

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 26 JULY 2026



DELHI AGE | 10

After backing students' stir, Salman Khan shares post: 'Jo darr gaya, woh mar gaya'

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■ Didn't want anti-nationals to exploit situation: Pradhan

Trump refuses H-1B visa fee

President Donald Trump had issued a proclamation in September last year imposing a \$100,000 fee for obtaining new H-1B visas.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers. American technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

—PTI

■ **More on Page 6**

SHORT TAKES

SIR digitisation crosses 66 lakh

New Delhi: Digitisation of enumeration forms under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Delhi's electoral rolls crossed the 66-lakh mark on Saturday, while the door-to-door distribution exercise was virtually complete, with nearly all electors having received enumeration forms. According to the chief electoral officer's status report, 66,06,924 enumeration forms have been digitised, covering 45.53 per cent of Delhi's 1,45,10,298 electors. Outer North continued to lead all districts in digitisation with 59.36 per cent of forms uploaded, followed by South West (55.67 per cent), North West (52.29 per cent), North Delhi (51.94 per cent) and Central North (50.60 per cent). At the other end, South East recorded the lowest digitisation at 31.94 per cent, followed by East (37.50 per cent) and South (38.88 per cent).

Gurgaon: 2 arrested for killing watchman

Gurgaon: The police here have arrested two men for allegedly murdering a 57-year-old watchman during an altercation and dumping his body on a roadside, officials said on Saturday. The police arrested Kamal, a resident of Gurgaon and Harishanker, a resident of Hathras, on Friday from beneath the KMP Flyover on Farrukhnagar-Wazirpur Road. Both are around 26 years old, the police said. According to the police, Jaipal, a resident of Mohammadpur village in Gurgaon, had gone to work as a watchman on July 19 but did not return home the next morning. When his son searched for him at the workplace, he could not be traced. After his family lodged a missing person's complaint, his body was found on Farrukhnagar-Wazirpur Road on July 20.

Labourer killed as building collapses

New Delhi: A 40-year-old labourer was killed, and two others sustained minor injuries after a portion of an old building collapsed during demolition work in outer north Delhi's Suroop Nagar on Saturday, the police said. The police said a PCR call was received at 3:17 pm reporting the incident during demolition of an old structure. A police team rushed to the spot along with rescue agencies, including the fire brigade, and launched a rescue operation. The police said three labourers were trapped under the debris after a portion of the roof suddenly gave way during demolition and debris removal work. Fire department officers said that by the time they reached the spot, two labourers had already been pulled out from the rubble with minor injuries. "Rescue teams later extricated another worker from beneath the debris and rushed him to a hospital where doctors declared him dead," a senior police officer said.

27K-KG WASTE CLEARED FROM JANTAR MANTAR

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

The New Delhi Municipal Council cleared around 27 metric tonnes of mixed waste from the Jantar Mantar protest site and surrounding areas on July 24, up from around 15 metric tonnes removed since midnight a day earlier, officials said on Saturday. Officials said the increase in the volume of waste has led to sustained round-the-clock deployment of sanitation workers, vehicles and mechanised cleaning equipment at and around the protest venue. According to the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), 50 sanitation workers were deployed in the morning shift and 20 in the evening, while another team will be deployed during the night. Additional workforce and machinery from the Civil Engineering Department have also been pressed into service to remove construction and demolition waste, stones and other debris. The civic body said three tipper loads of construction debris, stones and other solid waste were also removed on Friday. Four trucks, 10 auto-tippers and six gobble machines have been deployed for continuous garbage collection.

‘Took step to prevent crackdown, protect protesters’

Wangchuk defends ending fast, says no deal with govt

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

Sensing that his reported decision to end the fast in the presence of the Union ministers without securing any resolution to his earlier demand for the removal of education minister Dharmendra Pradhan had not gone down well with the protesting students, activist Sonam Wangchuk and his wife, Gitanjali Angmo, have taken to social media to clear the air during the last 24 hours.

Late Friday night, Mr Wangchuk posted a video on YouTube claiming that he "did not strike any deal with the Centre," but ended his fast as he feared an imminent crackdown on protestors and wanted to prevent violence.

"If I had to make a deal, would I have remained hungry for 26 days? Could I not have struck a deal sitting in an air-conditioned room instead of fasting in Delhi?" the activist asked. On Mr Pradhan's resignation, Mr Wangchuk said, "My focus was that students should not suffer. My main concern was legal action and FIRs. I did not think it was necessary for me personally to secure the minister's resignation."

To drive home the point, a video was also released showing Mr Wangchuk in a heated confrontation with security personnel at Safdarjung Hospital.

The activist is still recovering in Medanta Hospital.

Mr Wangchuk alleged



Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk reacts after the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan in Gurgaon on Saturday. — PTI

▶ **THE ACTIVIST** alleged that after being taken to Safdarjung Hospital, he was treated 'like a prisoner,' claiming he was denied free movement

that after being taken to Safdarjung Hospital, he was treated "like a prisoner," claiming he was denied free movement, prevented from meeting visitors, and not allowed to keep a mobile phone or laptop.

"It was like being in North Korea," he said, adding that even after the Delhi high court allowed him to shift to Medanta Hospital, he was allegedly prevented from leaving Safdarjung Hospital for several hours.

Ms Angmo alleged that police officers were present "everywhere" at the Medanta Hospital.

Sharing visuals on X, she asked, "If the court has clarified that he is not

under detention, then under what authority is this happening?"

She even questioned, "In an enlightened democracy, is the role of the police to protect citizens and uphold the law, or to control citizens on behalf of those in power? These are questions every Indian should be asking."

After Mr Pradhan's resignation, Mr Wangchuk described it as a "victory of democracy" and a powerful example of the strength of peaceful public participation.

In a statement, the activist said, "It's a victory of democracy — direct democracy... straight from the streets. It's a victory of peace, patience, and perseverance. Congratulations CJP, Gen Z of the nation, and thank you to all citizens for shedding fear and the fear of fear and rising from every corner of the nation. From accountability now to reforms."

Hours before celebration, Jantar Mantar turns tense again; police, protesters clash

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

The Delhi police on Saturday used tear gas shells and resorted to a mild lathicharge after fresh clashes broke out between protesters and security personnel near Jantar Mantar, hours before celebrations erupted over Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation. A special commissioner of police was among several officers injured after a section of protesters allegedly pelted stones at security personnel.

The police fired around 10 tear gas shells to disperse the crowd as tensions escalated. Regular appeals were

made through the public announcement system urging protesters to remain calm and continue their demonstration peacefully. Volunteers of the CJP also appealed to demonstrators to refrain from violence. The injured officers, including a special commissioner, an assistant commissioner, a sub-inspector and two women constables, were taken to hospital and are reported to be in stable condition.

The Police and CRPF personnel in riot gear were deployed at the protest site. According to police, security personnel moved swiftly to contain the violence after protesters allegedly resorted to stone-pelting, restoring order in the area.

▶ **THE INJURED** officers, including a special commissioner, an ACP, a sub-inspector and two women constables, were taken to hospital and are reported to be in stable condition

Following Mr Pradhan's resignation, protesters began celebrating before gradually dispersing from the protest site.

According to a senior police officer, the protesters announced the withdrawal of their agitation in the evening.

"They made the announcement through the media and from their stage, and the dispersal of the public has begun. All

‘Better late than never’: Joshi on Pradhan's exit

New Delhi, July 25: After Dharmendra Pradhan stepped down as Union education minister, veteran BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi on Saturday congratulated students for the "peaceful conclusion" of their agitation. Mr Pradhan's resignation earlier in the day came amid mounting pressure over the Neet paper leak controversy, with the Centre conceding the principal demand of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)-led agitation after weeks of protests that spread from the national capital to several parts of the country.

Mr Pradhan announced his decision in a statement, saying the developments of the past 10 days had "saddened" him deeply and that the issue was "not a matter of personal prestige."

Commenting on the development, Mr Joshi said in a post on X, "Better late than never. Shri Dharmendra Pradhan has submitted his resignation."

"I appreciate and congratulate all the students for their peaceful conclusion to the movement. I hope that now, peace will soon be established in the world of Indian education and that the young people will have ample opportunities for their bright future and progress," the BJP veteran added. — PTI



Chaos erupts at the site during the protest of the Cockroach Janta Party over the Neet paper leak issue at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Saturday. — G.N. JHA

‘Victory of youth’: Delhi Cong, AAP hail Pradhan resignation

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

The AAP and the Delhi Congress on Saturday welcomed Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation, describing it as a victory for students, youth and democracy after sustained protests over alleged paper leaks in competitive examinations.

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal termed the resignation a "big win for democracy", saying it had restored people's faith that governments must ultimately listen to public opinion.

Senior leaders Gopal Rai, Saurabh Bharadwaj, Atishi, Manish Sisodia and party spokesperson Sanjeev Jha also hailed the resignation as a triumph of

students, youth and peaceful democratic protest. The Congress also welcomed the development, with its chief Devender Yadav calling it the "first victory" of the nationwide agitation against alleged paper leaks.

"Victory of crores of youth, victory of truth and justice. The arrogance has bowed before the roar of the youth," Mr Yadav said, adding that the resignation reflected the collective struggle of students whose futures had been jeopardised. However, he asserted that the Congress would continue its agitation until those responsible for the alleged police action against students protesting at Jantar Mantar were punished and the PM publicly apologised to the country's students.

The people. I hope the government will now fix the entire Neet system so that paper leaks come to an end," Mr Kejriwal said.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said the youth-led movement had compelled the government to act, adding that the campaign would now expand to demand jobs and accountability.

The stations had been shut due to security arrangements in central Delhi amid the CJP protest, which drew large gatherings near Jantar Mantar over the past few days.

The CJP has led a sit-in at Jantar Mantar since June 20, demanding accountability over the NEET-UG 2026 paper leak and irregularities in the CBSE's on-screen marking process, besides seeking wider reforms in the conduct of public examinations.

All 18 Delhi Metro stns reopen after four days

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

All 18 Delhi Metro stations in central Delhi, which had remained shut due to security reasons, reopened on Saturday after the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) withdrew its protest, ending four days of restrictions.

In a post on X, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) announced that all metro stations were now open and normal entry and exit had resumed.

The stations reopened after Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned, after which the CJP announced the withdrawal of its protest and demonstrators began dispersing from the Jantar Mantar area.

The stations that had remained closed over the past four days were Lok

Kalyan Marg, Rajiv Chowk, Patel Chowk, Ramakrishna Ashram Marg, Barakhamba Road, Supreme Court, Seva Teerth, Janpath, Mandi House, Central Secretariat, ITO, Delhi Gate, Indraprastha, Khasi Market, Jor Bagh, Shivaji Stadium, Jhandewalan and New Delhi.

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Rekha Gupta

‘Pradhan made significant contributions to edu system’

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

Delhi chief minister Rekha Gupta on Saturday said that Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan had made significant contributions and had brought meaningful reforms to the education system.

Earlier in the day, Mr Pradhan resigned from his post following the Cockroach Janta Party-led student protests across the country for his ouster over the Neet paper leak controversy.

"Dharmendra Pradhan Ji has fulfilled every responsibility in his public life with dedication, honesty, and complete devotion. As Union education minister, he made a significant contribution to the effective implementation of the National Education Policy-2020," Ms Gupta said in a post on X.

She said education in Indian languages received a boost under his tenure, while technical and higher education expanded, creating new opportunities for students.

Spl judge takes charge of paper leak cases

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

A special judge on Saturday took charge of the designated court to deal with criminal cases arising from paper leaks as well as the use of other unfair means in public examinations.

Special Judge Anu Grover Baliga took charge of a specially designated Fast Track Court to try offences under the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 and connected offences, in the Rouse Avenue District Court Complex.



CJP spokespersons Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka, with supporters, celebrate after the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

It is learnt that the trial accused who have been pertaining to the 13 arrested and jailed in the

The cockroach who won't leave: The making of Dipke

ANJALI OJHA
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

When Abhijeet Dipke stood before thousands of students at Jantar Mantar on Saturday after Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned, he did not dwell on his own role in creating one of the biggest youth stir in recent years.

Instead, he sought to turn the moment into a lesson on democracy.

"This resignation is the evidence that if you don't get scared, don't bend before this government, you can get a resignation," he proclaimed. "If you are scared to speak, how is it democracy?... They think they are kings because we sent them there."

For the 30-year-old founder of the CJP, the resignation was never meant to be the end of the story. "This is the first wicket," he told the crowd. "This is just the beginning."

"That ability to convert a political victory into a larger argument about democratic participation perhaps explains how a man who, by his own admission, was applying for jobs in the US barely two months ago ended up leading a movement that forced the resignation of a Union minister."

In an interview in early June, Mr Dipke was preparing to fly back from Boston, where he had completed a master's degree in public relations. He expected to be arrested



Abhijeet Dipke

ed the moment he landed in India. "I'll most probably get arrested from the airport," he had said. Only weeks earlier, he recalled, he had been planning a career abroad. As international attention around CJP grew, multinational companies in the US and Europe offered him jobs. He turned them down.

The gamble has transformed both his life and India's political conversation. "It's the failure of the

▶ **FOR THE** 30-year-old founder of the CJP, the resignation was never meant to be the end of the story. "This is the first wicket," he told the crowd. "This is just the beginning."

Born out of satire after unemployed youth were likened to "cockroaches", CJP rapidly evolved into what Mr Dipke insisted on calling a "political youth movement".

At the outset, he argued that its popularity reflected not his own appeal but the failure of the political establishment to address unemployment, education and the aspirations of young Indians.

