged a road blockade near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj statue in Kothrud, disrupting traffic on the busy stretch. Activists sat on the road, waved VBA party flags and raised slogans against the police action on protesting Jantar Mantar students, which led to traffic delays.

In Nanded district, state

transport bus services remained off the roads during the bandh.

A strict bandh has been observed in the market of Karmala in Solapur in support of the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) and the NEET question paper leak-affected students.

Karmala city and areas in Jeur and Kem areas, which are the largest markets in the taluka were affected by the bandh.

At Kranti Chowk in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, the police intervened after VBA activists took to the streets, while the left parties actively supported the bandh in Kolhapur district. Vanchit and Left Front activists at the central bus station area appealed to traders to keep their shops shut. VBA activists staged a road block protest on the Yermala-Kalamb road at Masa Khandeshwari in Kalamb taluka of Dharrashiv district, which disrupted traffic on the highway for some time.

Police Officer Transferred After Threatening Detained Students with False Case

Mumbai : A local police constable was removed from his current duty post after a viral video showed him threatening detained student protesters. The clip showed a group of young demonstrators sitting inside a police van after being picked up from a demonstration. The officer sitting in the front warned them never to join future rallies again or he would ruin their lives.

In the recording, the policeman claimed he would plant illegal drugs in their bags to send them to jail. After the video circulated widely on social media platforms, senior police management ordered an immediate departmental inquiry. Officials stated that further disciplinary or legal steps will depend on the final findings of the internal investigation.

A local police constable in Mumbai was removed from his current duty assignment after a viral video surfaced online showing him verbally threatening a group of detained student protesters. The incident occurred shortly after law enforcement personnel rounded up young demonstrators from a public protest site and placed



them inside a official police transport vehicle to be taken into custody.

The protest had initially drawn a considerable crowd of students who gathered to peacefully voice their concerns regarding pressing social and educational issues. As officers moved in to clear the area, several key participants were detained and guided into waiting police vans, setting the stage for the controversial interaction that was subsequently captured on camera.

Inside the police trans-

port van, a small group of young demonstrators sat quietly under the supervision of law enforcement personnel while waiting to be driven to the local police station. A student seated near the rear of the vehicle managed to discreetly record the interaction on a mobile phone, capturing the entire exchange between the officer in charge and the detained youth.

The recorded clip clearly shows a police constable sitting in the front passenger section turned around toward the back of the vehicle to ad-

dress the detained students. Rather than following standard administrative procedures or explaining the legal basis for their detention, the officer began delivering a stern and aggressive warning to the young passengers.

In the video, the policeman can be heard warning the students never to participate in future protests or rallies again if they valued their personal lives and future prospects. The officer raised his voice and told the young demonstrators that engaging in further activist

activities would result in severe personal consequences that would permanently alter their life trajectories.

The constable went on to state that he possessed the power to completely ruin their personal and professional futures if they continued to join social movements. He emphasized that participating in public demonstrations was a mistake that would bring long-term hardship upon them and their families, urging them to abandon their activist efforts entirely.

The most shocking moment of the recording occurred when the policeman openly threatened to fabricate serious criminal charges against the young demonstrators. In an explicit declaration captured clearly on audio and video, the officer claimed he could easily plant illegal drugs inside their personal bags and backpacks without their knowledge or consent.

By fabricating narcotics evidence, the constable threatened to frame the students under stringent anti-drug laws, which carry heavy penalties and lengthy prison sentences.

Local Youth and Police Save Four Family Members Stranded by Rising Floods

Mumbai : Severe continuous rain caused local streams and rivers to swell rapidly, surrounding houses and trapping residents in floodwaters. In one critical case, four members of a local family became stranded inside a small hut next to their home when floodwaters quickly encircled the property late at night. Realizing they were stuck, the family called out to nearby villagers for help.

A group of brave local youth along with a team of police officers rushed to the spot around ten at night. Facing strong currents, the rescuers used ropes and floating tubes to reach the trapped family. They successfully brought all four individuals out to safety without any injuries, even as heavy downpours continued to flood surrounding roads and disrupt regional transport.

A group of local youth and police officers carried out a brave rescue operation to save four members of a family stranded by rising floodwaters in Mumbai. Continuous

heavy rainfall had caused nearby rivers and streams to overflow, completely surrounding the family's property and trapping them inside a small shelter adjacent to their house late at night.

As the water levels rose rapidly, the stranded family members shouted for help to alert neighbors in the vicinity.

Hearing their calls, local villagers immediately alerted the authorities and

assembled a rescue group to respond to the dangerous situation.

Despite the darkness and the strong water currents, a team composed of courageous local youth and police personnel arrived at the scene around ten o'clock at night to attempt a rescue. Equipped with ropes and floating tubes, the rescuers waded into the floodwaters to establish a secure line to the trapped family.

Major Lake Overflows to Boost City Drinking Water Supply

Mumbai : Heavy continuous rainfall in key catchment areas caused the Modak Sagar lake to start overflowing early Thursday morning. This makes it the fourth major reservoir supplying the city to fill up completely this monsoon season. The rapid inflow of rainwater has increased total water storage across all seven main supply lakes to nearly seventy percent of their full capacity.

This boosted reserve holds enough water to cover the city's needs for over two hundred days. Despite the positive increase in overall water levels, civic officials stated that the existing ten percent water cut enforced across the city will remain in place for now until a formal review takes place.

Heavy continuous rainfall across key catchment areas in Maharashtra has caused the Modak Sagar

lake to start overflowing early Thursday morning. This critical development marks the fourth major reservoir supplying drinking water to the city of Mumbai to reach its full capacity during the current monsoon season. The relentless downpours over the surrounding hills and forests have channeled massive volumes of fresh water directly into the lake, bringing its water levels to the maximum limit and of-

fering significant relief to urban water management authorities. The overflowing of Modak Sagar represents a crucial milestone in securing the city's municipal water supply for the coming year. As one of the primary lakes feeding the vast urban distribution network, the reservoir plays a foundational role in meeting the daily hydration, sanitation, and operational needs of millions of residents. Local

civic officials monitored the rising water gauges closely overnight as steady inflows pushed the lake past its crest level, officially initiating the natural overflow process into downstream channels. The rapid inflow of rainwater across regional catchment zones has dramatically boosted the total water storage recorded across all seven main supply lakes that cater to the metropolis.

Church Leaders Call for Special Prayers and Education Reforms After Clash

Mumbai : The Archdiocese of Bombay has issued a directive asking all local parishes and religious houses to hold special prayers during Sunday Masses and daily services. This call comes after recent violent incidents broke out during student demonstrations in Delhi.

The church leaders want the community to pray for national peace, healing, social harmony, and a speedy recovery for those who were injured.

The official statement emphasizes the need to resolve public disputes through peaceful discussions rather than using force. It also asks authorities to show restraint while keeping order.

Furthermore, the directive urges officials to make the national education system fairer, more accessible, and focused on human dignity so that students do not suffer.

The Archdiocese of Bombay has issued a directive calling on

all local parishes, chapels, and religious houses under its jurisdiction to hold special prayers during Sunday Masses and daily services. The announcement comes in the wake of recent violent clashes that erupted during student demonstrations in Delhi, prompting church leadership to seek spiritual reflection and community support for the impacted individuals and the wider nation.

In its official communication, the Archdiocese requested the

faithful to unite in prayer for national peace, social harmony, and institutional healing. Special intentions will be offered for those who sustained physical injuries during the unrest, wishing them a safe and speedy recovery while offering comfort to affected families.

The statement highlights the importance of resolving public grievances through constructive, peaceful dialogue rather than resorting to physical confrontation or heavy-handed force.

Protesting Students Perform Viral Viking Row Movement to Demand Resignations

Mumbai : Young demonstrators protesting against competitive examination paper leaks brought a unique sports-style celebration to the streets. A group of student protesters performed the famous Norwegian "Viking Row" while loudly demanding official resignations. In a viral clip, one person beats a rhythm on a drum while dozens of sitting students move back and forth together to copy the motion of rowing a ship.

Instead of cheering for a sports team, the crowd



chanted for accountability from government officials. The creative protest technique gained fast attention online, with social media users linking the rhythmic row to viral fan

movements seen during major international sports tournaments. Demonstrators insisted they will keep organizing protests at key city locations until their concerns are addressed.

Daily Passengers Peak as Local Metro Breaks All-Time Travel Record

Mumbai : The city metro system set a new single-day record on July 21 when more than three lakh seventy-three thousand passengers rode the trains. This achievement broke the previous high mark recorded just six days earlier. Transit officials revealed that this is the sixth time within a single month that the network has broken its own passenger record. The steady rise in commuter numbers highlights how much local residents now rely on the expanding metro line for daily travel. Officials attribute this rapid growth to better route connections across the city, growing public trust

in public transport, and the increasing use of digital ticket booking options. The city metro system in Mumbai set a phenomenal new single-day ridership record on July 21 when more than three lakh seventy-three thousand passengers rode the network across various corridors. This monumental operational milestone surpassed the previous high mark recorded just six days earlier, illustrating a rapid upward trajectory in daily commuter volume across the financial capital. Transit authorities from the operating corporation revealed that this latest surge marks the sixth time within a single calendar

month that the urban transit network has broken its own all-time daily passenger record. Such consistent milestones underscore an extraordinary shift in how local residents choose to navigate the bustling metropolis on a day-to-day basis. The steady and dramatic rise in commuter numbers highlights the growing reliance of local residents on the expanding metro infrastructure for their daily transit needs. As traffic congestion on major arterial roadways continues to pose challenges during peak hours, city dwellers are increasingly turning to the metro system as a fast, reliable.