"It's the failure of the

political ecosystem that they have failed to cater to the aspirations, the needs, the concerns and the hope of the youth," he said. "The youth have followed a party which was born out of satire. There could be no bigger explanation than this."

That belief continues to define his politics. On Saturday, as chants celebrating the resignation echoed across Jantar Mantar, Mr Dipke repeatedly steered the conversation away from personalities and back to issues.

"The youth have shown they can force anyone's resignation if they want," he said. "The people who said this government never listens have been proved wrong." — PTI

SHORT TAKES

4 spl fast track courts in MP over leak cases

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh high court has designated four special fast track courts to expedite cases relating to paper leaks and irregularities in the recruitment tests. The development comes hours after chief minister Mohan Yadav declared to establish four special fast-track courts in the cities of Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Gwalior in the state for the purpose, on Friday. Acting Chief Justice Vivek Rana on Friday night designated the district and additional sessions courts in four districts as special fast track courts to try offences under the Lok Pariksha (Anuchit Sadhanaka Ka Nivaran) Adhiniyam, 2024 and other related offences. The special fast-track courts have been asked to dispose of cases within three months after filing of the charge sheets. The initiative aims to maintain sanctity, transparency, and credibility of public examinations.

C'garh ex-PSC chair nabbed under PMLA

New Delhi/ Raipur: The Enforcement Directorate on Saturday arrested former Chhattisgarh PSC chairman Tamas Singh Sonwani in Raipur on money laundering charges in an alleged examination paper leak case. The case is related to the allegations that question papers for state service examinations conducted in 2020 and 2021 were leaked and results manipulated under Mr Sonwani's watch at the CGPSC. Officials said Mr Sonwani was taken into custody under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) after his questioning. They claimed he was "evasive" in his replies. The former PSC chief is being produced before a special PMLA court in Raipur, where the ED will seek his custodial remand, an official said. The money laundering investigation stems from a 2024 Central Bureau of Investigation FIR. The CBI case was booked based on a state police complaint that was filed after the BJP came to power in Chhattisgarh.

Fadnavis makes quick trip to Delhi

Mumbai: Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis made a quick trip to the national capital on Saturday and later returned to Nagpur, sources said. Amid speculation about his possible shift to national politics, Mr Fadnavis flew to Delhi after performing the customary Ashadhi Ekadashi puja at the Vitthal temple in Pandharpur early in the morning. His Delhi visit came on a day when Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned following Neet paper leak issue. Mr Fadnavis returned to Nagpur, his hometown, later in the evening, sources said. — PTI

ANTI-GOONDA ACT IS INVOKED OVER NEET STIR IN WB

Kolkata, July 25: West Bengal chief minister Suwendu Adhikari said the state had, for the first time, invoked its newly enacted anti-goonza law against those accused of orchestrating violence during Friday's Neet protest, warning they would face punishment "their next three generations will remember". Making a statement in the Assembly here on Saturday, Mr Adhikari said around 70 people identified from the Dharmatara rally were "not students", and had no connection with the agitation over the alleged Neet paper leak. Condemning the attacks on journalists during the protest, he said the West Bengal Public Safety and Control of Anti-social Activities Act, 2026 — popularly known as the Goonda Act — had been invoked to ensure exemplary punishment for those responsible. "I censure the attack on our journalist friends on behalf of the entire House. An attack on journalists is unacceptable. We will take such action under the Goonda Act that these goons and even their three generations will remember it," he said. — PTI

■ 1st batch set to complete tenure, 75% recruits face exit ■ 2,600 jawans to retire this year

After Neet, Agniveer exit govt's next big test

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

Amidst students protest, the government will now have to take a call on Agnipath scheme as the first batch of Agniveers will be completing their 4 year tenure in next three to four months, wherein 75 per cent of them will be sent back home.

It was Agnipath scheme where government had first faced nationwide backlash from the youth in 2022, as armed forces provided an important employment avenue for them especially in the rural areas, where opportunities are less.

UP, Bihar, Haryana, Delhi, MP, Bengal, Rajasthan and Telangana were the states to have witnessed massive protests against the Agnipath scheme.

It was the Navy which had recruited the first batch of Agniveers. Some 2600 Agniveers including 273 women Agniveers were inducted in the country's naval force and had commenced their training at INS Chilka, in November 2022. It is this batch which will be completing their 4 years tenure.

The Passing Out Parade (POP) of this first batch of Agniveers was held at INS Chilka on 28 March 2023.

After this, the first batch of Agniveers in Army and the Indian Air Force will be completing their 4 year tenure in early next year.

The first batch of Agniveers in Army and the IAF had started their training in January 2023. There are various proposals before the government for tweaking the Agnipath scheme, including to retain a higher number of Agniveers after they complete the four years tenure. One of the proposals is to hike the percentage of Agniveers retained after 4 years tenure to 50 per cent from 25 per cent.

The government has already announced quota for Agniveers in paramilitary forces, defence PSUs, defence civilians jobs, civil aviation, merchant navy, and there are also plans to offer them loans under Mudra and Stand Up India schemes to set up business.



Union minister J.P. Nadda and minister of state Jitendra Singh hold talks with Cockroach Janta Party spokespersons Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka, shortly after Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned from the Union Cabinet over the Neet paper leak and the month-long protest that followed it, at Constitution Club of India in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI



CJP spokesperson Saurav Das, with supporters, celebrates after education minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned after education minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned and took responsibility for the Neet paper leak, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. — PTI

India's youth needs emotional support, & not flak: Bhagwat

'Kids do what they see in family'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

Pointing that "values cannot be imposed," RSS has said that youth need emotional support rather than criticism when they fail and has asserted that values are absorbed by observing the conduct of parents and elders.

"Today's terminology speaks of IQ and EQ. Emotional intelligence is what really matters. Intelligence alone is not enough. We have all seen brilliant people who fail in life because they cannot cope with setbacks," said Mr Bhagwat while addressing a question-and-answer session after his lecture on Yoganukul Matruva (contemporary motherhood) at an event organised by Vishwamangalya Sabha yesterday.

He said women should not be burdened with every responsibility simply because they are capable, stressing that families should function as a team. He asserted that families should share responsibilities while



Mohan Bhagwat

ensuring that women's aspirations are not stifled.

Urging parents to lead by example in dealing with the influence of social media, the RSS chief said children imitate what they see at home and develop their character by observing elders.

Mr Bhagwat said parents should focus on nurturing character during the early years and gradually give children greater freedom as they grow.

He said emotional intelligence is more important than intellectual ability in overcoming setbacks. Children should be reassured instead of being made to feel guilty when they fail. They must be encouraged to rise again after failure, he said.

From NEP face to resignation: Pradhan's political rise and fall

■ Served as BJP's manager for polls in difficult states

New Delhi, July 25: From becoming BJP's go-to election manager for difficult states and handling key ministries in three tenures of the Modi government to resigning as education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan's political career faced an unexpected jolt after flaring nationwide protests over the Neet paper leak.

As education minister, Mr Pradhan became the public face of the implementation of the ambitious National Education Policy (NEP). However, his final years in office were overshadowed by repeated controversies surrounding competitive examinations and allegations of sarronisation of school textbooks.

Mr Pradhan stepped down from his post on Saturday, 35 days after protests spearheaded by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) broke out to press for his resignation over irregularities in the exam system and the Neet paper leak.

The resignation marked a significant departure from the government's initial dismissive response to the agitation. Mr Pradhan himself had escalated the confrontation in June by describing the CJP as the



Dharmendra Pradhan

"dehshatgardon ka B-team", accusing it of acting on behalf of forces rejected by the people.

He is the second Union minister in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenures to resign following a public controversy. The first was M.J. Akbar, who stepped down as minister of state for external affairs in 2018 after sexual harassment allegations surfaced against him during the #MeToo movement.

Mr Pradhan is also the person who was given a single assignment in the 2021 battle for West Bengal. He handled Nandigram constituency from where the then chief minister and TMC president Mamata Banerjee lost

HE WAS the person who was given a single assignment in the 2021 battle for West Bengal, which was to handle Nandigram constituency from where the then chief minister and TMC president Mamata Banerjee lost

has donned multiple hats in his political career.

In recent years, Mr Pradhan has also been favoured by the BJP when it comes to deployment of election in-charges, be it Bihar or Haryana. He was also assigned the polls in Uttarakhand in 2017 and Uttar Pradesh in 2022.

His long-term project was his home state Odisha, where the BJP formed the government on its own for the first time in 2024. He was the person who was given a single assignment in the 2021 battle for West Bengal to handle Nandigram constituency from where the then CM Mamata Banerjee lost despite her party's sweeping victory across the state.

Mr Pradhan made his electoral debut in 2000, contesting from Odisha's Pallalaha. — PTI

Maha TET leak mastermind held in Bihar; total arrests 14

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JULY 25

Following a three-week manhunt, the Thane police on Saturday arrested the alleged mastermind behind the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) paper leak. Bijendra Gupta, in Bihar along with his associate, Indrajit Singh. With these arrests, the total number of accused held in the case has risen to 14.

A senior police officer said both men were produced before a Bhiwandi court, which remanded them in police custody until July 30. The police is also searching for a few others in Maharashtra who allegedly agreed to purchase the leaked question papers.

According to the police, Gupta, the prime accused in the case registered at Konaong police station in Bhiwandi, had been absconding since the paper leak came to light two days before the examination. Acting on technical surveillance, mobile location tracking, intelligence inputs and coordination with the Bihar police, a special team traced and arrested Gupta and Singh in Patna.

"Gupta and Singh were taken to Hawai Adda police station in Patna before being flown to Pune. They were then brought to Bhiwandi," the officer said.

The TET examination was scheduled for June 28. However, the leak was uncovered in Bhiwandi two days earlier.



People celebrate after Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

BJP hails Pradhan's contributions, says boosted edu system

New Delhi, July 25: BJP leaders acknowledged Dharmendra Pradhan's contributions after he resigned as Union education minister on Saturday, with parliamentary affairs minister Kiren Rijju describing his journey as a "testament" to lifelong engagement with public life and student welfare.

Several other Union ministers, including Jitendra Singh, Piyush Goyal, Virendra Kumar, Giriraj Singh and G. Kishan Reddy, also lauded Mr Pradhan's contributions, saying his tenure reflected a strong commitment to strengthening the education ecosystem.

BJP president Nitin Nabin said that Mr Pradhan, as a Union education minister, played a "pivotal role" in reforming India's education landscape and successfully implementing the "landmark" National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, among other initiatives. "Prioritising larger interests, his decision to step down reflects the

Start dialogue with students: Pawar to Modi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JULY 25

NCP founder Sharad Pawar on Saturday welcomed the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the Neet paper leak controversy, calling it a victory for the country's youth. He also claimed that he had urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to initiate a dialogue with the protesting students by involving senior Cabinet ministers.

The protesters at Jantar Mantar and Opposition parties had been demanding Mr Pradhan's resignation. As the agitation spread across the country, the education minister submitted his resignation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday afternoon.

Reacting to the development, Mr Pawar posted a message in Marathi on social media platform X, praising the 28-day protest. "The 28-day-long struggle and determination shown by the youth at Jantar Mantar in Delhi over the Neet paper leak issue is truly commendable," he said.

Cong, Sena-UBT vow to continue protest in Maha

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JULY 25

The Maharashtra Congress and its alliance partner, the Shiv Sena (UBT), on Saturday said their protests over the alleged Neet paper leak would continue despite education minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation from his post.

While the Congress said it would intensify its agitation until Prime Minister Narendra Modi apologises, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray warned that the youth would shift their protests towards Union home minister Amit Shah if the Centre failed to act against alleged police excesses on protesting students.

Maharashtra Congress chief Harshvardhan Sapkal said the party would not back down until strict action was taken against all those allegedly involved in the paper leak.

■ Cockroaches, Gen Z made kings blink today, says Varun Grover

Celebs join celebration of students' win

New Delhi, July 25: Vijay Varma, Vir Das, Swara Bhasker, Varun Grover and many others from the world of showbiz on Saturday hailed the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan, calling it a victory for the students who have been relentlessly protesting over the Neet paper leak issue.

Mr Pradhan resigned earlier in the day amid mounting pressure over alleged irregularities in the conduct of several competitive examinations. In his resignation letter, he said he was "disturbed" by the developments of the past 10 days and had submitted his resignation to Prime



Vijay Varma



Vir Das



Swara Bhasker



Varun Grover

Minister Narendra Modi. Reacting to the Union education minister's resignation, Vijay Varma shared a photograph of Mr Pradhan on social media with the caption, "Accha chalta hoon... Duaaon mein yaad rakha," quoting the popular song "Channa Mereya" from movie Ae Dil Hai Mushkil.

Comedian-writer Grover congratulated the students and activists who led the movement. "Congratulations India. The seriousness of @Cockroachisback, @SauravDassss, @abhiijeet_dipke, @neha_aisa, Aameen, Manish, and the unheinged non-seriousness of the Gen Z memes has made the kings blink today," he wrote.

The protests, spearheaded by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), began at Jantar Mantar on June 20 over alleged paper leaks

and irregularities in the examination system, including Neet.

The demonstrations later spread to several cities, with protesters demanding Mr Pradhan's resignation and greater accountability in the education sector.

Mr Das shared a photograph with the caption "Friends" and followed it up with a message applauding the students. Actor Abhishek Banerjee changed his display picture on social media and posted, "DP CHANGE HO GAYI!! A big congratulations to GEN-Z."

Actor Saba Azad posted, "Chaatr ekta zindabad!!!" while Swara Bhasker described the development as a "Huge victory for students." — PTI

Unesco adds Sarnath to its world heritage list; PM hails

A proud moment for every Indian, Modi says on X

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 25

Hailing the inscription of Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh on the Unesco World Heritage List, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the site has a deep connection with Lord Buddha, whose timeless message of wisdom, compassion and harmony inspires the world. "A proud moment for every Indian! Delighted that Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh has been inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage List," Mr Modi said in a post on X. India's ancient Buddhist site of Sarnath was on

Saturday inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage List. The decision was taken during the ongoing meeting of the Unesco World Heritage Committee's 48th session in Busan, South Korea.

"New inscription on the @U N E S C O #WorldHeritage List: Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath, #India," the Unesco posted on X.

This is India's 45th site to join the list of Unesco World Heritage.

Sarnath, located approximately 10 kilometres from Varanasi, is a profoundly significant pilgrimage site for Buddhists worldwide. It

holds an unparalleled place in history as the location where Gautam Buddha delivered his first sermon.

"This recognition celebrates India's profound civilisational and spiritual heritage. It will also inspire more people across the world to come to Sarnath and connect with the ideals of Lord Buddha," Mr Modi said.

In August 2025, Union culture minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said that India had submitted a dossier titled "Ancient Buddhist Site, Sarnath" to the Unesco World Heritage Centre for the 2025-26 nomination cycle.

Time for ‘regime change’: Rahul

■ Continued from Page 1

Wayanad Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, “People have started claiming the country back from those who have tried to oppress and suppress their voice.”

With elections in seven states coming up in 2027, the Opposition looks to build up on the anti-government mood among Gen Z. Five states — Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Manipur, Uttarakhand and Goa — will have Assembly elections between January and February. Four states out of these have BJP governments, while the AAP is ruling in Punjab. The BJP is aiming to go solo in Punjab to test its luck and explore the possibility of forming a government.

“Our education system, once hailed as one of the best in the world, is being attacked, captured and privatised. Mr Pradhan is a symbol of corruption, destruction of the education system... Good, he is gone. This is a fight between the past, which is Modi-RSS, and the future of India, and I am confident that the future of India will defeat the past... This is a warning from the students and the Opposition that the government cannot run India like their personal fiefdom. If you continue down this path, you will see 10 times the scale of what transpired now,” said Mr Gandhi.

The entire Opposition, led by Congress, threw its weight behind the students’ movement both inside and outside the Parliament. It was Mr Gandhile sit-in protest outside the PM’s residence and his subsequent detention that gave a fillip to the movement that became massive after the students were hit by police in Delhi on Monday.

The Opposition leaders termed Mr Pradhan’s quitting as “a victory of the Gen Z” that raised its voice to fix a “rotten and crumbling” system. Saluting the students’ movement that was organic and without any political leadership, the Opposition leaders also praised the resilience shown by the students who faced police brutality on roads.

“The echo of India’s students has finally reached the doors of the arrogant power. This is the victory of our millions of youth who raised their voices on the streets across the country to fix the education system... This is the victory of truth and the defeat of Mr Modi’s stubbornness,” said Congress president Mr Mallikarjun Kharge.

“The incompetent, callous, and arrogant mantri Pradhan has finally been compelled to resign. It was sustained youth pressure that finally forced the Pradhan Mantri to stop giving him political cover. This is not the end. We still await the prime minister’s apology to our students,” said Congress general secretary in-charge of communications Jairam Ramesh.

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal termed Mr Pradhan’s resignation as a big win for democracy. “Jhukti hai duniya, jhukane wala chahiye. Congratulations to the entire country,” he added.

NCP(SP) chief Sharad Pawar said, “It is a symbol of the power of democracy. This is a major victory for the unity of the youth power in the country,” he added.

■ ₹18.07cr sent more than once to 9,226 A/Cs

CAG alleges lapses in Bengal Amphan relief

Bengal tables 28 pending CAG reports, targets TMC

Kolkata, July 25: The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has flagged serious irregularities in the West Bengal government’s post-Cyclone Amphan relief and restoration works, alleging that damage assessments were exaggerated, relief payments were made multiple times to thousands of beneficiaries and assistance was disbursed using beneficiary lists prepared for an earlier cyclone.

In its compliance audit report on post-Amphan relief and restoration works, tabled in the Assembly on Saturday, the CAG said the state’s assessment of damages submitted for seeking Central assistance was “exaggerated and unrealistically high” and was not supported by adequate evidence of actual losses.

The report was among 28 CAG reports tabled in the Assembly after a gap of four years. Super cyclonic storm Amphan made landfall on May 20, 2020, affecting 16 districts of West Bengal. The cyclone impacted nearly 60 per cent of the state’s population, claimed 99 lives and caused extensive damage to houses, agriculture, fisheries, forests, power infrastructure, irrigation canals, health facilities and industries.

The state government had sought ₹35,018 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), against which the Centre recommended assistance of ₹2,707.77 crore, subject to adjustment of 50 per cent of the balance available in the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) account as on March 31 of the preceding financial year.

Kolkata, July 25: The BJP government in West Bengal tabled 28 long-pending CAG reports in the Assembly on Saturday and said a special session would be convened to discuss them, alleging the previous TMC dispensation committed a “constitutional lapse” by not placing them in the House. Laying the CAG reports in the Assembly from fiscals 2020-21 to 2024-25, state finance minister Swapan Dasgupta said the special session of the Assembly would hold a detailed discussion on their findings, asserting it was the government’s responsibility to place its shortcomings before the people.

He said the reports would provide “a true picture” of the state’s finances and explain the reasons behind Bengal’s debt burden of

more than ₹8 lakh crore. Referring to the previous government’s failure to present the audit reports in the Assembly, Mr Dasgupta said, “Keeping that constitutional lapse in mind, we are tabling 28 volumes of the CAG report before the House.. He termed it a serious constitutional impropriety and told Speaker Rathin Bose that “for some known and unknown reasons” the reports had not been tabled for several years. “The CAG reports have constitutional importance. Every government has the responsibility to place them before the Assembly.

“We want to hold a special session in coming days where these CAG reports will be discussed. It is very important. It is our duty to place government’s mistakes before the people,” he said. — PTI

while those with partially damaged houses received ₹25,000 each. The audit said no records explaining the rationale behind the revised rates were made available. The report further revealed that house-building grants were credited more than once to the bank accounts of 9,226 beneficiaries, involving ₹18.07 crore.

“This indicated serious deficiencies in the process of selection of beneficiaries and absence of adequate checks and balances before Direct Benefit Transfer to prevent such multiple payments,” the CAG said. — PTI

■ Win crucial after party denies ticket to veteran Narottam Mishra

Datia poll 1st big test of BJP’s new guard

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, JULY 25

The July 30 by-elections to the Datia Assembly constituency under Gwalior-Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh is viewed in the ruling BJP circles as an acid test for the party’s experiment with the second-generation leadership in the state in the form of chief minister Mohan Yadav.

The Central BJP leadership’s decision to field debutant Ashutosh Tiwari in the seat by surprisingly ignoring the claim of five-time party MLA and former home minister Narottam Mishra for renomination is a pointer to this, a senior BJP functionalary told this newspaper on Saturday, unwilling

to be quoted. An influential section of the party was of the view that there was every possibility that Mr. Mishra would have staked claim for a cabinet berth in the Mohan Yadav ministry and subsequently created a parallel power Centre in the state government because of his stature in the party had he been elected to the Assembly in the by-elections.

Mr. Yadav has started tightening his grip over state administration after overcoming initial challenges from senior ministers such as Kailash Vijayvargiya, Prallhad Patel and Rakesh Singh with the support from the Central leadership which won’t like him to face a fresh challenge of a parallel power Centre in his ministry in the event of

■ **THE STATE** party later released 40-member star campaigners for the by-elections in which state party president and the chief minister topped the list

Mr. Mishra made it to his cabinet, the BJP leader said.

Sources said that Mr. Mishra had exhibited his dominating nature by launching campaign in the seat and later purchasing the nomination form even before the party declared candidate for the by-elections, causing discomfiture in the state leadership as well as inviting displeasure of the Central leadership.

In a sign of revolt after he was denied a party ticket, his loyalists had ram-



People wade through a waterlogged road following heavy rainfall in Surat, Gujarat, on Saturday. Thirty-five rain-related deaths have been reported in Gujarat in the past two days, with over 7,000 persons rescued in the last few days. — PTI

Assam flood situation still grim, death toll rises to 61

■ 14 more die in last 24 hrs ■ Over 7.05 lakh affected

MANOJ ANAND Guwahati, July 25

The flood situation in Assam continued to be critical on Saturday even as water levels showed signs of receding in some areas. The death toll from the deluge rose to 61 after 14 more people lost their lives in the last 24 hours.

As per the Assam state disaster management authority (ASDMA), seven were reported from Charaideo district, six from Sivasagar and one from Jorhat. The deceased included 11 males and three females, with one person are still missing in Sivasagar.

Over 7.05 lakh people have been affected across nine to 12 districts, including Charaideo, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Hojai, Jorhat, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon, Sivasagar, and others such as Biswanath, Sonitpur, and Kamrup (Metro). Sivasagar remains the



Cars lie partially submerged in mud and silt washed after monsoon rainfall in Assam’s Sivasagar district. — PTI

worst-hit with around 3.48 lakh people affected, followed by Charaideo (nearly 1.88 lakh) and Jorhat (over 1.26 lakh). A total of 856 villages under 37 revenue circles are inundated, and floodwaters have damaged over 56,606 hectares of cropland. Livestock losses are also significant, with thousands of animals and poultry washed away in recent days.

The state administration has set up 363 relief camps and distribution centres, sheltering over 1.15 lakh displaced people, while

relief materials are being provided to additional affected populations.

However, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma acknowledged that relief has not yet reached around 80,000 people in inaccessible areas, particularly in parts of Nazira (around 50,000) and Sivasagar (around 30,000).

He also said that he was personally monitoring the relief operation and announced that he would be visiting the flood-hit areas in a day or two.

Radio collars to elephants ahead of Haridwar Kumbh

AGE CORRESPONDENT DEHRADUN, JULY 25

In preparation for the Haridwar Kumbh 2027, the Uttarakhand forest department has announced plans to fit radio collars on the leaders of elephant herds to help mitigate the growing incidence of human-elephant conflict in the Haridwar forest division.

The initiative was announced during the Uttarakhand State Wildlife Board meeting held in Dehradun on Friday and chaired by chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami.

The department said the project would enable officials to monitor the movement of elephant herds in real time, allowing them

to respond swiftly and reduce the risk of elephants straying into residential areas.

Elephant intrusions into human settlements have become a persistent challenge in Haridwar, often leading to conflict and posing a threat to both residents and wildlife.

According to wildlife officials, the radio-collaring programme will be introduced as a pilot project in the Haridwar forest area.

By tracking the movements of herd leaders, the Forest department aims to issue timely alerts and implement preventive measures, particularly during the Kumbh Mela, when millions of pilgrims are expected to visit the city.

Lord Jagannath & his siblings dazzle in divine Suna Besha

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR, JULY 25

Tens of thousands of devotees converging on Puri to witness the sacred Suna Besha (Golden Attire) of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra triggered massive traffic congestion on the Bhubaneswar-Puri National Highway on Saturday, leaving commuters stranded for long hours.

The worst traffic snarls were reported near Batagaon on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar, where vehicles crawled bumper-to-bumper amid an unending stream of buses, private cars and two-wheelers heading towards the pilgrim town.

In several stretches, commuters remained stuck for nearly an hour as traffic moved at a snail’s pace.

The annual Suna Besha ritual, regarded as one of the most revered events of the Rath Yatra festivities, has drawn an overwhelming number of pilgrims from across Odisha and neighbouring states, resulting in an unprecedented surge in vehicular movement along the highway.

Amarnath Yatra resumes after 6-day rain halt

AGE CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, JULY 25

The annual Amarnath Yatra resumed on Saturday after a six-day halt caused by relentless rainfall, landslides and widespread disruption across Jammu and Kashmir. With weather conditions showing signs of improvement and the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway restored for traffic, a fresh batch of 6,269 pilgrims set out from the Bhagwati Nagar Yatri Niwas in Jammu for the Baltal base camp in the Kashmir Valley.

The convoy, comprising 223 vehicles, departed at around 2:40 a.m. under tight, multi-layered security arrangements.

Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Anshul Garg said on Saturday that the Yatra will continue through the Baltal axis while the traditional Pahalgam route remains temporarily closed for pilgrimage because of repair and maintenance work made necessary by recent rainfall in the Valley.

Dharmendra Pradhan resigns, CJP stir ends

■ Continued from Page 1

Wangchuk and the Opposition leaders hailed the students for their “unprecedented victory”. Lok Sabha Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi yet again insisted that the Prime Minister must “apologise” to the students.

Incidentally, this is the second time in the last 12 years that the Modi government has removed a Union minister under pressure. Before Mr Pradhan, the last Union minister to resign was M.J. Akbar, who stepped down in 2018 after a barrage of sexual harassment allegations surfaced against him during India’s “#MeToo” movement.

A few hours after Mr Pradhan stepped down, the third round of talks between the CJP and the government resumed. In a joint conference, CJP spokespersons Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka called off the strike after the government assured it will withdraw FIRs against the protesters not only in Delhi but also in other BJP-ruled and supported states.

The government also assured that honorary compensation will be given to the families of Neet suicide victims within existing rules. Regarding further educational reforms, the CJP delegation will hold talks with the government in the next four weeks.

Amid thunderous applause and deafening cheers, Mr

Dipke, struggling to make himself heard, shouted, “Jai jai jai Bhim.”

He then quipped: “My only message to the Prime Minister is: Subah ho gayi mamu (Wake up uncle, it’s morning).”