Editorial

The Outcry of the Youth and the Silence of Power

In a democracy, protest is not a crime; it is a constitutional right of the people and the most effective way to hold those in power accountable. However, when the path of suppression is chosen over dialogue, the issue transcends the specific protest and becomes a question of fundamental democratic values. The events that unfolded at Jantar Mantar have raised serious questions regarding the government's sense of accountability, its willingness to engage with protesters, and its sensitivity toward the discontent of the youth. The scene witnessed in the heart of the capital on Monday was not merely the suppression of a protest; it was a brutal slap in the face of democratic dialogue by the powers that be. The sight of unarmed students holding the Tricolour—being subjected to lathi-charges and dragged away was harrowing enough to make any sensitive citizen's heart skip a beat. Yet, those at the helm of power chose to completely ignore it, once again demonstrating their callousness; therein lies the true tragedy of this incident.

For the past month, thousands of young people and veteran social activist Sonam Wangchuk have been on a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar. Their primary demand is that Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resign, accepting moral responsibility for the massive irregularities and paper leaks associated with the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET). It is particularly distressing that, despite the heart-wrenching revelation that over twenty-two meritorious students across the country have committed suicide due to the trauma caused by this paper leak, the government has not shown even a shred of empathy. The fact that not a single minister or government representative extended the courtesy of engaging with the protesters over this prolonged period of 33 days speaks volumes about the government's insensitivity. On Monday the very first day of the parliamentary session—a stark contrast emerged that reveals the true nature of the country's governance: while protesters were raising their voices through the 'Chalo Sansad March' (March to Parliament), they faced an indiscriminate lathi-charge by the Delhi Police and central security forces, even as Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan was seen walking out of the Parliament steps with a smile. The government's stance regarding listening, seeing, and speaking appears so unresponsive that it vividly brings to mind the imagery of Gandhiji's 'Three Monkeys.' Although Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju claimed in the House that the government was "ready for discussion," the government has no answer to the pointed question of why not a single representative visited Jantar Mantar over the past 33 days.

The fact that BJP National President J.P. Nadda kept the protesting representatives waiting for two hours only to grant them a mere ten-minute meeting must also be seen as an open insult to the youth. Furthermore, the question of where trucks loaded with stones and bricks came from in a high-security zone like Jantar Mantar has cast a shadow of suspicion over the entire incident. After social activist Abhijit Deepke shared video evidence on social media, suspicions have deepened that this was a calculated attempt to discredit the students by turning a peaceful protest violent. If such tactics are employed to crush dissent in a democracy, it must be termed not merely an administrative failure but a constitutional betrayal.

Following these events, Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi staged a sit-in protest directly outside the Prime Minister's residence, demanding the resignation of the concerned ministers and a public apology from the Prime Minister. With the Congress, as well as leaders like Sharad Pawar, Uddhav Thackeray, and Raj Thackeray along with most regional parties across the country extending open support, this agitation is evolving from a mere student movement into a widespread political protest nationwide. The fact that thousands of students took to the streets in Mumbai's Shivaji Park area for the third consecutive day makes it clear that the scope of this discontent is no longer confined to Delhi.

This situation brings to mind the farmers' protest of three years ago. The very same government had labeled the farmers who had camped at Delhi's borders for a year as 'Khalistanis' and 'Andolanjivis' (professional agitators); yet, ultimately, as electoral calculations shifted, the three farm laws had to be withdrawn. Today, similar attempts are being made to discredit the students involved in the 'NEET' protest and brand them as political pawns. The common thread linking both these movements is telling: those in power do not open the door to dialogue until they perceive a threat to their own existence.

A distinctive feature of this protest is that 'Gen Z' mobilized via social media has shown the courage to take to the streets and fight for its future. For many, this marks their first-ever experience of street-level activism. The brutality displayed by the police while lathi-charging such innocent youth, contrasted with their resolve to return to Jantar Mantar that very night, underscores the intensity of this generation's discontent. Yet, the government appears oblivious to the gravity of the situation; instead, it resorts to familiar tactics dismissing the protest as a 'political stunt' and alleging foreign interference.

Over the last decade of the Modi government's tenure, the tradition of holding ministers accountable has all but vanished. From the international controversy surrounding the Epstein files to the failed ethanol-blending policy, and from collapsing bridges to incidents involving the Minister of State for Home's son, the tendency has consistently been to evade responsibility. If a minister's resignation is avoided even in a grave matter like the NEET scandal which jeopardizes the futures of thousands of students then one must conclude that the very concept of accountability has been banished from the lexicon of those in power.

A government's strength lies not in suppressing dissenting voices, but in listening to them and building trust. Ignoring students' concerns or attempting to silence them through repression might yield temporary success, but it ultimately erodes faith in democracy.

Honest dialogue regarding education, transparency, and accountability is the only sustainable path forward. After all, the youth currently on the streets are the ones who will shape the India of tomorrow. Whether they hold books or protest placards in their hands will ultimately depend on the government's sensitivity and its commitment to democratic values. The protesting students' demands are not excessive; they simply seek accountability for the examination scandal specifically, the minister's resignation and adequate financial support for the families of students who died by suicide. If those in power choose the path of repression instead of acceding to these demands, it will amount to an admission not merely of an administrative error, but of a moral failure.

History will never forgive the decision to use lathis against the very youth upon whom the nation's future rests, rather than engaging in dialogue with them. The ultimate and grave warning emerging from these events is this: if the authorities fail to act sensibly in time, the discontent currently simmering at Jantar Mantar will inevitably erupt into a wildfire that holds the entire system accountable.

The Union Minister for Communications and Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER), Shri Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, together with the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Shri Conrad K. Sangma, today launched the "Mission Golden Spice – Integrated Lakadong Turmeric Value Chain Enhancement Project", a ₹175.45-crore convergence-led initiative for turmeric cultivation and value-chain development in the State of Meghalaya. The Mission is designed as a phased, five-year roadmap (2025–2030), to be implemented in two phases — Value Chain Strengthening (Phase 1) followed by Expansion & Scale-up (Phase 2) — for promotion of Meghalaya's Unique Selling Proposition (USP), the GI-tagged Lakadong Turmeric.

Anchored by MDoNER and the North Eastern Council (NEC), the Mission builds upon convergence with schemes and interventions of the Ministries of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Food Processing Industries and Commerce, along with APEDA, the Spices Board, the National Turmeric Board, ICAR, MeitY, NABARD, SFAC and the Government of Meghalaya for establishing an integrated turmeric value-chain ecosystem in the State.

Smt. Nivedita Shukla Verma, Secretary, MDoNER, in her introductory remarks, elaborated on the implementation framework of the Mission and highlighted the need for a mission-mode approach to unlock the full economic potential of Meghalaya's Lakadong turmeric. She underlined that despite its exceptionally high curcumin content (7–10%), distinctive aroma and strong nutraceutical potential, the income realised by smallholder growers remains limited due to inadequate processing facilities, insufficient infrastructure, weak market linkages and the lack of high-value addition. She noted that processed and export-grade products have the potential to command significantly higher prices in both domestic and international markets.



The Secretary further highlighted that the Mission seeks to systematically address the major structural gaps in the sector including post-harvest losses, lack of integrated cold chain infrastructure, absence of commercial-scale processing facilities, weak branding, and lack of structured GI monetisation and buyer linkage systems.

As part of the launch programme, a short film on the Golden Spice Mission was screened, followed by interactions with progressive turmeric farmers from Meghalaya and remarks by investors and industry representatives. Shri Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, Union Minister, MDoNER, said the launch was part of Prime Minister Modi's vision for "Ashtalakshmi" — India's eight northeastern states — which he described as having moved from the periphery to the centre of India's developmental paradigm over the past twelve years. He said the Ministry had worked with the Chief Ministers of all 8 NE states to define a unique selling proposition (USP) for each state, and to promote each USP "bottom up as opposed to top down." He noted that Lakadong turmeric's curcumin content is nearly four times the world average, and highlighted extraordinary role of women in turmeric produc-

tion and processing. Recalling that the Prime Minister had recently showcased Meghalaya's Lakadong turmeric at the G7 Summit, Shri Scindia said the spice