The CJP founder then indicated that the battle is far from over. “This is only the first wicket,” he said, warning the government that the movement had only just begun.

Saluting the students, Mr Dipke urged them not to make him the face of the victory.

“Don’t make me the hero,” he said. In an apparent swipe at Mr Modi’s “personality cult”, he reminded the students that the country’s fortunes had “deteriorated” after it chose to elevate one individual as a hero. He then led the crowd in chants of “Bharat Mata ki Jai”.

Sources revealed that the decision to go for Mr Pradhan’s scalp was eventually taken after the Prime Minister began emerging as the main target of the students’ movement.

Almost all the songs, slogans, posters and placards targeted the Prime Minister. Apprehending that the ongoing protest could eventually “damage” the image of the BJP’s prime vote catcher, the party decided to drop Mr Pradhan for now.

However, the Modi government finally capitulated only

after realising that neither police crackdowns nor pressure tactics could crush a movement fuelled by Gen-Z’s rage.

The government’s first miscalculation, sources revealed, was believing that removing activist Mr Wangchuk from Jantar Mantar on the eve of the CJP’s “Chalo Sansad” march would take the sting out of the agitation.

Mr Wangchuk’s hunger strike had begun to galvanise support and sympathy for the movement across the country. However, the activist’s removal did not deter the students. Lakhs of students flooded Jantar Mantar on July 20, catching the authorities completely off guard.

The next move was an unprecedented police crackdown and the demolition of the protest stage. Yet again, students returned in greater numbers, rebuilt the stage and resumed the protest with renewed determination.

The impact of the police crackdown also helped the protest gain momentum, as students from across the country and people from all walks of life began thronging the protest site.

The protest also spread like wildfire across the country. The authorities then switched strategies, sources said. A section of the media was allegedly roped in to portray the protesters as being linked to Pakistan and

other “anti-national” elements. Mr Gandhi’s protest near the Prime Minister’s residence and the Opposition’s relentless disruption of Parliament further intensified the political pressure. Sources revealed that the “final throw of the dice was an attempt to co-opt Mr Wangchuk.”

As Wangchuk ended his fast late on Thursday without reiterating his demand for Mr Pradhan’s resignation, the government hoped the agitation would lose steam. It had misread the movement yet again. By then, the protests had outgrown Mr Wangchuk and every other leader. The protests had become a spontaneous nationwide student uprising.

During the second round of talks with the government on Friday, the CJP leadership made its position clear: nothing short of Mr Pradhan’s resignation will be acceptable. Yet till late Friday evening and Saturday morning television channels kept running scrolls saying, “Mr Pradhan will not resign.”

However, with the Prime Minister’s image taking a repeated hit and his late-night social media appeals and promises of setting up fast-track courts failing to calm the streets, the government prepared itself for the inevitable. On Saturday afternoon at 2.15 pm, Mr Pradhan stepped down.

Tiranga, songs of triumph fill Jantar Mantar

■ Continued from Page 1

informing the parents. Many students had spent weeks sleeping on pavements, surviving on community kitchens and volunteer support. For those who arrived only on Saturday, determined to witness the culmination of a protest they had followed online, it was a scene they will remember always.

“I was hit by tear gas during the July 20 protest,” said Kartik (24). “Today I feel people can still bring change when they stand together.”

Another protester, pointing to the bandage wrapped around his head, smiled through the celebrations. “If this resignation had not happened, all this suffering would have been pointless. Today it feels worth it.”

“People say we are always on our phones. But it was through those phones that we organised, mobilised and reached millions. Today we’ve shown what young people can achieve together,” Saina (23) said, adding that the outcome

had answered those who dismissed her generation as passive.

For Rajesh Thapa, father of late Neet-UG aspirant Riya Thapa, the celebrations carried a grief that never left. “If my daughter were alive, she would probably have stood here with these students. Since she couldn’t, I came in her place,” he said, holding back tears.

“This is the children’s victory. Had accountability been fixed when the paper leak first surfaced, perhaps many lives could have been saved,” Mr Thapa added.

Addressing the gathering, CJP leader Saurav Das borrowed Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s trademark tone. “My Friends...,” he began, drawing laughter and applause, before asking protesters to return home peacefully. “Celebrate this with your families. This movement belongs to all of you. This is just the beginning...we will meet again,” he said.

As dusk settled, the Delhi police officers appealed to

demonstrators to disperse peacefully while the Delhi Metro reopened gates at nearby stations, allowing thousands to head home after weeks of restrictions.

The CJP organiser Ashutosh Ranka also thanked Nihangs for supporting the cause and making the movement peaceful. They performed the traditional martial art form “Gatka” in the evening, bringing the protest to a symbolic close. The end of the agitation also brought relief to traders around Jantar Mantar and Connaught Place, where weeks of barricades, diversions and security restrictions had kept customers away. Shopkeepers, many of whom had reported one of the weakest business weeks in recent months, had a sense of relief, hoping normal footfall would finally return on Sunday.

Yet, not everyone packed up immediately. As the crowds thinned and volunteers dismantled tents, several students chose to stay

back at Jantar Mantar for the night. Many said they had nowhere else to go in Delhi and returning home immediately was not an option, having made no railway or bus reservations during the uncertainty over when the protest would end. Some waited for friends to arrange tickets for the journey home.

“We’ll leave once we get confirmed tickets. After spending over a month here, one more night doesn’t matter,” said a student from Bihar.

By night, volunteers folded tents, packed away loudspeakers and rolled up banners that had become symbols of resistance over the past five weeks.

The slogans faded, the crowds thinned and the barricades remained. But for thousands leaving with faded tricolours, hoarse voices and tired smiles, Jantar Mantar had become more than a protest site; it had become the place where they believed a movement found its “first victory”.

PM to interact with youth from Ladakh, HP, U’khand

■ Continued from Page 1

competition that witnessed participation from more than three lakh youth.

As part of the programme, participants lived with local communities and undertook activities

such as swachhata drives, awareness campaigns on government schemes, yuva sammelans, cultural exchange programmes, tree plantation drives, mini model panchayat simulations, interactions with

local artisans and visits to institutions of strategic importance.

The programme provided participants with first-hand exposure to the socio-economic landscape, cultural heritage and develop-

mental aspirations of India’s frontier regions while fostering community participation, national integration and a deeper understanding of the strategic importance of border villages.

THE ASIAN AGE

26 JULY 2026



Shreya Sen-Handley

Off the beaten track

Living memorials: Love out loud, now

Memories and memorials have been a large part of my life in the last few months, as my beloved father was first hospitalised and then, abruptly, gone. Yes, he'd been grappling with various ailments, but nothing that was ever flagged as life-threatening by the throttle of physicians consulted. Yet, out of the blue, one mundane evening, he collapsed and never regained consciousness, even as his doctors predicted a full recovery.

Leaving my children behind in England, in the throes of their life-defining board exams, I flew to Kolkata to assist with my father's expected recuperation. But that was not to be. Alongside the heartbreak and (bureaucratic and financial) harassment that attend death, I had the cold comfort of dropping one last kiss on his cooling forehead, of carrying his pall to the conflagration that reduced him to ashes, and the realization that he lived on in our resilience in crises.

There was bittersweet succour to be found, also, in his thumbing his nose, as it were, from the other side of sentience, at the cluelessness of the smugly negligent medical establishment. Some solace could be drawn as well, in his having decided, if decisions can be made while drifting away, that he would bring an end to both his suffering and ours, sleeplessly watching and worrying over him as we had those last days.

Comfort, too, arrived on our doorstep with the heartwarmingly vast visitor contingents, offering condolences, a forest of flowers, sweets, and sometimes, practical help (in the form of khichri, assistance with arrangements, and counselling from lived experience). If our loss wasn't made bearable by the universality of bereavement, we felt seen and supported.

In that very acknowledgement that each experience is different, though there's nothing more tragically inevitable than death, I found the key to coping with heartache; especially in our quickly-pulled-together-yet-well-attended gathering to celebrate the eventual, erudite existence my father had led. Described by a friend as "very moving without being maudlin", I both encouraged and was delighted by the joy gently rippling through the evening, which was exactly what our father would have wanted from an event in his name.

Struck by how much love there was for him in evidence that day — in the songs he enjoyed that were sung expressively, in fond speeches from an array of friends and family, highlighting some of his finest (and funniest) moments, as well as in the avalanche of warmth off-stage — I couldn't help but wonder if these bracing celebrations of the lives we live, and the good we accomplish in small and large measures, shouldn't happen *before* a life ends, rather than after!

That they don't is down to convention. We commemorate folk once they've left us, and that's true of most cultures. Not for us ordinary mortals are roasts, roasts, felicitations, and lifetime achievement awards, while we're still around to, not just appreciate, but benefit from them. Gain a second wind even.

It's human nature, unfortunately, to recognise a person's true worth *after* they've very definitely decamped, and only then, to honour them. Yet, if humanity got into the habit of celebrating everyday individuals in the course of their lives, instead of after their demise, wouldn't it extend our existence with an infusion of the very validation it needed? If our wakes were held while we were still awake, wouldn't they give our physical and mental health the boost they sometimes (desperately) require in our twilight?

Oh sure, we have late-life birthday parties and so on, but they're rarely accorded the respect of a memorial. People don't feel the same compulsion to turn up, or make the appreciative speeches they do after the fact, though undoubtedly each word is meant. I intend, therefore, not just to urge everyone else to have their final get-together in advance of their suspected departure, but to set an example, by having mine, well before my death. To enliven the time I'll have left, and maybe even lengthen it!

Not at all like Ross in *Friends* then, who falsely spread the news of his demise to discover what his familiars really thought of him, with unexpected consequences. There would be no pretence at mine that I wasn't still alive (and kicking, hopefully); gathering family and friends around me to share good memories, fine food, and music that touches a collective chord.

Isn't that too irreverent, you wonder. Or, at least, precipitate? If it stretches a life out further, we're not celebrating its winding down, eh? And what's to stop us hosting more than one memorial for ourselves if we find the felicitations addictive? But, ask yourselves, whenever not?

The twilight years are undeniably a wrapping up, with no time like then to celebrate the past, as well as the immediate moment. Nor does any other span in our lives need the upliftment of fond gatherings quite as much. Most of all, it might give both the celebrants, and the cynosure of that evening's attentions, a few more years with the people they love.

The more I think about it, the more I'm sure it's exceedingly sensible, and more productive too, to fete a life while it yet flowers, and not afterwards. Lavish all the praise on them you'd reserved for their memorial, fill their heart with your regard and let it tick a little bit longer. So, when they go, as we all shall, there'll be fewer things left unsaid and many fewer regrets.

Good grief — can it be done?

Shreya Sen-Handley is the award-winning author of *Memoirs of My Body*, short story collection *Strange and travelogue* *Handle With Care*. She is also a playwright, columnist and illustrator.

Subhani



Resilient Iran changes Mideast security game



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

Between 2024 and 2026, the Middle East moved from a prolonged shadow war into direct state-to-state conflict.

On June 13, 2025, Israel launched surprise and sneak attacks at nuclear facilities in Iran. The United States joined the assault on June 22, 2025, under the aegis of an operation codenamed Midnight Hammer to try and obliterate Iran's nuclear facilities that were not decapitated by the Israeli strikes. Seven B-2 Spirit stealth bombers flew continuously for 18 hours from their base in Whiteman, Missouri, defended by F-35 and F-22 fighter aircraft to draw any incoming surface to air missile or anti-aircraft fire. These B-2 stealth bombers dropped bunker busting bombs on Fordow and Natanz Iranian nuclear sites. The bombing inflicted significant damage.

Tehran retaliated by leveraging its 'Axis of Resistance,' a loosely knit network of armed groups and state actors in the Middle East. It is also colloquially referred to as the Shia Crescent that emerged in the wake of the ill-considered US invasion of Iraq. Its cohesion is at best recondite. While the Hezbollah in Lebanon coordinates closely with its Iranian patron, others, such as Yemen's Houthis, are partners of convenience. What binds them are shared objectives — driving the American presence and influence out of the region, the elimination of the Israeli state, and support for the Palestinian resistance.

From Decapitation to Continuity: The US and Israel again on February 28, 2026, amid ongoing negotiations between the US and Iran in Geneva on the nuclear question launched an operation codenamed Operation Epic Fury and Operation Roaring Lion, respectively, against Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile infrastructure with an underlying assumption

that this round of regime decapitation strikes would topple the Iranian leadership.

This undergirded assumption was based upon the widespread protests against the Iranian regime that commenced on December 28, 2025, and continued through much of January and February 2026. The protests were brutally put down by the mullah regime in Tehran with over 30,000 young Iranians being mercilessly butchered by the indiscriminate use of heavy military grade weapons against unarmed protesters.

On March 1, 2026, a US-Israeli precision strike assassinated Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Iranian Supreme Leader who had reigned for thirty-seven years. An Interim Leadership Council was constituted within days. Mojtaba Khamenei succeeded his father with the backing of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Notwithstanding extensive disenchantment with the mullah regime and visible domestic polarisation, the Islamic Republic preserved functional command. It is this capacity to absorb unprecedented blows that is now reshaping the security architecture of the Middle East.

Bases as Liabilities: The Middle Eastern Security architecture rests on America's forward military presence, which dates back to the Marine landing in Beirut in 1958. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, in total, the US has military facilities across at least 19 countries in the Middle East, eight of them are considered as permanent in countries including Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates. The US military also uses large bases in Djibouti and Turkey, which are part of other regional commands but often contribute significantly to US operations in the Middle East.

Paradoxically, 18 out of these 19 military and basing arrangements are with the

For decades, regional security in the Middle East rested on the assumption that US bases deterred attack and that Gulf states could rely on US protection. The US-Israel war with Iran has tested both assumptions.

Islamic and Arab states and only one is with Israel. The latter however is the most significant. As the US and Israeli militaries stepped up their attacks again after a momentary ceasefire and the war enters its 149th day, Tehran launched strikes again across the Middle East, forcing Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar, along with Jordan and Syria, to take defensive action against incoming missiles and drones. Tehran's actions in itself sketch out the contours of the region's current security order. Iran insists that it is hitting US facilities because Washington has used its regional bases as launchpads for strikes on Iran. A logic that automatically converts host-state territory into a veritable battlefield.

On July 18, Kuwait's ministry of electricity, water and renewable energy confirmed via X that an Iranian strike hit one of its power generation and water desalination stations, sparking a fire and knocking a large number of electricity generation units out of service.

The Gulf Cooperation Council's secretary-general, Jasssem al-Budaiwi, condemned Iran's "treacherous" attacks on Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan, warning that continued strikes on critical infrastructure risked dragging the region into deeper instability. The states anchoring US's regional presence are now absorbing the blowback of a war fought from their soil and the security architecture built on it is bending under the strain.

Hormuz as Leverage: Iran's second instrument is geography. The Strait of Hormuz carried about 20 million barrels of oil and petroleum products daily in 2025, one-fifth of global consumption, about 93% of Qatar's and 96% of the UAE's LNG exports transit through the Strait, representing 19% of global LNG trade.

Iran's closure of the strait met by a US naval blockade of Iranian ports delivered an energy shock severe enough to force negotiation. The Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, signed under Pakistani and Qatari mediation, opened a 60-day window for a comprehensive settlement and reopened the waterway. That memorandum of understanding failed to deliver and the Straits of Hormuz once again stand closed.

The transitory reopening, however, has confirmed Tehran's grip on the Straits of Hormuz. Port Watch recorded only 513 transits in the first 16 days, about 28 ships a day. Myriad number of commercial vessels have been attacked since the ceasefire; the mined central channel lies unused, and traffic is funnelled through two corridors, one in Iranian waters and one in Omani waters under US oversight. The Gulf's energy exporters find their lifeline resting on Iranian forbearance. Keeping aside the Law of the Sea, the world's most important oil artery now operates partly on Iranian terms, and the security architecture built around it is bending to that reality.

A Region Recalibrating: For decades, regional security in the Middle East rested on the assumption that US bases deterred attack and that Gulf states could rely on US protection. The US-Israel war with Iran has tested both assumptions. Ultimately, the current circumstances have permanently shattered the illusion that regional stability can be outsourced to an external patron forcing a profound recalibration of the Middle East's balance of power. By exposing the critical vulnerabilities of the Mideast states, this conflict proved that passive neutrality without credible deterrence invites aggression rather than preventing it. To survive this new geopolitical reality, Mideast states must rapidly move toward partnership pluralism, invest in indigenous defence capabilities and convert sovereign wealth into strategic infrastructure to ensure the next security order is negotiated from a position of collective strength.

Manish Tewari is a third-term Lok Sabha MP and former Union minister. @ManishTewari.

LETTERS NEVER TOO LATE

It is good for the larger cause of democratic and inclusive governance that the education minister has resigned. To retain him after the leak of Neet examination papers did ensure continuity as the re-examination was due in a month. The government would have been well-advised to have Mr Pradhan resign soon after the re-examination was successfully held. This would have reflected well on the personal image of the minister in two ways: He is well conversant with the examination architecture and thus delivered in his remit and his moral standing in accepting responsibility overrides his executive acumen. The government need not have flattered on this score. It should put all this behind and restructure the entire ecosystem in consultation with stakeholders.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

NO WORRIES that the BJP has withdrawn its protest. They have done what no political party has done before. Make a minister resign for not doing their job. And in the process energised a whole nation, brought hope to their countrymen. Politics is no longer the same as before. It is the age of post-ideological classical liberalism tempered by kindness and socialism. We are no longer loyal to a party, we just want the job done. *Sambhavami yuge yuge*, that is to say every six months or less, whenever the government tries to push a bad bill through parliament or takes an unjust decision, let this party be that danda to beat back the dictator. For eternal vigil is the price of freedom. And not everyone needs to enter Parliament.

Priyanka Mathur
Noida, UP

ETHANOL STIR NEX?

TEAM BHARAT, a citizens' rights organisation, has announced a nationwide campaign against the Centre's roll-out of E20 ethanol blended petrol fuel comprising 80% petrol and 20% ethanol, a plant derived biofuel. They believe consumers should have the option of continuing to use E10 fuel. The organisation's key demands include continued availability of E10 petrol for vehicles compatible only with that fuel. A 20% price concession on E20 petrol reflects its ethanol content and the public release of technical, environmental, health and economic studies related to policy. It also sought the availability of E10 or unblended petrol as a consumer choice. More than 80% of vehicles currently on Indian roads are designed to run on E10 fuel. So who is in the crosshairs next? Mr Nitin Gadkari?

C. Koshy John
Pune

Chandrakant Lahariya



Right to return home alive: Killer roads a growing menace in India

On the first Sunday of July, I lost a dear friend, Dr Biplab Mukhopadhyay, 43, a gifted laparoscopic gynaecological surgeon, to a tragic road traffic accident in Delhi. He had spent the day doing what he was trained to do: saving lives. After completing a successful surgery, he stepped out of the hospital and began crossing a road in New Delhi's Chattarpur area, when a speeding motorcycle struck him. He was rushed to the emergency room in hospital but did not survive.

I had known Biplab for only three years. Yet friendship is not always measured in calendar time. Some people take decades to enter our inner lives; others arrive quietly through meetings, brief conversations and small acts of warmth. He had that rare gift: a gentle presence. Whenever we met, there was a smile, a brief conversation, perhaps a joke, and the assumption that there would always be another meeting. That Sunday afternoon, I had seen him at an academic gathering. By late evening, the news arrived that he was gone.

For India, Biplab will become one more road-traffic fatality. For his wife, children, family, patients and friends, he will never be a number. He is a life interrupted,

a chair left empty, a familiar voice silenced.

The distance between a statistic and a human life helps explain why India has tolerated its road-safety crisis for so long. In 2024, India officially recorded nearly 4.88 lakh road crashes. They killed 177,177 people: about 485 deaths every day, or more than twenty every hour. These numbers, already staggering, tell only part of the story. Road crashes do not merely kill. They disable as well.

A survivor may leave a trauma ward with a spinal injury, brain damage, an amputation, visual loss, chronic pain or cognitive impairment. The burden of road trauma is counted not only in funerals but in lost livelihoods, interrupted education, depleted savings, dependence and years of healthy life lost.

This is why the Supreme Court's judgment of June 19, 2026 matters. By recognising the right to walk, including the right to safe and demarcated footpaths, as a fundamental right, the court did more than settle a legal dispute. In India, our cities have been designed as though roads belong first to cars and vehicles and pedestrians must bargain for whatever remains. The court's proposition is simple: mobility cannot be measured only by how

rapidly cars travel. A decent city must also ask whether a child can walk safely, whether an elderly person can cross without fear, and whether a wheelchair user can move independently.

But while courts can declare rights; only the governments can free up the pavements for the public. Speeding, drunk driving, red-light jumping, wrong-side driving and failure to use helmets or seat belts cannot remain offences enforced mainly through occasional campaigns. Missing footpaths, unsafe crossings, dark stretches, dangerous junctions and recurrent crash locations should be identified and repaired against deadlines.

Ambulance speed, trained first responders, rational trauma-referral networks and functional trauma centres often determine whether a victim dies, survives with severe disability or returns to ordinary life. The medium-term task is harder: redesign the system itself.

People make mistakes: drivers misjudge speed, children move unpredictably, older people walk slowly, and riders lose balance. The answer is safer design: continuous footpaths, protected cycle lanes, frequent crossings, refuge islands, traffic calming, safer junctions, good lighting, corrected black spots,

appropriate speeds, and faster emergency care when crashes occur. Roads, speeds, vehicles and institutions must be designed to absorb error. The key challenge is cultural.

India must abandon the idea that a good road is simply one on which vehicles move fast. Speed has become the vanity metric of transport policy. Flyovers, expressways and widened carriageways are visible achievements; a safe crossing or intact pavement is less photogenic. Yet civilisation is often revealed by the infrastructure it builds for the slowest person, not the fastest machine.

Sweden's Vision Zero began with an ethical proposition: no death or serious injury on the road is acceptable. Its significance lay not in imagining that people would stop making mistakes, but in refusing to make individuals carry the entire burden of a system's failures. Road users had responsibilities; but so did road designers, vehicle manufacturers, enforcement agencies and governments. Geography, density and traffic patterns differ. But the principle still travels well: road deaths fall when societies stop describing them as inevitable accidents and start treating them as preventable system failures.

That shift requires political leadership, stronger city governments, better crash data, independent safety audits, accountable road agencies and transport policy that gives walking, cycling and public transport the seriousness reserved for motorised traffic.

We have become accustomed to road deaths because they arrive one by one. There is no single national catastrophe, only a steady accumulation of private grief: a student on a scooter, a labourer walking home, a family on a motorcycle, a child going to school, a pedestrian crossing a road, a doctor returning from work.

Each disappears into a spreadsheet. Until one of them is someone you know. Then the number acquires a face, a voice, a family, a history. You remember the last conversation. You replay the last meeting. Biplab's death has done that for me. The real test of a modern nation is not whether its roads can allow people to move faster. It is whether those roads allow people to reach home alive.

Rest in peace, dear Biplab.

Dr Chandrakant Lahariya is a practising cardiometabolic physician and health policy specialist. He has worked with the UN system for 18 years.

SHORT TAKES

BUS COLLISION IN SYRIA LEAVES 35 DIE, 30 INJURED

Damascus, July 25: The death toll in a crash on Saturday between two passenger buses in a central-eastern desert region of Syria has risen to 35, state media said.

News agency SANA, quoting a health ministry official, also said 30 others were injured in the "collision between two passenger buses on the Damascus-Deir Ezzor road".

The interior ministry said the crash was between "a bus carrying a number of internal security forces personnel and a civilian bus", without specifying how many of the casualties were from its forces.

INDONESIA'S EX-TOP GRAFT PROSECUTOR HELD

New York, July 25: Indonesia's former top graft prosecutor was arrested on suspicion of money laundering, weeks after police raids uncovered \$26 million worth of gold bars and cash at a house he owns. Febrie Adriansyah, who was deputy attorney general for special crimes, was detained late Friday and escorted to a detention facility of the Corruption Eradication Commission for an initial 20 days, the Attorney General's Office said in a statement on Saturday.

He had earlier Friday faced about 10 hours of questioning by the AGO, local reports said. Dressed in a gray long-sleeved batik shirt when detained, he was neither handcuffed nor wearing the pink vest typically worn by detainees in AGO custody, media photographs and videos showed.

QUEENSLAND CONFIRMS H5N1 BIRD FLU CASE

Sydney, July 25: Queensland became Australia's fourth state to confirm a case of H5N1 bird flu after authorities said on Saturday that a migratory seabird tested positive for the highly pathogenic virus. Australia was the final continent to confirm a mainland case of H5N1 when the disease arrived in June, although it had been detected in late 2025 on the sub-Antarctic territory of Heard Island, about 4,100 km (2,600 miles) from continental Australia.

Eighteen infections have now been confirmed across four states, including 7 in the dead petrel found by Queensland park rangers at Moreton Island, a wilderness area about 40km by ferry from state capital Brisbane.

\$765 MN FINE FOR TRAVEL GIANT TRIP.COM

Beijing, July 25: China's market regulator said Saturday it had fined and confiscated 5.18 billion yuan (\$765 million) from the country's largest online travel provider Trip.com Group for violating monopoly laws.

Beijing has previously taken tough regulatory action on major internet companies over monopoly charges, notably launching an aggressive crackdown on tech and e-commerce giant Alibaba in late 2020.

China's State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) had opened an investigation in January into Trip.com Group for "suspected abuse of its dominant market position in violation of the Anti-Monopoly Law".

ESPIONAGE: CANADIAN INTERN AT NATO HELD

New York, July 25: A Nato intern was arrested by Belgian police on Friday on suspicion of espionage on behalf of a third country and of membership of a criminal organization. The intern, a Canadian woman of Chinese origin, worked at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, Nato's strategic command in Mons, Belgium, where she "has come to the attention" of security services, according to the Belgian Federal Prosecutor's Office.

On Thursday, Belgian police carried out searches at the suspect's home and work office, and on Friday, the investigative judge placed her under arrest, the prosecutor's office said in a statement. Belgian authorities did not identify the suspect or the third country she was allegedly spying for.

Houthi vow retaliation as Saudi strikes deepen

Flare-up marks new chapter in the months long Gulf war

New York, July 25: Iran-backed Houthi rebels vowed to retaliate against Saudi Arabia on Saturday after they accused the kingdom of targeting civilian infrastructure, as the Middle East war widens across the region.

Riyadh struck Houthi military targets in Hodeida on Friday, with rebel media reporting two wounded after the Yemeni group announced a maritime blockade of the top oil producer and hit its ships.

The flare-up marks a new front of the war that has engulfed the region following US-Israeli strikes on Tehran in February, and comes on top of Iran's parallel blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, Riyadh's only other maritime route.

"The Saudi enemy's targeting of civilian facilities in Hodeida and Kamaran island constitutes a dangerous escalation," the Houthis' Ansarallah media posted on Telegram.