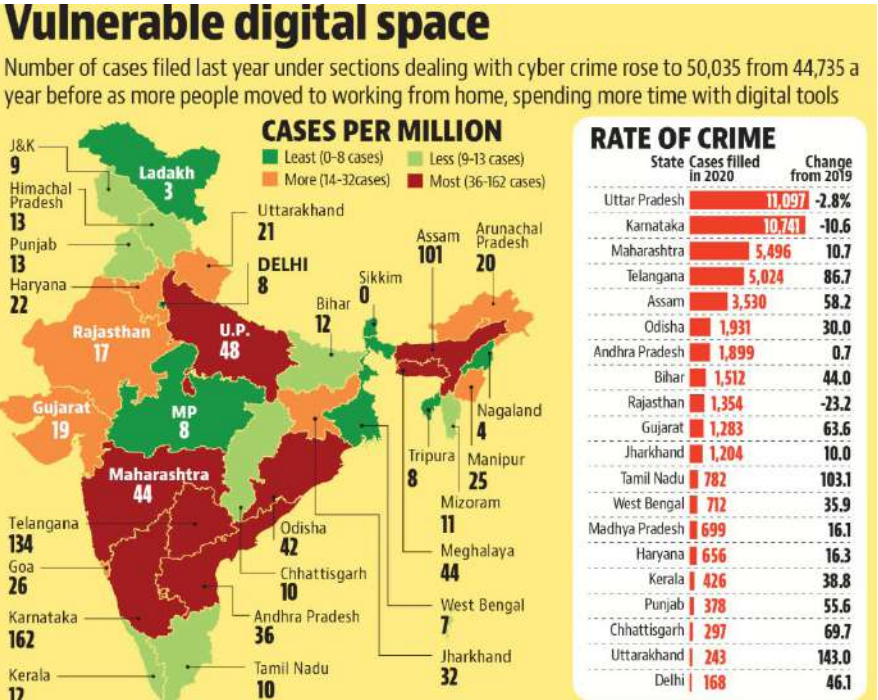
ly 7,500 hectares. He further stated that promotion of Lakadong Turmeric as USP of Meghalaya reflects the comparative and competitive advantage of



had generated strong interest among world leaders, and called on the Mission's stakeholders to ensure the crop's quality, authenticity, scale and sustainability help it fly high on the global stage. He said the Mission's objective was to nearly double farmers' remuneration — from ₹30–40 a kilo today to close to ₹80 a kilo by 2030 — while expanding the area under cultivation from around 2,500 hectares to near-

the state and is rooted in its tradition and agro-climatic conditions. The Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Shri Conrad K. Sangma, said the Mission built on years of institutional groundwork laid by the state government, officials and farmers, and reflected the Union Government's "mission mode" approach of identifying one unique product from each North Eastern state and building a complete, replicable

National cyber crime data



The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) compiles and publishes the statistical data on crimes in its publication "Crime in India". The latest published report is for the year 2024. As per the data published by the NCRB, State/UT wise & Crime Head-wise cases registered under cyber crimes (involving communication devices as medium/target) during the period from 2020 to 2024 is at Annexure-I & Annexure-II.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has set up the 'Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre' (I4C) as an attached office to deal with all types of cyber crimes in the country, in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

The 'National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal' (NCRP) (<https://cybercrime.gov.in>) has been launched, as a part of the I4C, to enable public to report incidents pertaining to all types of cyber crimes, with special focus on cyber crimes against women and children.

The 'Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System' (CFC-FRMS), under I4C, has been launched in year 2021 for immediate reporting of financial frauds and to stop siphoning off funds by the fraudsters. As per CFCFRMS operated by I4C, till 30.06.2026, financial amount of more than Rs. 11,158 Crore has been saved in more than 32.80 lakh complaints. A toll-free Helpline number '1930' has been operationalized to get assistance in lodging online cyber complaints. As per NCRP & CFCFRMS operated by I4C, from the year 2021 to 2025, the total number of financial frauds complaints on NCRP are more than 6589201, the total amount reported is more than ₹ 55050 Crores, the total amount marked as Lien is more than ₹ 8189 Crores and the number of FIRs registered is more than 195760.

Cyber crime incidents reported on National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, their conversion into FIRs and subsequent action i.e. filing of chargesheets, arrest and resolution of complaints, thereon are handled by the State/UT Law Enforcement Agencies concerned as per the provisions of the law.

'Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India. Accordingly, the States and Union Territories (UTs) are primarily responsible for the prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of cybercrime. The Central Government, through the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), supplements the efforts of States and UTs by providing policy guidance, technological support, capacity-building assistance, and financial resources to strengthen cybercrime management and enforcement capabilities.

The Central Government has taken the following steps to strengthen the cyber crime investigation and coordination among Central and State Governments :

Samanvaya Platform has been made operational to serve as an Management Information System (MIS) platform, data repository and a coordination platform for LEAs for cybercrime data sharing and analytics. It provides analytics based interstate linkages of crimes and criminals, involved in cybercrime

complaints in various States/UTs. The module 'Pratibimb' maps locations of criminals and crime infrastructure on a map to give visibility to jurisdictional officers. The module also facilitates seeking and receiving of techno-legal assistance by Law Enforcement Agencies from I4C and other SMEs. It has lead to arrest of more than 29,837 accused and more than 2,33,593 Cyber Investigation assistance request. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has intensified its efforts to strengthen India's cybercrime prevention and investigation framework through a series of initiatives aimed at improving coordination, enhancing law enforcement capabilities, and ensuring faster action against online offences. These measures, implemented under the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), are designed to address the rapidly evolving cyber threat landscape and improve the country's digital security ecosystem.

One of the key initiatives introduced by the ministry is the launch of the 'Sahyog' portal, which has been developed to streamline the process of issuing notices to Information Technology (IT) intermediaries. The portal enables the Appropriate Government or its authorised agencies to send notices under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2000, seeking the removal or disabling of access to online information, data, or communication links that are being used to facilitate unlawful activities.

The 'Sahyog' platform is expected to significantly reduce delays in communication between government agencies and digital intermediaries, thereby enabling quicker action against illegal online content and cyber-enabled offences. The initiative aims to improve compliance while ensuring that digital platforms respond promptly to lawful requests made under the provisions of the IT Act.

To improve inter-state coordination in

tackling cybercrime, the Ministry has constituted seven Joint Cyber Coordination Teams (JCCTs) under the I4C. These teams have been established for cybercrime hotspot regions including Mewat, Jamtara, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Chandigarh, Visakhapatnam, and Guwahati, which frequently witness cyber offences involving multiple jurisdictions.

The JCCTs bring together officials from different States and Union Territories to strengthen intelligence sharing, facilitate co-ordinated investigations, and address challenges arising from crimes that span multiple jurisdictions. By integrating state police forces under a common coordination framework, the initiative seeks to improve the efficiency and speed of cybercrime investigations across the country. As part of its capacity-building efforts, I4C has also developed the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) platform known as the 'CyTrain' portal. The platform offers specialised online training courses for police personnel, judicial officers, and investigators covering critical areas such as cybercrime investigation techniques, digital forensics, prosecution procedures, and emerging cyber threats. According to official data, as of June 30, 2026, more than 1,63,344 police and judicial officers from various States and Union Territories have registered on the CyTrain portal, while over 1,61,957 certificates have been issued after successful completion of the training programmes. The initiative is helping create a more skilled workforce capable of effectively handling complex cybercrime investigations.

The Ministry has also made significant progress under the Cyber Commando Programme, which was launched by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on September 10, 2024. The programme aims to establish a specialised cadre of cyber commandos equipped

model around it. He recalled that attempts to cultivate Lakadong turmeric saplings outside Meghalaya had consistently led to a decline in curcumin content, underlining that "there is something magical about Meghalaya's soil" that makes the region's turmeric unique. He thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his sustained attention to the northeast and reaffirmed the state government's commitment to working with the Union Government to replicate the model for other Meghalaya products such as pineapple, ginger, jackfruit, honey and mushrooms.

Shri Timothy D. Shira, Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of Meghalaya, said Lakadong turmeric was "much more than a crop" — a symbol of the state's indigenous knowledge, culture and agricultural heritage. He noted that for years, farmers had sold the produce largely raw and semi-processed, limiting rural incomes, and said Mission Golden Spice was designed to change that by expanding cultivation, establishing the northeast's largest integrated organic turmeric processing and curcumin extraction facility, and placing women — the "true custodians" of the value chain — at the centre of the Mission's farmer institutions and enterprises.

During the launch, interactions were held with farmers from the East and West Jaintia Hills. They highlighted that Lakadong Turmeric is not just another spice but a premium organic product, and that Mission Golden Spice will not only help grow turmeric but also create new opportunities for farmers.

The launch event was also attended by Dr. Emmanuel Kumar, industry representative and natural products expert, senior officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, the North Eastern Council (NEC), APEDA and the Government of Meghalaya, along with farmer producer organisation leaders, industry partners and thousands of turmeric farmers who joined the launch virtually from the Jaintia Hills.

with advanced technical expertise to counter cybersecurity threats and protect the country's critical information infrastructure.

The Cyber Commando initiative envisions the creation of a dedicated national workforce trained to respond to sophisticated cyberattacks, support digital investigations, and strengthen India's cybersecurity preparedness. So far, 281 cyber commandos have successfully completed specialised training at premier institutions including the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), Rashtriya Raksha University (RRU), and the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) campuses at Gandhinagar and New Delhi.

Beyond formal training programmes, I4C continues to organise regular knowledge-sharing initiatives such as 'State Connect', 'Thana Connect', and peer-learning sessions. These platforms enable police officers from different States and Union Territories to exchange best practices, discuss emerging cybercrime trends, and strengthen institutional capacity through collaborative learning.

To support digital investigations, the Ministry has established the National-Digital Investigation Support Centre (NDISC)—previously known as the National Cyber Forensic Laboratory (Investigation). The first centre became operational in New Delhi on February 18, 2019, while a second facility was inaugurated in Assam on August 29, 2025.