"We affirm that these recent crimes will not go unanswered." A Yemeni security source said a naval base in the port city of Hodeida and a military camp on Kamaran island were among the Saudi targets.

The Saudi-led coalition said it hit Houthi sites and destroyed targets threatening commercial vessels in response to attacks on Red Sea shipping.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump vowed "major military punishment" for Tehran and its Houthi allies in Yemen, though he once again left open the door to a diplomatic deal with Iran.

Two weeks after the collapse of an interim truce meant to end the war, Iranian armed forces responded by firing at US bases in neighbouring Arab countries and warning that they could strike non-military buildings there used by U.S. personnel.

Trump has threatened in recent days to widen targets to Iran's energy plants and bridges, send ground forces to seize its oil hub of Kharg Island, and bomb a deep-underground nuclear-linked site known as Pickaxe Mountain.

On Friday, he said he had not yet made a decision on new major strikes, however. "We are talking to them," Trump said at the White House. — Agencies



SpaceX Starship launches from Starbase. — AFP

SPACEX MISSION LAUNCHES 13TH STARSHIP TEST

Washington, July 24: SpaceX's Starship rocket lifted off from Texas on Friday and briefly put its first 20 upgraded Starlink internet satellites into suborbital space, the company's 13th test mission as it aims to begin routine service by the end of the year.

The roughly 400-foot-tall Starship rocket system blasted off around 6.50 pm from SpaceX's Starbase company town in Texas.

During the mission, the rocket launched 20 of Starlink's V3 satellites, a much more powerful version with greater bandwidth and internet speeds. They briefly connected with SpaceX's existing network of some 10,000 orbiting satellites. Then, as planned, they followed the ship's suborbital trajectory into Earth's atmosphere and burned up. As the craft flew over a shadowed Earth, a camera fixed to the rocket and streamed live by SpaceX showed thunderstorms with flashes of lightning in the background 190 km below. — Reuters



Clouds of smoke rising after strikes on the Saudi Aramco refinery in Jizan. — AFP

Missiles target oil refineries in Saudi

Washington, July 25: Air defence systems in Saudi Arabia intercepted two ballistic missiles from Yemen on Saturday targeting oil refineries in Yanbu on the Red Sea, Greek security sources said, a day after U.S. forces launched fresh air strikes on Iran.

Saudi civil defence had issued several warnings for Yanbu and later said the danger had passed. Civil defence also issued a warning for the port city of Jizan about 1,000 km to the south, close to the Yemeni border.

There were no immediate official reports of damage.

The defence system was operated by Greek military personnel, the sources said. Greece has deployed a US-made Patriot air defence battery in Saudi Arabia since 2021 under an agreement to help protect the kingdom's energy infrastructure. Later on Saturday the Greek Patriot system also shot down a drone in the Yanbu region that had been launched from Yemen, Greek security sources said.

The U.S. military had launched air strikes on Iran late on Thursday and early on Friday, the 13th consecutive night of attacks. — Reuters

Israel kills senior Hamas-led police official in Gaza: Medics

Cairo, July 25: An Israeli airstrike on Saturday killed the head of the Hamas-led police force in the northern Gaza Strip, Brigadier-General Abdel-Nasser Al-Maqadma, the group-run interior ministry and medics said.

Medics and the interior ministry said Maqadma, known also as the governor of northern Gaza Strip, was killed by an Israeli airstrike in the Sheikh Radwan area north of Gaza City.

In a separate incident, another Israeli strike killed a Palestinian medic in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza Strip, medics said. They added that a police officer, wounded by an Israeli airstrike last week, died on Saturday.



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli military strike, in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, on Saturday. — AP

The Israeli military did not immediately comment on any of the incidents.

Israel has killed dozens of members of the Hamas-led police force, including senior officials, in the past

U.S. CLAIMS IT SHOT ANOTHER MERCHANT VESSEL

Irbil, Iraq, July 25: The US military said on Friday that it fired on another merchant vessel that was trying to breach its blockade of Iranian ports, while Iran targeted American strongholds around the Gulf. US embassies in the Middle East began alerting Americans in the region that options to leave could become more limited, while Iran's Revolutionary Guard advised residents of neighboring countries to stay away from bases with US troops.

American forces disabled the *M/T Lavine* in the Gulf of Oman after the ship attempted to run the blockade at least four times, Capt. Tim Hawkins, US Central Command spokesman, said. Hawkins stressed that the ships crew was warned and didn't comply with commands. The military then fired into its engine room. Its second commercial ship to be disabled since the military reimposed its blockade, US Central Command said it also has redirected 12 vessels.

Earlier on Friday, Trump described negotiations with Iran as by far the most serious. — AP

16 killed as Moscow, Kyiv intensify deadly airstrikes

Moscow, July 25: At least 16 people were killed in Ukrainian and Russian strikes Saturday, in a deadly fifth summer of war as both sides intensify attacks, with diplomacy at a deadlock.

Ukrainian drones also targeted a Siberian oil refinery and the Urals city of Yekaterinburg, escalating strikes deep inside Russia — which it says are aimed to weaken Russia's war effort and force the Kremlin to negotiate.

The deaths — in Russian-occupied Ukraine, north-eastern Ukraine and Russian border villages — come as the UN has warned of civilians dying in larger numbers recently in the almost 4.5-year war. US-led talks on ending the fighting are at a deadlock, with Washington focused on the Middle East. Russian authorities in southern Ukraine said a Ukrainian strike on an Azov Sea village killed eight people, including two children. — AFP



Russian President Vladimir Putin with his Kazakhstani counterpart Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on Saturday. — AFP

ing the fighting are at a deadlock, with Washington focused on the Middle East. Russian authorities in southern Ukraine said a Ukrainian strike on an Azov Sea village killed eight people, including two children. — AFP

SHOT DOWN 2ND DRONE: ROMANIA

Bucharest, July 25: Romania said on Saturday that it had shot down a second drone breaching national airspace in as many days over a sparsely populated area near the border with Ukraine.

The first, which prosecutors investigating the fragments said was Russian, was shot down on Friday, the first time it has done so after dozens of airspace breaches. President Nicusor Dan said the second drone had been shot down at 8.30 a.m. 10 km west of Stauts Georgehe. — Reuters

Dinner postponed after shooting incident

Trump mixes jokes with barbs at scribes

Washington, July 25: US President Donald Trump took aim at the press with humor and barbs at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner on Friday, mixing in tropes typical of his political rallies at an event celebrating press freedom that was restarted anew after a shooting disrupted the original event in April.

Trump, whose administration has often been at odds with the press, started by mostly going along with the warm and relaxed tenor of the evening.

But much of the speech, which ran over an hour, veered into broadsides at his political adversaries, echoing oft-repeated themes and attack lines.

The black-tie gathering of journalists, politicians and administration officials, intended for April 25 at the Washington Hilton hotel, was called off that night after a man tried to force his way through a security checkpoint and fired a shotgun outside the ballroom where Trump and members of his cabinet were taking their seats.

The suspect, Cole Allen, pleaded not guilty in May to charges including attempting to assassinate the president.

The correspondents' gala has been an annual fixture on Washington's calendar for more than a century and raises money for journalism scholarships while celebrating press freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Several hundred veteran journalists, along with eight professional journalism organizations, signed a letter urging the correspondents association to use the dinner to condemn what they called Trump's attacks on the First Amendment.

Regardless, the president was afforded typical honors, with only a few awkward moments when he shook hands with journalists winning awards for stories about the Trump administration. "I hope all of you know that I believe in the free press more than anyone in this room does — maybe not quite. That's why I'm proud to be the most open and transparent president in history," Trump said. He also spoke about the flip side of his attacks on the press. "I always find that when you don't speak to the press, you always get a bad story," he said. As many of the barbs on his teleprompter fell flat, he also questioned the ability of his speechwriters. — Reuters



US President Donald Trump throws his 'Trump 2028' hat during the 2026 White House Correspondents Association Dinner at the Waldorf Astoria in Washington, DC. — AFP

Appeals court denies bid to halt visa rule

Boston, July 24: A federal appeals court on Friday rejected a bid by US President Donald Trump's administration to halt a judge's order preventing it from imposing a \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visas for highly skilled foreign workers.

The 1st US Circuit Court of Appeals declined to put on hold a lower court judge's June 8 ruling in a lawsuit filed by 20 Democratic state attorneys general, striking down the fee on the basis that it constituted an unlawful tax Congress never authorised. The three-judge

panel, composed only of appointees of Democratic presidents, said the administration failed to show it was likely on appeal to succeed in showing it had not exceeded its authority by imposing the fee. The President issued a proclamation in September that raised the cost of obtaining H-1B visas, which tech companies rely heavily on to bring on foreign workers. The H-1B programme offers 65,000 visas annually, with another 20,000 visas for workers with advanced degrees, approved for three to six years. — Reuters

US Bill proposes 3-yr pause on H-1B visas

Washington, July 25: A Republican senator has introduced a Bill in the US Senate proposing a three-year pause on new H-1B visas and stricter curbs on the programme, citing concerns over its impact on American workers.

US Senator Tim Sheehy of Montana introduced the End H-1B Abuse Act, which seeks to suspend issuance of new visas and later restart the programme under tighter limits and standards. "The H-1B programme was created to address workforce shortages for specialised, difficult-to-fill positions — not to displace qualified, hardworking Americans with cheaper, foreign labour," Sheehy stated. "My legislation, the End H-1B Abuse Act, restores the programme to its original intent and puts American workers first by closing loopholes that incentivise abuse, strengthening guardrails and prioritising

our national security interests," he said.

The H-1B visa allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialised occupations requiring technical expertise, with firms, particularly in the technology sector, hiring large numbers annually from countries such as India and China. The proposed legislation also seeks to formalise the \$100,000 fee per H-1B petition introduced by the Donald Trump administration, which was struck down by a federal court.

The First Circuit Court of Appeals declined to stay a June 8 ruling by a US district judge that termed the fee an unlawful tax not authorised by Congress.

The Bill proposes replacing the lottery system with a wage-based selection process, banning concurrent employment and third-party staffing arrangements, and ending the "dual intent" provision for visa holders. — PTI

11 tourists rescued after Indonesia boat tragedy

Palu, July 25: Indonesian rescuers found alive 11 European tourists and a local crew member who went missing after their speedboat apparently broke apart and sank in rough weather off a bay on Sulawesi island, officials said Saturday. Search teams continued looking for the vessel's captain.

The vessel departed a dive resort in Tojo Unauna agency of Central Sulawesi province

on Friday morning bound for Marisa Port in the neighboring Gorontalo province but failed to arrive as scheduled, said Heriyanto, Head of the Gorontalo Province Search and Rescue Office.

A local tour guide reported the missing boat to the search and rescue office at 3.40 pm on Friday, prompting an immediate search operation, said Heriyanto, who, like many Indonesians, uses a single name.

Concerns arose when their speedboat had not arrived by afternoon, Heriyanto said. We immediately launched a search mission overnight.

Five Dutch nationals, three Germans, a Czech man, a Belgian man, a French woman and two Indonesian crew members were on board, according to Indonesian authorities.

There was no immediate comment from the national embassies of the tourists. — AP

GLOBAL HONOUR

Medinas are first sites from the Comoros archipelago to join Unesco list

6 Comoros medinas in Unesco heritage list

Moroni, Comoros, July 25: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) on Saturday added six centuries-old medinas in the Comoros — once historic sultanates along Indian Ocean trading routes — to its World Heritage List, raising hopes for their preservation.

The ancient cities of palaces, mosques, public squares and narrow streets, some dating back to the 12th century, are still occupied today, even though many structures

are in serious disrepair. "This listing is not a finish line but a starting point," said Comoros culture minister Said Mohamed Ali Said, part of a government delegation that travelled to Unesco's meeting in Busan, South Korea, for the announcement. It was a moment of "immense national pride", he said.

The medinas are the first sites from the Comoros archipelago to join the Unesco list, which counts more than 1,200 properties around the world considered to have "outstanding



The Royal Palace in the Medina of Iconi, south of the capital Moroni. — AFP

universal value" worth protection.

They "are not just historical sites for us: they are

living towns, where people still pray, trade, and celebrate life's great moments exactly as our ancestors

did", the minister said. "This heritage is fragile and, in places, in real danger," he said. "The listing changes things: it places obligations on us, but it also opens doors for us."

The Islamic country, about 300 kilometres off the coast of Africa and home today to around 870,000 people, was for centuries a crossroads of maritime trade between east Africa, the Middle East and Madagascar.

Four of the inscribed medinas are on the main island of Grande Comore and two on the smaller

island of Anjouan.

The 14th-century medina in Moroni includes the emblematic Friday Mosque with its green minaret across from the dhow port. It is surrounded by paved alleyways and multi-storey houses, some with heavy, carved doors.

The small maritime Itsandra medina nearby is considered a cradle of Swahili civilisation. Further south, the 12th-century Iconi medina houses the tomb of Prince Said Ibrahim, son of the last sultan of Grande Comore, Said Ali. — AFP

INDIAN TOP 10

NON-FICTION

- A HISTORY RETOLD: AURANGZEB ALAMGIR**
Munis D. Faruqi, Juggernaut, ₹999
- BIRTH OF A NATION**
Josy Joseph, Westland, ₹799
- FRACTURED COMMUNITIES**
Umar Khalid, Juggernaut, ₹499
- REGIME CHANGE**
Maggie Haberman, Simon & Schuster, ₹999
- STRANGERS A MEMOIR OF MARRIAGE**
Belle Burden, Penguin, ₹999
- CHOKE POINTS**
Edward Fishman, Simon & Schuster, ₹999
- DARA SHUKOH**
Amit Ranjan, Penguin India, ₹799
- CHAND BIBI**
Sarah Waheed, Penguin, ₹899
- THE ONCE AND FUTURE RIOT**
Joe Sacco, Metropolitan Books, ₹2,864
- 14 LAWYERS**
Raju Ramachandran, Juggernaut, ₹799

FICTION

- THE CORRESPONDENT**
Virginia Evans, Penguin, ₹699
- YESTERYEAR**
Caro Claire Burke, 4th Estate, ₹599
- HEART THE LOVER**
Lily King, Penguin, ₹799
- TAIWAN TRAVELOGUE**
Yang Shuang-Zi, Pan Macmillan, ₹599
- THE CALAMITY CLUB**
Kathryn Stockett, Fig Tree, ₹999
- FRIDA**
Claire Berest, Hachette, ₹699
- VILLA COCO**
Andrew Sean Greer, Hachette, ₹699
- THE BOOK OF EVERLASTING THINGS**
Aanchal Malhotra, HarperCollins, ₹599
- THE FINAL SIX**
Akinari Asakura, Hachette, ₹599
- DROWN ALL THE REFUGEES**
Tabish Khair, HarperCollins, ₹699

Bahrisons Booksellers, New Delhi

How tribals' lives got changed



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

review

Umar Khalid, in prison as an unchargesheeted under-trial for the last six years under the draconian UAPA, has written the most readable doctoral dissertation which can be enjoyed by the curious common reader. Khalid tells the political story of the Hos in the Singhbhum from the early decades of the 19th century when the East India Company was expanding its control in central India. It is the paradigm established by the Company, and later by British, officials that remains the framework for understanding the Hos. Khalid clears up the ground as it was when he says, "The reality of the complex world of the Adivasis, we need to realise, does not conform to the much-romanticised

picture of idyllic communities unitedly resisting the encroachment of 'outsiders'. As has been highlighted in recent scholarship... the internal worlds of Adivasis, who are differentiated within, are as much conflict-ridden, and therefore include different kinds of responses to the state."

This makes way for Khalid to trace the changing status and fortunes of the Hos, also known as Kols courtesy British, in the Singhbhum region, which is now part of Jharkhand. There were the local rajas or chiefs spread across the forested track, who fought with each other, and the Hos were their fighting force. When the East India Company, and later the British government, took over direct control of the region, pensioning off

the chiefs, it had to evolve a policy which meant engaging with the Hos. The basic remit of the Company officials was to increase the tax revenue. In their efforts to achieve this, they encouraged and roped in the Hos to turn to farming. This meant deforestation on a large scale of what was an intractable lot. While the revenue increased, the next generation of officials felt that the dwindling forests needed to be preserved, and therefore created protected forests under government control. It is the colonial government's creation of protected forests that independent India inherited.

As the freedom movement gained ground in the 1920s, political awakening swept across the tribal region while they also retained their awareness of their separate identity. The entry of Hinduism in the form of the Haribaba movement, the Christian missionaries among the tribals, as well as

passing influence of Muslim League, are noted. The Adivasi Mahasabha became the rallying point of the political leaders who had emerged among the tribals, especially Jaipal Singh Munda, who was a member of the Constituent Assembly. The new point of conflict was with the Congress, especially Bihar Congress, dominated as it was by upper caste Hindus leaders, eyeing the rich mineral resources of the tribal tracts, ignoring the demand for Jharkhand by the Mahasabha, during the 1940s. Khalid connects it with the BJP choosing Raghuraj Das, a non-tribal, as chief minister of Jharkhand in 2014. Khalid constructs a masterly narrative of about 120 years, from 1830 to 1950, showing how tribals changed with the changes that were made by colonial and freedom movement worldviews.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

A woman, three men & the search for home



Sucheta Dasgupta

review

A rational, intelligent, rather hard-headed Irene has three romantic interests in this short novel. These are hot and dissolute Franz, boring but stable Stefan and Thomas who is mostly gay. Who loves her? Who attracts her most strongly? Whom does she end up with? These questions as well as the nature and specifics of her relationships with each of them are the main draw of the novel.

Just like its author, Herta Müller, though, Irene is a Romanian-born ethnic German

and has emigrated to West Germany. In Romania, the reasons for a person's misery are always clear and structural — fear, starvation, oppression. In Germany, she cannot understand how people can be so unhappy when they have total freedom, making her, a 'double outsider', feel even more disconnected.

The book is also about a woman's unique loneliness, about how one feels after being masturbated at on a sea beach, is stalked and is nonchalant, or is unable to find an appropriate box when asked to check them during an interview upon entering Germany. "Sometimes the city attacked her thoughts. Sometimes her thoughts attacked the city."

Pertinently, it is not about

intersectionality between femininity and disability; the title 'Traveling on One Leg' refers to one leg of a journey. She believes she is not destined to travel the return leg.

Now this is the kind of book where the importance of the story or plot is secondary. And it cannot be successfully adapted to film without loss of meaning. Much of it is open to interpretation, like abstract art or an expressionist painting, changing depending on the reader's life experience and understanding. But man, is it satisfying. Indeed, it gives to you what cinema cannot. A window into your inner life.

Müller uses a distinctive, non-realist literary style to turn emotional truths and intellectual struggles into art rather than focus on actual events. Indeed, rather than being a metaphor for those, her surrealism is filtered through the lens of feeling. The gravity of the issues she tackles (capitalism vs communism, alienation following forced migration, et al.) informs it. In that sense, it is a hard book.

"I know you can forget whole books," Müller who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2009 writes on page 85 of her novel. "Only individual, audacious sentences are left over. They belong to you as if your own experience had whispered them to you in a railway station. As if they come to your mind against your will."

That audacity is perhaps the secret behind the absurd beauty of this book.



By HERTA MÜLLER
Aleph
pp. 154; ₹599

WORLD

SHORT TAKES

AFTERSHOCKS IN NEW ZEALAND AFTER QUAKE

New York, July 25: A 5.9 magnitude earthquake hit the center of New Zealand's North Island early Saturday local time, leading to road closures, minor damage and a series of aftershocks.

The quake took place around 4.51 am and 73 aftershocks were recorded in the approximately five hours that followed, according to GeoNet, which tracks seismic activity. The organization labeled the earthquake as "severe" with a depth of 9 kilometers and pinpointed its location to 5 kilometers south of Taumarunui in the central area of the country's North Island.

"We expect aftershocks to continue, and people will likely feel these as they are occurring at a shallow depth," GeoNet said in a statement. "Aftershocks are likely to decrease in frequency over the coming days, although there is always the possibility of another earthquake of a similar size or larger occurring."

PUB LICENCE REVOKED AFTER BOOZY BINGE

Sydney, July 25: The manager of a pub in Australia has had his license to sell revoked after a patron consumed 21 drinks in five hours and collapsed in the street. New South Wales state's alcohol licensing said this week the man entered the Gladstone Hotel in Stockton just after midday on March 23, 2024.

He proceeded to drink 19 beers, a shot of tequila and another of Cointreau, growing progressively more intoxicated over the course of the afternoon. The man was seen "stumbling into furniture" and "being overly friendly with other patrons", before leaving the pub.

CCTV footage by the state's hospitality and tourism department showed the man collapsing on the street and being helped by a passerby following the marathon session.

High winds make rescue bid harder after Spain's wildfire

Man held for allegedly setting off fire by using farm vehicle despite ban

Madrid, July 25: Winds will pick up in Spain on Saturday, with gusts of up to 60 kph (38 mph), complicating the fight against out-of-control wildfires west of Madrid, the interior ministry warned its people.

Two separate wildfires in the Madrid region combined on Friday and became one huge blaze, but so far they have not merged with another in Avila, in the neighbouring Castilla y Leon region.

The fires have so far forced more than 30,000 people to flee their homes in the Madrid region and more than 20,000 to be confined at home, the ministry said on Saturday, in what officials have called the region's worst fire on record.

Overnight weather conditions had helped the firefighters.

"The change in weather conditions (less wind, higher humidity, and lower temperature) has greatly benefited the fight against the forest fires, which have advanced little and decreased in intensity," the central government in Madrid said on Saturday morning.

Plumes of thick smoke could be seen in the sky



Spain's Military Emergencies Unit (UME) and Castilla-y-Leon units firefighters battle a fire in a forest next to La Atalaya residential area in El Tiemblo, 80 kms west of Madrid. Right: Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez shakes hands with UME firefighters at the Centenios advanced post of command.

west of the capital. More than 9,000 hectares have burned in the wildfires in the Madrid region, authorities said.

Meanwhile, Spain's Guardia Civil police force said they had arrested a man for allegedly setting off the fire in the Madrid region by using a farm vehicle despite a ban in the tinderbox conditions.

Another person is under investigation for the same incident.

"The head of the regional government of Madrid, Isabel Diaz Ayuso, said it

was the worst wildfire in the region's history. "The situation is completely unusual and catastrophic," she said, adding that the priority was "to save lives".

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez attended an emergency meeting in Centenios in the affected area, the government said.

"We are living through a dramatic situation, not only in various Spanish provinces but also in regions of neighbouring countries," he wrote earlier on X.



Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez shakes hands with UME firefighters at the Centenios advanced post of command.

WILDFIRE HITS MAJOR NASA SITE

Washington, July 25: Massive wildfires in Europe on Friday forced NASA to evacuate one of its three global deep space communications facilities in Spain, impacting the agency's ability to communicate with space probes.

The Madrid Deep Space Communications Complex (MDSCC) is located in Robledo, about 65 km west of central Madrid, a NASA spokesperson stated. "The wildfire has passed

through the MDSCC. Any potential damage will be assessed when it is safe to do so," the US space agency said, adding all personnel were "safely evacuated." MDSCC is part of the Deep Space Network, one of three sites that allow NASA to communicate with its spacecraft exploring distant parts of the galaxy. The other two sites are in Canberra, Australia and Goldstone, California.

Southern China braces for Noul

Beijing, July 25: Strong winds and torrential rain lashed China on Saturday, brought by a strengthening Typhoon Noul, weather authorities said, urging people to avoid unnecessary travel as transport links could be disrupted.

Noul, the 12th typhoon of the year, is forecast to hit the coast between the Asian financial hub of Hong Kong and Lufeng in China's southern province of Guangdong sometime between late Saturday and the next morning.

The National Meteorological Centre warned that Guangdong, and the nearby provinces of Fujian, Jiangxi and Hunan, would be directly affected.

It urged people to take precautions, avoid unnecessary travel and watch for danger. More than 20,000 people were relocated in areas across Guangdong by Friday evening.

Guangdong began suspending rail services on Saturday, with high-speed and regular trains expected to halt on Sunday.

From Saturday, operations at airports across Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Xiamen may be affected.

On Saturday, 29 departures and 20 arrivals had been cancelled at Hong Kong International Airport, while 126 departures and 112 arrivals were delayed.

A large number of flights were expected to be affected on Sunday. Airport Authority Hong Kong said, Cathay Pacific said it had cancelled flights from Hong Kong between 1:15 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. on Sunday. — Reuters



Passersby walk in Hong Kong's Mong Kok district under heavy rain and wind ahead of Typhoon Noul on Saturday.

Japan records cruelly 'hot day', 5th in a row

Tokyo, July 25: Japan recorded its fifth consecutive "cruelly hot day" on Saturday, a new meteorological term devised this year to warn people of intense heat above 40C, as officials issued heatstroke warnings in parts of the country.

The streak marks the longest number of days in a row with blistering temperatures since records started in 2010, public

broadcaster NHK reported. Six cities in central Japan including in the Aichi and Gifu regions surpassed the new threshold for "koku-shobi", which translates to "cruelly hot day", according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. By using this designation, JMA said in April that it would be able to "more effectively call for vigilance against extremely high temperatures". — AFP

El Niño worsens Asia's rice belt

Bangkok, July 25: A dry spell is sweeping across Asia's rice fields, dealing another blow to farmers grappling with steep fuel and fertilizer prices triggered by the war in Iran.

From Vietnam to the Philippines, production of the region's most important food staple is under threat as a strengthening El Niño prolongs dry weather. That includes India, the world's top grower and exporter, where the

crucial monsoon rains that began in June are running about a sixth lower than normal so far.

Lower harvests risk driving up food prices, fanning inflation at a time when economies are coping with the fallout from the war. Thailand rice prices, an Asian benchmark, recently touched an 18-month high, and the most-active-traded futures in Chicago are up about 40% this year as supply con-

cerns intensify.

"I'm so worried," farmer Nguyen Van Trung said at the edge of his one-hectare (2.5-acre) rice paddy in central Vietnam. "I've already applied fertiliser three times, but the rice just won't grow because there's not enough water."

Two months of drought have already withered the water-intensive crop, yellowing fields in parts of central Vietnam. Rain finally came this month,

but some farmers say it's too little and too late.