The National-Digital Investigation Support Centres provide early-stage cyber forensic assistance to investigating officers from State and Union Territory police forces. These centres offer specialised forensic expertise that helps investigators analyse digital evidence more efficiently and improve the quality of cybercrime investigations. As of June 30, 2026, the New Delhi centre alone has provided forensic assistance in more than 14,064 cybercrime cases.

The Ministry has also extended substantial financial support to States and Union Territories under the Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) Scheme. Financial assistance amounting to Rs. 132.93 crore has been released to strengthen cyber forensic infrastructure, establish cyber forensic-cum-training laboratories, recruit junior cyber consultants, and train law enforcement personnel, prosecutors, and judicial officers. Under the CCPWC scheme, cyber forensic-cum-training laboratories have already been commissioned in 33 States and Union Territories, while over 24,600 law enforcement personnel, judicial officers, and public prosecutors have received specialised training in cybercrime awareness, investigation techniques, digital forensics, and prosecution. The country's cyber forensic infrastructure has also expanded considerably. At present, seven Central Forensic Science Laboratories (CFSLS) and 28 State Forensic Science Laboratories (SFSLS) are operational to support cybercrime investigations.

Day after policeman's killing, LG Sinha orders intensified anti-terror operations

Srinagar: A day after a policeman was shot dead in Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday directed security forces to remain highly vigilant and intensify intelligence-led anti-terror operations during a high-level security review meeting.

Senior officials from the Army, Jammu and Kashmir Police, civil administration, Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), intelligence agencies, and the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board attended the meeting.

An official spokesman said the Lieutenant Governor also comprehensively reviewed logistics and safety arrangements for the ongoing Amarnath Yatra in light of the recent inclement weather and heavy rainfall across the region.

The Lieutenant Governor instructed all departments to maintain seamless coordination and ensure the safety, well-being and convenience of all pilgrims of Baba Barfani.

He directed a comprehensive department-wise review of all amenities, including rigorous audits of fire and emergency services, power grids, and water supply infrastructure.

More than 3,91,000 pilgrims have performed darshan at the holy cave in the first 20 days.



The Lieutenant Governor said the resumption of the Yatra is strictly contingent upon weather conditions.

In view of recent heavy rains, the Lieutenant Governor directed strengthening flood protection measures and immediate clearance of debris from all nallahs along the pilgrimage tracks.He emphasized the need for continuous operational readiness, focusing on round-the-clock disaster response preparedness, ensuring clean tracks and well-

maintained sanitation facilities and adequate reserves of rations, LPG, kerosene, and emergency medical supplies.The Lieutenant Governor instructed officials to strictly prohibit unregistered service providers along the route and to enforce a mandatory 100 per cent prepaid service system. He also instructed for the setting up of additional power DG sets, round-the-clock healthcare services, adequate availability of manpower, oxygen cylinders, and ambulances.

To ensure a swift response to potential incidents, the Lieutenant Governor instructed officials to maintain active traffic management, conduct regular vehicle inspections, ensure all equipment is functional, and issue timely weather alerts. He also directed that every tent must have a fire extinguisher and specialized wildlife units be stationed along the tracks.

Those present in the meeting included Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Pratik Sharma, Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, Director General of Police Nalin Prabhat, GOC 15 Corps Lt Gen Balbir Singh, GOC 16 Corps Lt Gen P.K. Mishra, Principal Secretary (Home) Chandekar Bharti, Additional Director of the Intelligence Bureau Pankaj Thakur, Principal Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor and CEO of the Amarnathji Shrine Board Mandeep K. Bhandari, ADGP CID Nitish Kumar, along with divisional commissioners, deputy commissioners, inspectors general of police and other senior security and civil administration officials.

The LG also commended the hard work and dedication of J&K Police, Indian Army, Civil Administration, Security Forces, Shrine Board, service providers, volunteers, stakeholders, and the citizens for making the holy Yatra of Shri Amarnathji safe and successful.

Bihar Govt announces strict action against 'anti-social elements' behind Patna violence, says attackers were not students

Patna : The Bihar government Thursday announced stringent action against those involved in the violence that broke out during a students' protest in Patna yesterday, alleging that anti-social elements had infiltrated the agitation with political motives to spread violence, target journalists and legislators and destabilise the state government.

Making a statement on behalf of the government in the Bihar Legislative Assembly, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary said the government would identify every person involved in the violence and ensure the "strictest action" against them. Addressing the House, Choudhary said the protest had begun over the alleged NEET paper leak issue but was subsequently hijacked by anti-social elements.

"The entire state witnessed how anti-social elements entered the gathering of students and attempted to spread violence with political motives. They deliberately identified and attacked journalists and legislators in an attempt to defame and de-

stabilise the government. Such acts will not be tolerated under any circumstances," he said.

The minister asserted that those involved in the attacks could not be considered students.

"The government's clear view is that those who targeted MLAs and journalists were not students and cannot be students. They were anti-social elements disguised as students, acting with vested political interests and a hidden agenda," he said.

At the same time, Choudhary said the government was fully sensitive to the concerns of students over the alleged examination paper leak.

Referring to recent legislative measures against examination fraud, he said the paper leak had now been explicitly brought under stricter legal provisions and treated as an organised crime, enabling stronger punishment for offenders. He added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also emphasised speedy trials through fast-track courts to ensure exemplary punishment in such cases.

Yogi Reviews Rain Situation, Orders Swift Relief Measures

Lucknow: In view of the continuous heavy rains and flood-like situation in various districts of Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday directed officials to immediately expedite relief and rescue operations.

According to an official statement, the Chief Minister has asked all District Magistrates and concerned officials to remain in the field and continuously monitor the situation and provide all possible assistance to the affected people.He also directed to immediately assess the loss of life, livestock, and property and provide the permissible relief amount to the affected families within 24 hours.The Chief Minister asked officials to regularly review the relief work and maintain constant communication with the affected families so that assistance can be provided as per their needs. He appealed to the people to take special precautions during bad weather, asking them not to leave their homes if there is a possibility of lightning strikes, and to avoid going near rivers and water bodies during heavy rains.

UP CM Yogi Adityanath takes cognizance of heavy rains , directs officials to expedite relief work

Lucknow : Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday instructed officials to immediately accelerate relief and rescue operations in several districts of the state affected by continuous heavy rainfall and flood-like conditions.

Taking note of the worsening situation due to incessant rains, the Chief Minister directed district administrations to remain on high alert and ensure that affected residents receive timely assistance. He emphasised that the safety and well-being of people should remain the top priority during the ongoing weather crisis.

According to an official statement, Yogi Adityanath asked all District Magistrates and concerned officials to remain present on the ground and continuously monitor the situation. He



instructed authorities to personally oversee relief measures instead of relying only on reports from field-level teams.

The Chief Minister directed officials to provide all possible support to people affected by floods, waterlogging, and other rain-related challenges. He said immediate steps should be taken to

ensure that no affected family faces difficulties in accessing essential assistance.

Yogi also ordered officials to conduct a prompt assessment of damages caused by the heavy rains. The assessment will cover loss of human lives, livestock, and property so that affected families can receive government assistance without unnecessary delays.

He instructed authorities to provide the eligible relief amount to affected families within 24 hours after verification of losses. The move aims to ensure quick financial support for those who have suffered due to flooding and weather-related incidents.

The Chief Minister further asked officials to regularly review relief operations and maintain continuous communication with affected communities.

KTR serves legal notice to CM Revanth Reddy over Globarena allegations

Hyderabad: Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) Working President K T Rama Rao (KTR) on Thursday said he had served a legal notice on Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, demanding an unconditional public apology within 48 hours over allegations linking him to Globarena Technologies.

In a statement, KTR said the Chief Minister had made "false, malicious and defamatory" allegations by claiming that Globarena Technologies was his benami company.He asserted that he had no ownership, financial, proprietary or any other rela-



tionship with the firm and challenged the Chief Minister to produce evidence supporting his claims.KTR said that if the Chief Minister failed to substantiate the allegations or apologise within

the stipulated period, he would initiate civil and criminal proceedings, including a defamation suit.Rejecting the allegations as "false and politically motivated", KTR questioned why the Con-

gress government had entered into agreements with Globarena if it believed the company belonged to him. He also alleged that the Chief Minister was attempting to divert attention from the issue of alleged irregularities in national examinations and criticised the state government for not questioning the BJP-led Central government over the NEET controversy. KTR further accused the Congress and the BJP of having a covert understanding and claimed that the Chief Minister was reluctant to confront the Centre due to political compulsions.

Six critical as PG fire engulfs workers' hostel in Bengaluru

Bengaluru: Eight migrant labourers from West Bengal suffered burn injuries after a massive fire broke out at a paying guest (PG) accommodation in Bengaluru's industrial area of Bommasandra early Thursday morning. Six of the injured workers sustained critical burns and are undergoing treatment, police said.

The incident took place at Sai PG, where several employees of a private engineering company were staying. According to preliminary investigations, a suspected LPG cylinder leak triggered the fire, which quickly spread through the room on the second floor of the building.

The blaze reportedly erupted around 6.30 am, when nine workers were

present inside the accommodation. Police suspect that the leaking gas cylinder caused the fire to intensify rapidly, leaving the occupants with very little time to react and escape.Local residents noticed the fire and immediately alerted emergency services. Firefighters and police teams reached the spot shortly after receiving information and launched a rescue operation to evacuate the trapped workers.The injured labourers were shifted to nearby hospitals for medical attention. Officials said the victims suffered varying degrees of burn injuries, with several of them requiring specialised care due to the severity of their condition. The injured workers have been identified as Debasis Halder, Debasis Malik, Sub-

rata Bera, Hisbul Rehman, Sourav Chowdary, Santan Ray, Syed Alahuddin, and Diswanath. All eight victims are residents of West Bengal and were employed at a private engineering firm in Bengaluru.Police officials said that six of the victims suffered more than 60 per cent burns and are currently being treated at Best Hospital in Chandapura. Doctors are closely monitoring their health condition as they continue to receive treatment. Following the incident, police registered a case against the owner of the PG accommodation on charges of alleged negligence. Investigators are examining whether safety guidelines were followed at the premises and whether any violations contributed to the fire.

Congress accuses Odisha government of denying OBC reservation in Panchayat, ULB elections

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) on Thursday launched a sharp attack on the Odisha government, accusing it of denying political reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in Panchayat and Urban Local Body (ULB) elections .

Addressing a press conference at Congress Bhawan here, former MLA and PCC Organisation In-charge Santosh Singh Saluja, senior party spokesperson Sonali Sahu, and Debashish Bhuyan alleged that the absence of OBC reservation in local body elections is unjust and deprives a majority section of the state's population of meaningful political representation at the grassroots level.

The Congress leaders

said the government's failure to implement constitutional provisions and comply with the Supreme Court's "Triple Test" guidelines has stalled the political empowerment of backward classes in Odisha.The party demanded the immediate constitution of an independent commission in accordance with the Supreme Court's directions to undertake a scientific and empirical study on the political representation of OBCs. It said reservation in Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies should be implemented on the basis of the commission's recommendations before the next round of local body elections.

The Congress also called for a comprehensive reservation mechanism to ensure inclusive governance and

equal political participation for all sections of society.

Claiming that OBCs constitute nearly 54 percent of Odisha's population, the party asserted that the constitutional ideals of social justice and inclusive democracy cannot be realised if such a large section of society remains without political reservation in local body elections.The Congress maintained that Articles 243D(6) and 243T(6) of the Constitution, read with the Supreme Court's "Triple Test" guidelines, make it imperative to provide reservation for backward classes in local self-governing institutions. Such representation, it said, would strengthen grassroots democracy and uphold the constitutional promise of equality and so-

cial justice.The party argued that political representation is not merely a constitutional provision but the cornerstone of social justice, adding that democracy cannot be truly representative if 54 percent of the population is excluded from adequate participation in local governance.The Congress further alleged that after the BJP came to power, the Housing and Urban Development Department issued a notification on March 12, 2022, finalising the reservation list for 358 Municipalities and Notified Area Councils (NACs), but not a single seat was reserved for OBC candidates.The party contended that denying reservation to OBCs in Municipalities and NACs, despite their significant contribution to the

state's economy and tax revenues, amounts to a violation of their constitutional rights.

Questioning the government's commitment to backward class welfare, the Congress asked why Odisha has statutory commissions for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Women and Children, but is yet to establish an OBC Commission.

The party also alleged that despite the provision of 27 percent reservation for OBCs in government employment, a substantial number of reserved posts remain vacant. It claimed that around 50-55 percent of Class-I posts, 55-65 percent of Class-II posts, 65-75 percent of clerical posts, and 75-85 percent of peon and attendant posts earmarked for OBCs have not been filled.

Arunachal Guv lauds decade of Khandu Govt, reviews state's development agenda

Itanagar: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) KT Parnaik on Thursday congratulated Chief Minister Pema Khandu and "Team Arunachal Pradesh" on completing ten years of dedicated public service and leadership, while lauding the State Government's achievements in infrastructure, governance and public service delivery.The Governor made the remarks when the Chief Minister called on him at Lok Bhavan here.

During the meeting, the two leaders held detailed discussions on the State's developmental priorities, implementation of key projects, and measures to address challenges arising from natural disasters and climate-related events.

Congratulating the Chief Minister, the Governor said the past decade had witnessed significant progress across sectors such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, connectivity, tourism and rural development.



He observed that the Government's people-centric approach had helped bring governance closer to citizens, particularly those living in remote and border areas.Appreciating the flagship Seva Aapke Dwar initiative, the Governor said the programme had transformed public service delivery by ensuring government services reached the doorsteps of the people.He noted that the initiative had strengthened public trust and rein-

forced the spirit of inclusive development.The Governor also commended the State Government's efforts in promoting e-governance and digital service delivery.Emphasizing the importance of technology-driven administration, he advocated greater use of geospatial applications, satellite imagery and data analytics for planning, monitoring and evaluation of developmental projects.

He said these technologies could significantly en-

hance decision-making, strengthen disaster preparedness, optimize resource utilization and ensure timely implementation of welfare and infrastructure programmes for the benefit of the people of Arunachal Pradesh.Meanwhile, the Governor handed over a cheque of Rs two lakh to Abotani Vidya Niketan, Pachin Colony, Naharlagun, to support the strengthening and expansion of the school's library. The cheque was received by Vice Principal Yanya Karlo and Arunachal Shiksha Vikas Samiti (ASVS) State Coordinator Sukumaran K at Lok Bhavan here. The financial assistance was announced by the Governor during his visit to the school last month to facilitate the procurement of books and enrich the library. Highlighting the transformative power of books, the Governor said reading nurtures curiosity, critical thinking, creativity and lifelong learning among children.

Karnataka battling worst drought in 150 years, no shortage of relief funds: Parameshwara

Bengaluru: Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and Revenue Minister G Parameshwara on Thursday said the state government was fully prepared to deal with what it has termed the worst drought in nearly 150 years, assuring that adequate funds were available for relief and emergency measures.Addressing concerns over the severe rainfall deficit and widespread crop losses across several parts of the state, Parameshwara said drought management had become the government's top priority. He asserted that there would be no shortage of financial resources while implementing relief measures for affected regions. Speaking after hearing public grievances at his official residence, the Deputy Chief Minister said the government had already allocated funds to ensure the availability of drinking water in drought-hit areas. He said every MLA had been provided Rs 1 crore, while each district had received Rs 5

crore specifically for drinking water-related requirements. In addition to these allocations, Parameshwara said around Rs 329 crore was available in Personal Deposit (PD) accounts to address urgent requirements arising from the drought situation. He reiterated that the state administration had sufficient resources to handle immediate challenges."The government is fully prepared. There is no scarcity of funds for drought relief," Parameshwara said, highlighting the measures being taken to provide assistance to people facing the impact of water shortages and agricultural distress.The Deputy Chief Minister said the government was conducting detailed reviews across different regions to assess the severity of the drought and prepare a comprehensive response strategy. These region-wise assessments are aimed at understanding local challenges and implementing targeted relief measures. He said review meetings

for some revenue divisions had already been completed, while the review of the Bengaluru division would be conducted on July 25. The meeting will be jointly chaired by Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Parameshwara. A similar review for the Mysuru division will also be held before finalising the state's overall drought mitigation plan. Concerned about the possibility of rural distress and migration due to lack of employment opportunities, Parameshwara said district administrations had been instructed to immediately generate employment in drought-affected villages.He said all Deputy Commissioners and Zilla Panchayat Chief Executive Officers had been directed to utilise the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to provide livelihood support to people facing difficulties due to the drought.Parameshwara also said Karnataka had approached the Centre seek-

ing financial assistance for drought management but was yet to receive a response. He added that the state government would submit a formal memorandum in August, when the Union government generally considers proposals related to drought relief.The Deputy Chief Minister explained that the current crisis had intensified after farmers began sowing crops following pre-monsoon showers. However, the failure of subsequent rains severely affected agricultural activities, leaving large areas of farmland dry and damaged.He said many farmers are now hoping for adequate rainfall in August to begin a second round of sowing and recover from the losses caused by the delayed and insufficient monsoon. The Karnataka government had on Wednesday described the prevailing situation as the most severe drought in around 150 years, citing rainfall levels far below normal, limited sowing progress.

‘The Conjuring First Communion’ ropes in Matthias Schweighofer

Mumbai : German actor Matthias Schweighöfer, known internationally for his role in Oppenheimer, has joined the cast of the upcoming horror film “The Conjuring: First Communion,” the latest prequel in the hugely successful The Conjuring franchise.

While the filmmakers have confirmed Schweighöfer’s casting, details regarding his character and the film’s plot remain tightly under wraps.

The project is expected to further expand the universe built around paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren.

Earlier, the makers announced that Garrett Wareing and Amanda Fix will portray younger versions of Ed and Lorraine Warren, the iconic paranormal investigators previously played by Patrick Wilson and Vera



Farmiga throughout the franchise.

The Conjuring: First Communion follows the success of “The Conjuring: Last Rites,” which emerged as the highest-grossing film in the franchise after earning

more than \$499 million worldwide, according to Deadline.

The supernatural thriller is being directed by Rodrigue Huart, who was selected for the project following the acclaim received by

one of his short films. The screenplay has been penned by Richard Naing and Ian Goldberg.

The film is being produced by Peter Safran, while John Rickard, Natalia Safran, and Romel Adam are

serving as executive producers. The Conjuring: First Communion is scheduled to hit theatres on September 10, 2027.

Schweighöfer has been enjoying a successful run with several high-profile projects. Most recently, he starred in the German science fiction thriller “Brick,” which climbed to the No. 1 spot on Netflix globally and topped streaming charts in 59 countries within 24 hours of its release, maintaining the position for two weeks.

The actor has also completed filming for the upcoming action-comedy “Mister,” in which he stars opposite Walton Goggins. In addition, he is set to appear in director Jaume Collet-Serra’s World War II-era psychological thriller “Play Dead,” produced by acclaimed filmmaker Sam Raimi.

New song ‘Kahaan Chale Gaye Ho Ram’ from ‘Batwara 1947’ released

Mumbai: Ahead of the theatrical release of “Batwara 1947,” the makers have unveiled the film’s latest song, “Kahaan Chale Gaye Ho Ram,” a deeply emotional track that reflects a mother’s unwavering faith, unconditional love, and longing amid the turmoil of India’s Partition. Released by Aamir Khan Productions, the song offers audiences another glimpse into the emotional core of the period drama, which is set against one of the most defining chapters in Indian history. Through its powerful visuals and soulful music, the track seeks to capture the pain, hope, and resilience experienced by families during the Partition era. The music video prominently features veteran actress Shabana Azmi, who is seen offering heartfelt prayers to Lord Ram, symbolising hope and faith in difficult times. Her performance forms the emotional centrepiece of the song. Actors Sunny Deol and Preity Zinta



also appear in several important moments throughout the video. Their scenes alternate between joyful family celebrations and emotionally charged sequences, offering viewers a glimpse into the personal struggles and relationships that drive the film’s narrative. The visuals gradually unfold against the backdrop of the Partition, hinting

at the separation, sacrifice, and emotional upheaval that define the story. The song blends intimate family moments with larger historical events, reinforcing the film’s central themes. Sharing the song on social media, the makers wrote, “Pukaar ek Maa ki (A mother’s call). Listen to Kahaan Chale Gaye Ho Ram Out Now.

‘Max, Min & Meowzaki’ unveils new song ‘Suhana’

Mumbai: Ahead of its nationwide theatrical release, the makers of the internationally acclaimed film “Max, Min and Meowzaki” have unveiled “Suhana,” the third song from the film’s soundtrack.

The newly released track offers audiences a heartfelt glimpse into the film’s emotional core, celebrating love, youth, companionship, and the quiet beauty found in shared moments. The soulful number has been written by Padmakumar, while Shail Oswal has lent his voice to the song. The music has been composed by Anand Ranganathan and Nitiin Dubey, whose melody complements the film’s emotional and uplifting narrative. “Suhana” follows the release of the film’s official trailer and its first two songs, “Arriva” and “Dil Sambhalta Nahin,” both of which introduced viewers to the film’s emotional landscape. With



the release of the third track, the makers continue to build anticipation ahead of

the film’s theatrical debut. The song captures tender moments between the characters and reflects the themes of hope, healing, and emotional connection that form the heart of the story. Through its soothing lyrics and gentle composition, “Suhana” adds another emotional layer to the film’s narrative.

“Max, Min and Meowzaki” features an ensemble cast led by Medha Shankar, Siddharth Menon, Adil Hussain, Mandira Bedi, Nassar, Nafisa Ali, and Vidhatri Bandi. The film brings together a diverse group of performers to tell a deeply human story of resilience and rediscovery. At its core, the film explores themes of hope, self-belief, and fresh beginnings after experiencing personal loss. It follows characters who navigate grief, healing, and emotional transformation while discovering renewed purpose in life.

Prabhas becomes the country’s most loved star, securing the first position in the Ormax ranking

Mumbai: Pan-India star Prabhas has secured the top spot in Ormax Media’s “Stars India Loves” rankings for June 2026, emerging as the country’s most-loved male film star.

Prabhas has surpassed several big stars of Indian cinema to top the ranking, which reflects the preferences of audiences across the country. This achievement underlines his immense popularity and strong fan base among audiences across languages and regions.

The 46-year-old actor,



who gained national and international recognition with the “Baahubali” franchise,

has consistently proven his star power with films like “Salaar” and “Kalki 2898

AD.” His powerful screen presence, ability to portray diverse characters, and relatable appeal to audiences across the country have made him a major pan-India star of Indian cinema.

This honour comes at a time when Prabhas has had a very successful 2026. His film “Kalki 2898 AD” recently received recognition at the National Awards. Audiences are also generating tremendous excitement for his upcoming films “Fauji,” “Spirit,” “Salaar 2,” and “Kalki 2898 AD Part 2.”

Kalyani Prayadarshan to showcase her action mettle in zombie thriller ‘Pralay’

Mumbai: Fresh from the success of the Malayalam supernatural fantasy film “Lokah: Chapter 1 – Chandra,” actress Kalyani Priyadarshan is all set to make her Bollywood debut in the ambitious action thriller “Pralay,” starring alongside Ranveer Singh. The film is expected to mark a significant milestone in her career as she transitions from regional cinema to Hindi films with a performance unlike any she has attempted before. Known for portraying a variety of characters across Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu cinema, Priyadarshan will reportedly take on an action-centric role in Pralay. The film is expected to showcase her in a powerful avatar, moving away from the conventional image of a heroine and placing her at the heart of the action.

According to reports, the filmmakers have designed her character as a fearless and capable individual who actively participates in the narrative rather than serving as a traditional supporting figure. Instead of following familiar cinematic tropes, the actress is expected to perform a series of elaborate action sequences and high-risk stunts throughout the film.

Industry sources suggest that the makers were particularly impressed with Priyadarshan’s portrayal of a yakshi in “Lokah: Chapter 1 – Chandra.” Her performance in the fantasy thriller

reportedly convinced the team that she possessed the screen presence and physical commitment required for a demanding action role in Pralay.

The film is being positioned as one of India’s most ambitious cinematic ventures, with the makers aiming to create a visually spectacular action experience. Priyadarshan’s stunt

sequences are reportedly being choreographed on a scale comparable to those seen in major Hollywood productions featuring leading female action stars.

To prepare for the physically demanding role, extensive planning has gone into the film’s pre-production phase. The production team has reportedly spent months working on action choreography, visual effects planning, and world-building to ensure that the film delivers an immersive cinematic experience.

Filming for Pralay is expected to begin next month. Lead actor Ranveer Singh will reportedly complete the first shooting schedule before taking a paternity break around the Diwali festival. The actor is then expected to resume work on the project with the second schedule commencing in 2027.

Mounted on an estimated budget of around Rs 300 crore, Pralay is among the costliest Indian films currently in production. The large-scale investment reflects the makers’ ambition to deliver a technically advanced film featuring cutting-edge visual effects and large-scale action sequences. The story of Pralay is set in a post-apocalyptic dystopian world, offering audiences a futuristic narrative filled with survival, conflict, and visually rich storytelling. The filmmakers are reportedly relying heavily on visual effects to create an expansive cinematic universe unlike anything seen in Indian cinema before.



‘Bhool Bhulaiyaa 4’ enters development; Kartik Aaryan, Anees Bazmee likely to reunite

Mumbai : With “Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3” continuing to enjoy strong popularity among audiences, producer Bhushan Kumar has reportedly begun work on the fourth installment of the successful horror-comedy franchise. The upcoming film is expected to build on the momentum of its predecessors while bringing back familiar faces.

According to reports, Kartik Aaryan is set to reprise his role as Rooh Baba, the eccentric paranormal investigator who has become one of the franchise’s most popular characters since making his debut in “Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2.”

Industry reports suggest that director Anees Bazmee, who helmed both Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2 and Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3, is also expected to return for the fourth installment. Discussions between the filmmaker and producer Bhushan Kumar are reportedly underway.

As per a report by Bollywood Hungama, the two sides are currently finalising financial terms before officially confirming Bazmee’s involvement. Once the discussions are completed, the director is expected to reunite with Kartik Aaryan for another chapter in the horror-comedy franchise.



makers are keen to maintain continuity by retaining the successful actor-director pairing that has delivered two commercially successful films in the series. Their collaboration has been credited with giving the franchise a fresh identity while preserving its horror-comedy appeal.

However, Bazmee is presently occupied with another major project featuring Akshay Kumar.

The filmmaker is currently focused on completing the production of that film before shifting his attention to the next installment of Bhool Bhulaiyaa.

Once his existing commitments are fulfilled, Bazmee is expected to begin work on the screenplay and pre-production of “Bhool Bhulaiyaa 4.” The scripting process is likely to play a key role in shaping a new mystery

while retaining the franchise’s trademark mix of comedy, suspense, and supernatural elements.

The makers are reportedly planning to take the film on floors in the second half of 2027. The extended pre-production timeline is expected to allow the team to develop the script, finalise casting, and prepare for large-scale production.

Official anthem reality show ‘Bhojpuri Bawaal’ is out

Mumbai : JAhead of the premiere of its upcoming reality show “Bhojpuri Bawaal,” JioHotstar has released the show’s official anthem, offering viewers a vibrant introduction to the series and its celebration of Bhojpuri culture. The reality show is scheduled to premiere on August 2.

The newly launched anthem has been composed and sung by acclaimed musician Sneha Khanwalkar, who blends contemporary musical elements with traditional Bhojpuri folk influences to create a track that reflects the region’s rich cultural identity.

According to the makers, the anthem has been designed to showcase the confidence, resilience, ambition, and cultural pride of the Bhojpuri community. Through energetic music, colourful visuals, and grand choreography, the song offers audiences a glimpse into the spirit and atmosphere of “Bhojpuri Bawaal.”

The producers said the anthem serves as more than just a promotional track, aiming to capture the essence of Bhojpuri heritage while presenting it in a modern and visually engaging format. The song is expected to set the tone for the reality show’s celebration of regional talent and traditions.

Featuring premium production values, vibrant cinematography, and high-energy dance performances, the anthem highlights the colourful traditions and festive spirit that are closely associated with Bhojpuri culture. The visuals seek to blend authenticity with contemporary entertainment.

Speaking about the project, Sneha Khanwalkar said the objective was not to reinvent Bhojpuri music but to honour its originality and enduring appeal. She noted that the anthem celebrates the genre’s unique identity while remaining rooted in its cultural traditions.

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Salman Khan, Alia Bhatt back NEET student protest, call for fair education system

Mumbai: Bollywood As Salman Khan and Alia Bhatt have expressed their support for students protesting over the alleged NEET-UG 2026 question paper leak, commending their peaceful demonstrations and calling for meaningful reforms in the education system.

Sharing a black-and-white picture of his younger self along with a message on Instagram, Khan said he was disheartened to see a peaceful movement descend into violence, expressing concern for the students and their families who were affected.

He wrote, “My heart goes out to the students and their families who were hurt. Paper leak is a

very serious issue, and I am glad to know n see that the kids of our country have come together for a better educational system, and their parents supported them.

“I truly appreciate the stand they have taken, showing dedication, sincerity, and keenness to study hard n make their future and a greater, educated India. This andolan, this protest, is the right way to go abt it, n the students have done this peacefully. So courageous and brave. Driven and motivated towards education, this generation will make India proud.”

The 60-year-old actor highlighted the issue between the students and the educational system, it should not be hijacked politically, the credit should only go to the students of the country. He hoped the government would work alongside the students to strengthen the education system.

He further elaborated, “Education should be the next trend and fashion, and should get trendier n more fashionable yr by yr.”

He also expressed his wish to see India emerge as a global destination for education, attracting students from around the world.

BSE Sensex		Nifty 50		Nifty 500		Nifty Next 50		Nifty 100		Nifty Bank		Nifty Midcap 100	
Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change
76,391.39	-0.47%	23,869.60	-0.53%	22,982.40	-0.70%	71,840.45	-0.63%	24,932.50	-0.55%	56,592.00	-0.94%	61,685.00	-0.99%
Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open
76,755.05	76,515.10	23,996.25	23,904.80	23,145.05	23,069.10	72,296.65	72,040.90	25,069.65	24,975.35	57,126.80	56,796.95	62,300.60	62,134.30
High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
76,726.66	76,151.98	23,990.75	23,807.20	23,148.90	22,937.75	72,606.60	71,634.60	25,083.80	24,867.10	56,930.15	56,374.75	62,285.40	61,549.95

Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
Bajaj Auto	11,283.50	2.59
SBI Life Insura	1,853.50	2.59
M&M	3,229.70	1.71
TCS	2,242.90	1.57
Eicher Motors	7,721.50	1.17

Top Losers

Company	Current	%Loss
Adani Enterpris	3,010.00	-4.37
Shriram Finance	1,025.80	-3.12
Nestle	1,447.90	-3.06
Adani Ports	1,778.50	-2.25
Bajaj Finance	1,039.80	-1.93

Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Aug 05	144,201.00	-1,479.00 -1.02
Silver Sep 04	223,075.00	-3,923.00 -1.73
Crudeoil Aug 19	8,735.00	325.00 3.86
Naturalgas Jul 28	286.20	2.80 0.99

Sensex falls 364 pts, Nifty below 23,900

Mumbai : Indian equity benchmark indices extended their losing streak for a fourth consecutive trading session on Thursday as escalating tensions in West Asia pushed global crude oil prices sharply higher, dampening investor sentiment across domestic markets.

The benchmark BSE Sensex ended the day 363.66 points, or 0.47 per cent, lower at 76,391.39, while the NSE Nifty 50 declined 126.65 points, or 0.53 per cent, to close at 23,869.60, slipping below the 23,900 mark.

The weakness persisted throughout the trading session, with investors remaining cautious amid concerns that surging crude oil prices could increase inflationary pressures and negatively impact corporate earnings as well as India's import bill.



During intra-day trade, the Sensex fell as much as 603.07 points, or 0.78 per cent, to touch a low of 76,151.98 before recovering part of its losses by the close.

The decline marked the fourth straight session of losses for both benchmark indices, reflecting sustained selling pressure as global uncertainties continued to influence investor

behaviour.

A sharp rise in international crude oil prices remained the primary factor weighing on market sentiment. Traders monitored developments in West Asia, where heightened geopolitical tensions triggered concerns over possible disruptions to global energy supplies.

Brent crude, the international benchmark for oil prices,

surged 4.52 per cent to \$98.32 per barrel, significantly increasing concerns about inflation and the potential impact on oil-importing economies such as India. Higher crude oil prices generally increase input costs for industries, widen India's current account deficit, and put pressure on inflation, making investors cautious about sectors sensitive to rising energy costs.

Among the Sensex constituents, Adani Ports, Bajaj Finance, InterGlobe Aviation, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, and Tata Steel emerged as the major losers, dragging the broader market lower.

Shares of InterGlobe Aviation, the parent company of IndiGo, came under pressure as rising aviation fuel costs are expected to impact airline profitability if crude prices remain elevated.

Mercedes Benz expands PHEV portfolio, launches AMG E 53 Hybrid 4MATIC, ties up with Indian Padel Tour for 2026-27 season

Chennai: Expanding its PHEV portfolio by pursuing a 'powertrain agnostic' strategy for India, Luxury car makers Mercedes-Benz India today launched the Mercedes-AMG E 53 HYBRID 4MATIC , the first sedan in the E-Class portfolio, while announcing a multi-year tie up with Indian Padel Tour as its title sponsor for 2026-207 season.

A company statement said AMG E 53 is available in two exciting editions - Performance and Racing Editions which Racing Editions are priced at Rs. 1.45 crores and Rs.1.48 crores respectively (ex-showroom, all-India). Company MD and CEO Santosh Iyer said "the E-Class has been the longest running nameplates in the Indian automotive industry and the AMG E 53 HYBRID 4MATIC underlines performance, practical usability and electric efficiency, making the E-Class portfolio truly unmatched. This performance sedan combines

genuine AMG performance with plug-in hybrid's efficiency, balancing an AMG customers need of racetrack performance with practicality of daily usage, perfectly. The AMG E53 Hybrid furthers our 'powertrain agnostic' strategy for India, where customers decide the powertrain of their choice, suiting their requirement."

The company also announced a multi-year partnership with the Indian Padel Tour, becoming the Title Partner for the 2026-27 season, featuring 19 tournaments across 10 cities, including 10 City Opens, five Grand Slams and four Special IP events. The season will commence in Mumbai in August and culminate with the season finale in Bengaluru in June 2027. Jigar Doshi, Co-Founder, Padel Park India said the Indian Padel Tour was created with a simple ambition: to build the competitive ecosystem that every great sport needs.

Wipro eyes more acquisitions after 17th buy

Bengaluru: Wipro Consumer Care & Lighting on Thursday signalled an aggressive acquisition-led expansion strategy, saying it is actively scouting for more acquisitions in India and overseas even as it announced the acquisition of the Good Home and Eva brands from TTK Healthcare Ltd for Rs 256 crore.

The acquisition of the two brands, Wipro Consumer Care's 17th so far, is part of a broader strategy to strengthen its presence in fast-growing consumer categories, with the company identifying home care, personal care, fragrances, foods and digital-first brands as key areas for future acquisitions. "Since

we've announced two acquisitions in the last two days, clearly acquisitions are on our radar both in India and international markets," Kumar Chander, CEO of Wipro Consumer Care & Lighting and Managing Director of Wipro Enterprises, told reporters. However, he said acquisitions would continue to be pursued selectively, noting that transactions succeed only when valuations meet the expectations of both buyers and sellers. India will remain Wipro Consumer Care's highest-priority market, although the company will also continue evaluating opportunities across other developing economies. Chander said the acquisition of Good Home and Eva positions

Wipro to capitalise on rapidly expanding consumer segments, particularly fragrances, where he believes India has only begun to realise its potential. "India is just scratching the surface. This category is going to grow quite a lot," he said, adding that the domestic fragrance market could expand to Rs 5,000-10,000 crore over the next decade. Good Home has a portfolio spanning air care, odour removers, scrubbers and drain cleaners, while Eva is among India's pioneering deodorant brands with offerings including body sprays, no-gas perfumes, underarm roll-ons and talcum powders. Together, the brands generated revenues of Rs 148 crore in FY26.

UCO Bank Reports Strong First Quarter Growth

Mumbai : The UCO bank has reported strong financial performance for the first quarter of the financial year 2026-27, with healthy growth in business, deposits, advances and profitability. As of June 30, 2026, the bank's total business reached Rs. 6,05,083 crore, registering a year-on-year growth of 15.53 percent. Gross advances rose 21.18 percent to Rs. 2,72,768 crore, while total deposits increased 11.28 percent to Rs. 3,32,315 crore.

The bank's CASA deposits grew 12.34 percent to Rs. 1,16,136 crore, with savings deposits rising to Rs. 1,00,870 crore and current



deposits increasing to Rs. 15,266 crore. The CASA ratio stood at 36.94 percent. Retail, Agriculture and MSME (RAM) advances recorded a strong 25.27 per-

cent growth to Rs. 1,57,745 crore, driven by 27.32 percent growth in retail loans, 30.01 percent growth in agriculture loans and 18.79 per-

cent growth in MSME lending. Operating profit jumped 79.84 percent to Rs. 2,810 crore during the quarter, while net profit increased

8.05 percent to Rs. 656 crore from Rs. 607 crore a year earlier. Global Net Interest Margin improved to 3.05 percent and domestic NIM to 3.24 percent. Gross NPA declined to 2.08 percent and Net NPA fell to 0.25 percent. The Capital Adequacy Ratio stood at 19.03 percent, Credit-to-Deposit Ratio improved to 82.08 percent and Provision Coverage Ratio reached 97.85 percent, reflecting the bank's strong financial position and improved asset quality.

Future real estate sentiment stays neutral in Q2; Office market remains resilient: Knight Frank-NAREDCO

New Delhi: India's real estate sector entered a phase of stabilisation during the April-June quarter of 2026, with future sentiment holding steady despite global economic uncertainties, according to the latest Knight Frank-NAREDCO Real Estate Sentiment Index. The report said while the current sentiment remained subdued, the sharp deterioration witnessed in the previous quarter has levelled off, supported by resilient office demand and strong domestic economic fundamentals. The 49th edition of the sentiment index showed the Current Sentiment Score slipped marginally to 48 in Q2 2026 from 49 in the previous quarter, remaining below the neutral mark of 50. However, the Future Sentiment Score stayed unchanged at 50, indicating that industry stakeholders expect market conditions to stabilise over the next six months rather than deteriorate further. According to the report, sentiment continues to be weighed down by geopolitical tensions, volatile energy prices and inflationary pressures.



neutral threshold, while non-developer stakeholders—including banks, financial institutions and private equity investors—turned more optimistic. Their sentiment score improved to 53 from 50 in the previous quarter, reflecting greater comfort with prevailing market conditions.

The residential market continued to moderate after several years of strong growth. Housing sales across the top cities rose just 1 per cent year-on-year in the first half of 2026, signalling a transition towards a more stable growth cycle. The re-

port noted that fewer stakeholders now expect residential demand to weaken, while a larger share believes market conditions will remain unchanged, suggesting stabilisation rather than a downturn. Developers also appeared less pessimistic about new project launches, although concerns over construction costs, labour availability and financing conditions continue to weigh on supply decisions. Despite these challenges, 74 per cent of respondents expect residential property prices to either remain stable or increase over the next six months, supported by elevated input costs. The office segment remained the strongest-performing asset class. Office transactions touched 48 million square feet in the first half of 2026, down only 2 per cent year-on-year despite a high base, with demand continuing to be driven by (GCCs), technology firms and diversified occupiers.

Nearly 74 per cent of stakeholders expect office leasing activity to remain stable or improve over the next six months.

New Delhi: A revival in foreign investment flows indicates that global investor confidence in the Indian economy is strengthening, according to an article published in the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) July Bulletin.

The article said higher foreign direct investment (FDI), the return of foreign portfolio inflows and improving external sector indicators reflect India's resilience despite ongoing global uncertainties.

The article, State of the Economy clarified that the views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the central bank's official position.

According to the article, both gross and net FDI inflows during April-May 2026 exceeded the levels recorded in the corresponding period last year. Net FDI rose to \$6.5 billion during the two-month period, compared with USD 2.5 billion a year ago.

The report also high-



lighted a turnaround in foreign portfolio investment (FPI) flows. After witnessing sustained outflows earlier in the financial year, FPIs turned net buyers in June and continued to invest in July, aided by supportive policy measures and easing geopolitical tensions.

Indian equity markets also reflected the improving investor mood. The bulletin noted that equities rallied during June and the early part of July following the ceasefire agreement between the US and Iran, moderation in crude oil prices and renewed foreign investor buying. However, markets corrected after geopolitical tensions resurfaced in West Asia and oil prices climbed again, before settling into a range-bound movement.

Despite the recent recovery, overseas investors remain net sellers of Indian equities so far in the current financial year, having withdrawn USD 13.28 billion. In contrast, they have invested \$7.8 billion in the

Foreign investment revival signals renewed confidence in Indian economy: RBI



domestic debt market.

The article said recent policy initiatives by the RBI and the government have helped improve foreign investor sentiment. These included measures to expand overseas investors' access to government securities, relax investment norms for foreign portfolio investors and provide tax support for investments in sovereign bonds.

The RBI also pointed to strong inflows under its recently introduced foreign currency mobilisation measures. Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) invested USD 17.41 billion through Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) [FCNR(B)] deposits under the special incentive scheme.

In addition, the central

bank received USD 1.97 billion through overseas foreign currency borrowings and USD 1.34 billion via external commercial borrowings.

According to the article, the concessional swap facility introduced for fresh FCNR(B) deposits has played a key role in boosting foreign currency inflows and strengthening India's external position.

On global financial markets, the bulletin noted that the US 10-year Treasury yield remained elevated and volatile during June, hardening further in early July before easing after softer-than-expected US inflation data. The US Dollar Index strengthened in June but gave up part of its gains in July as inflation concerns eased. Foreign investors also trimmed exposure to emerging market equities during June, although debt inflows partially offset the outflows.

The authors observed that the global economy continues to grapple with

geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions and an uncertain trade environment. Against this backdrop, they said India's economy has remained resilient, supported by healthy domestic demand and steady performance across the industrial and services sectors.

On inflation, the bulletin noted that headline retail inflation edged higher in June, primarily due to food and fuel prices, while underlying core inflation—excluding precious metals—remained subdued. It also said liquidity conditions have improved, supporting robust credit growth. The article added that India's external sector remains stable and its outlook continues to improve, aided by stronger foreign investment inflows.

It also reiterated that India remains among the world's fastest-growing major economies and has sustained economic momentum despite an increasingly uncertain global environment.

SHG digitisation India's next UPI moment: Women's World Banking

Bengaluru: Digitising the credit history of nearly 10 crore women associated with self-help groups (SHGs) could become India's "next UPI moment", unlocking access to formal finance for millions of women entrepreneurs and accelerating inclusive economic growth, Kalpana Ajayan, Women's World Banking (South Asia Regional Head), said on Thursday.

In an interview with UNI on the sidelines of the Fintech Fusion Festival here, Ajayan said SHGs represent one of India's biggest untapped financial assets, but years of borrowing and repayment by women within these groups remain invis-

ble to the formal banking system because the transactions are not digitally recorded.

"We keep talking about the next UPI moment. I believe the digitisation of SHG lending history can become that moment. Nearly 10 crore women have built repayment discipline over many years, but banks cannot see it because there is no digital credit footprint," she said.

She said women in SHGs typically receive loans of around ₹25,000 through inter-group lending mechanisms, but many are unable to graduate to larger enterprise loans despite having demonstrated financial

discipline over the years.

"From the banking system's perspective, these women appear to have no credit history. But they have actually been borrowing and repaying loans for 10 to 15 years. If this credit behaviour is digitally captured, millions of women will become visible to formal lenders," Ajayan said.

She said creating such a digital record would enable banks to assess borrowers beyond conventional credit scores and significantly expand access to affordable institutional finance.

According to Ajayan, formal recognition of SHG credit history could support the government's efforts to

promote women entrepreneurship, including initiatives such as the Lakhpati Didi programme.

"Employment generation is a challenge. Entrepreneurship offers a sustainable solution, but women need both capital and capacity building. Our experience shows that when a woman

entrepreneur succeeds, she often creates livelihoods for three to five other women. The multiplier effect is significant," she said.

Ajayan said Women's World Banking estimates that nearly 200 million women in India own smartphones and have internet access but remain outside the formal fi-

nancial system despite the country's rapid digitalisation.

"The challenge today is no longer access but usage. India has made tremendous progress through the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile architecture, but financial inclusion must now translate into active participation in savings, credit, insurance and digital financial services," she said.

She stressed that financial institutions also need to rethink the way they assess women entrepreneurs.

"Traditional collateral-based lending excludes many women because property is rarely in their names. Credit underwriting should

increasingly be based on enterprise activity, business cash flows, supply chains and repayment capacity rather than physical collateral," she said.

Ajayan also highlighted the shortage of women banking correspondents, describing them as critical to last-mile financial inclusion.

"Women often feel more comfortable transacting with women banking correspondents. Although women account for nearly 55 per cent of Jan Dhan account holders, only around 13-14 per cent of banking correspondents are women. Increasing their participation can significantly improve financial access," she said.

She said Women's World Banking works with banks, fintech companies, NBFCs, insurance firms, government departments and regulators to design commercially sustainable financial products for women, adding that financial inclusion should extend beyond credit to include insurance, savings and digital financial services.

Ajayan also noted that lack of awareness remains a major barrier, with many women entrepreneurs unaware of collateral-free lending available under the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) and several government support schemes.