"Rice farming is no longer profitable," said the 60-year-old farmer, who has cultivated the grain in Quang Tri province with his family since he was a child. Fertiliser, plowing and harvesting have all become more expensive this year, said Trung, who has to work shifts on a construction site to make ends meet. For rice growers, the drought is more than just

bad weather. With the war driving costs higher, many are unable to afford the extra irrigation and investment needed to protect their crops as they enter a critical growth phase. The combination of a drier monsoon, higher groundwater pumping costs and lower fertiliser use poses the biggest risk to this year's harvest, according to the International Rice Research Institute. — Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

India beat Pak in youth hockey

Muscat, Oman: Indian sub-junior boys defeated arch-rivals Pakistan 7-3 and hosts Oman 10-1 to enjoy a triumphant Friday at the FIH Youth Hockey5s Asian Championship here. The Indian sub-junior girls, meanwhile, put up a spirited fight before going down 3-6 to China in their Elite Pool match. The Indian boys took early control against Pakistan, leading 3-0 at half-time thanks to goals from Romit Pal (8'), Karan Gautam (10') and captain Ketan Kushwaha (10'). They maintained the momentum in the second half, with Prahalad Rajbhar (12') extending the lead to 4-0. Pakistan attempted a comeback through Muhammad Usman (12', 15') and captain Adeel (17'), but strikes from Shahrulkh Ali (16'), Rahul Yadav (18') and Kushwaha (20') sealed a comfortable victory for India. Earlier in the day, India thrashed Oman 10-1. The Indians stormed to a 6-0 lead at half-time, powered by two goals each from Shahrulkh Ali and Ketan Kushwaha. — PTI

Bagan beat EB in Durand opener

Kolkata: Mohun Bagan Super Giant combined clinical finishing with resolute defending to edge arch-rivals and East Bengal 1-0 in the pre-season derby that kicked off the Durand Cup to a rousing start at the Salt Lake Stadium, here on Saturday. Sahal Abdul Samad's 52nd-minute strike proved decisive as Mohun Bagan made the most of their best opportunity, while goalkeeper Vishal Kaith produced a commanding display between the posts to preserve the slender lead and secure a clean sheet. The winning goal stemmed from relentless pressing high up the pitch. Mohun Bagan youngster Kiyan Nassiri won possession on the edge of the East Bengal penalty area before driving to the byline and squaring the ball across the six-yard box where Manvir Singh attempted a clever backheel but failed to connect. — PTI

BRONZE BEAUTY

Para powerlifter Jhandu opens India's account at CWG

Glasgow/ New Delhi, July 25: Jhandu Kumar's bronze in para powerlifting provided India the much-needed cheer after its Commonwealth Games campaign was jolted by the doping-related suspension of judoka Tulika Maan even before the competitions got underway here. Until Kumar's success late in the evening in the men's heavyweight competition, doping remained the big talking point in India's campaign as last edition's silver medal-winning judoka Maan stood suspended even before landing in Glasgow due to three whereabouts failures. FROM BIHAR'S VILLAGE TO CWG SUCCESS

Kumar overcame a childhood marked by polio, poverty and years of odd jobs to fetch the bronze in the Scottish city, delivering the country's first medal of the competition. The 28-year-old amassed 130.9 points to finish on

the podium after successfully lifting 181kg and 190kg. He failed his final attempt of 196kg. The other Indian in the fray Sudhir (114.1) finished sixth. Nigeria's Idris Riluan scored 132.8 points to win the gold while Matthew Harding (131) took home the silver medal. Kumar's triumph capped a remarkable rise from Harnaut village in Bihar's Nalanda district, where he helped his parents sell vegetables to support the family after contracting polio at the age of five. EASY FOR JADUMANI IN BOXING

In boxing, Jadumani Singh registered a facile win against local favourite Aaron Cullen in the men's 55kg contest. Fighting in front of a partisan crowd, Jadumani was technically and tactically too strong for Cullen, beating the Scot by a unanimous decision to move to the pre-quarters, where he



India's Jhandu Kumar celebrates after winning the bronze medal during the medal ceremony for the men's heavyweight para powerlifting event at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow on late Friday. — PTI

will take on Sumama Rehman of Pakistan. Meanwhile, one of India's brightest medal hopes, Sachin Siwach, survived a stern challenge from familiar foe Keoma Al-Ahmadieh of Canada to enter the pre-quarter-finals on Saturday. The

round bout at the SEC Centre.

MIXED OUTING IN LAWN BOWLS

Rupa Rani Tirkey and Pinki Singh maintained India's impressive momentum in the Lawn Bowls competition with a third straight win, while Putul Sonowal tasted his first defeat after back-to-back victories, here on Saturday.

The Indian duo of Rupa and Pinki continued their dominant run, prevailing over Tonga 2-0 in tie-breaker of women's pairs third round match in Section 'B' to stay on course for a berth in the semifinals.

In the men's singles competition, Sonowal made a gritty fight but lost his third round match to Izzat Shameer Dzulkeple of Malaysia. Sonowal lost 0-2 (4-8, 8-9) to his Malaysian opponent in the Section 'D' match that lasted around one hour. — PTI

India hammer Zim, seal series

Harare, July 25: Power-packed fifties by Ishan Kishan and Tilak Varma worked well with bowlers' diligence as India trumped Zimbabwe by 90 runs in the second T20I to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series here on Saturday. Chasing 220 was never going to be easy for the Africans and the fate of the match was sealed when they lost five wickets inside 9 overs.

Eventually they were bundled out for 129, well short of India's 219 for five, which was constructed around Kishan's 81 and Tilak's unbeaten 60.

The series win will also give new T20I skipper Shreyas Iyer a big relief after losing two consecutive series against Ireland (0-2) and England (0-4).

However, Zimbabwe started the hunt in earnest through Brian Bennett (32, 19b, 3x4, 3x6), who creamed debutant pacer Yash Thakur for a six and four in a row. But Thakur (2/30) extracted a quick revenge, as an attempted ramp did not go past wicketkeeper Kishan.

Once the first blood was drawn, Indian bowlers did not let the Zimbabwe batters off the hook.

There were little pockets of fight such as 20s by Ryan Burl and Tadi Marumani but nothing good enough to challenge the Indian bowlers for a sustained period. Even part-timers Tilak and Abhishek Sharma (3/17) found themselves in the list of wicket-takers as India completed the

SCOREBOARD

India: Vaidhaval Sooryavanshi c Muzarabani b Ngarava 20, Abhishek Sharma c Burl b Muzarabani 8, Ishan Kishan c Bennett b Nyamhuri 81, Shreyas Iyer c Evans b Bennett 25, Tilak Varma not out 60, Rinku Singh c Burl b Evans 12, Shivam Dube not out 6. Extras (b-2, nb-1, w-4) 7. Total (for 5 wickets in 20 overs) 219.

Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-29, 3-95, 4-189, 5-213.

Bowling: Sikandar Raza 4-0-47-0, Blessing Muzarabani 4-0-36-1, Richard Ngarava 3-0-43-1, Brad Evans 4-0-44-1, Newman Nyamhuri 3-0-25-1, Brian Bennett 2-0-22-1.

Zimbabwe: Brian Bennett c Ishan b Thakur 32, Ben Curran c Dube b Prince 1, Dion Myers b Bishnoi 12, Ryan Burl c Rinku b Tilak 20, Sikandar Raza c Kishan b Prince 0, Wessly Madhevere c Iyer b Dube 2, Tadiwanashe Marumani b Thakur 24, Brad Evans b Abhishek 19, Newman Nyamhuri b Abhishek 3, Richard Ngarava c Rinku b Abhishek 1, Blessing Muzarabani not out 7. Extras (b-2, lb-3, w-3) 8. Total (all out in 17.5 overs) 129.

Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-34, 3-48, 4-49, 5-65, 6-82, 7-105, 8-119, 9-121.

Bowling: Mayank Yadav 3-0-25-0, Yash Thakur 4-0-30-2, Prince Yadav 1.2-0-10-2, Ravi Bishnoi 4-0-20-1, Shivam Dube 1.4-0-13-1, Tilak Varma 1-0-9-1, Abhishek Sharma 2.5-0-17-3.

stroll. But circumstances that led to the employment of part-timers might just give India some worries.

Pacer Prince Yadav (2/10 in 1.2 overs) walked off with a clutched hamstring, casting a shadow over such a dominant victory and raising another question about the team's injury management system. — PTI

Norris and McLaren back in the game



HARISH SAMTANI HIGH OCTANE

And here we are in Hungary, famished for action on qualifying day. This recently refurbished and rejuvenated race track of the 1930s has a character that is quaint and rather appealing. Fondly called the 'Monaco without walls', this tight and twisty 4.4 km circuit takes

no prisoners. Its narrow track width doesn't really give much scope for overtaking. Even the supremely fit F1 drivers were all of the opinion that it's physically and mentally challenging to be constantly flat out on this track, and to add to their stress, there isn't even a semblance of a long straight that can serve as a breather.

Although it offers the cheapest tickets of all the races worldwide, the quality of the track, which seats up to 100,000 fans, along with the hotels and surroundings, is top-notch, and one can be assured this event is here to stay for a long, long time and is not subject to the vagaries of the newer circuits in the Middle East.

As we face an uncertain end to the war in Iran, the last two events in Qatar and Abu Dhabi are under a cloud. The financial implications of cancelling these mega events may not directly hurt the oil-rich nations, but peripheral

losses can mount to billions of dollars. It also puts the championship into disarray since the points system would be skewed.

Currently, Kimi Antonelli doesn't look very perturbed with his massive championship lead, and further, his teammate George Russell is having plenty of troubles, with his woes mounting in qualifying today as well. The 2025 world champion, Lando Norris, proved that McLaren is getting back in the game with a brilliant pole in Hungary, followed closely by the never-ageing Lewis Hamilton. With

the hard-charging Charles Leclerc and Antonelli closely in pursuit and within striking distance at the very first corner, it could be anyone's race, but the caveat is that it will likely be decided either at the first corner or through a truly tactical pit strategy by the think tanks in the pit lane.

A lot has to go in Max Verstappen's favour for him to claw his way onto the podium. The Italian racing tifosi must be delighted to watch Ferrari gather genuine pace, with their two jockeys within attacking distance of pole-sitter Norris.



INDIAN ARMY

KARGIL VIJAY DIWAS
COMMEMORATING THE COURAGE, VALOUR
AND SACRIFICE OF OUR BRAVEHEARTS



Lieutenant
Manoj Kumar Pandey PVC
1/11 GR (Posthumous)



Captain
Vikram Batra PVC
13 JAK RIF (Posthumous)



Rifleman
Sanjay Kumar PVC
13 JAK RIF



Grenadier
Yogendra Singh Yadav PVC
18 GRENADIERS

"ON KARGIL VIJAY DIWAS
I BOW TO EVERY VALIANT SOLDIER
WHO FOUGHT FOR INDIA TILL
THE VERY LAST BREATH.
THEIR HEROIC SACRIFICES INSPIRE US."

-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister



BATTLE OF TOLOLING

Indian Army operations to recapture Tololing involved nearly three weeks of intense fighting under extremely difficult terrain and weather conditions. The relentless assault culminated in the capture of Tololing by 0600 hours on 13 June 1999. The victory marked a pivotal turning point in Operation Vijay and paved the way for subsequent successes in the Drass Sub-Sector.



OPERATIONS IN Batalik

The recapture of Point 5203 was an important early success in the Batalik Sub-Sector and paved the way for subsequent operations against the Khalubar Ridgeline and other enemy-held positions. Sustained operations by the Indian Army progressively restored control over the occupied heights in the sub-sector.

BATTLE OF KHALUBAR

The Khalubar Ridgeline dominated the Batalik area and key enemy supply and escape routes. Indian artillery destroyed enemy sangars and disrupted their communication and logistics. The battle witnessed extraordinary courage and some of the most heroic acts of valour during Operation Vijay.



BATTLE OF POINT 4875

Located in the Mushkoh Valley, the Point 4875 complex was a strategically important objective comprising several dominating features. Indian Army troops fought with exceptional courage to recapture the enemy-held positions during intense operations from 4 to 7 July 1999.



BATTLE OF TIGER HILL

Tiger Hill was a dominating feature overlooking the Dras area. Its recapture was one of the Indian Army's most important objectives during Operation Vijay. Following a daring multi-directional assault, the feature was captured on 04 July 1999.



FROM CELEBRATORY EMOJIS TO MEMES AND HEARTFELT MESSAGES, FILM PERSONALITIES WELCOMED THE DEVELOPMENT AS A VICTORY FOR STUDENTS



KAMAL HAASAN wrote on X, "Glad to see dialogue replacing confrontation. Dissent deserves dialogue. This is democracy in action. Pellet guns, electric shock batons and nail-studded lathis have no place in the land of Bapu. Equally, attacks on security personnel and public property must be examined fairly. Accountability cannot be selective (sic)."

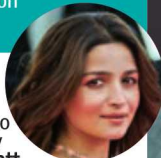
CELEBS HAIL PRADHAN'S RESIGNATION

AGE CORRESPONDENT

Soon after Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned amid the NEET paper leak row, several Bollywood celebrities flooded social media with messages celebrating what many described as a victory for students.



ACTOR PRIYANKA CHOPRA reacted by sharing a news report on her Instagram Stories with applause, celebration and red heart emojis.



The post was also liked by **Alia Bhatt, Triptii Dimri, Sonam Kapoor and Varun Dhawan.**

THE SAME POST drew enthusiastic responses from Prajakta Kohli, who commented, "Big Big Big Winn!!!", while **Malaika Arora, Diana Penty, Shibani Akhtar and Tisca Chopra** joined in with congratulatory emojis.



DIRECTOR ZOYA AKHTAR while praising Gen Z on Instagram, wrote, "What a reminder this has been...Gen Z - Only... Only (sic)." She added a quote, which read, "Democracy is a system of government where power belongs to the people (sic)."



SONAKSHI SINHA shared the news on her Instagram Stories with clapping emojis before reposting a video from the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) featuring founder Abhijeet Dipke's reaction to the resignation. She captioned it, "Bhaiiii kya kar diyaaaaa?!?!"

Actor Saba Azad posted, "Chaatr ekta zindabad!!!!", while **Swara Bhasker** called it a "Huge victory for students." Actor **Parvathy Thiruvothu** shared a screenshot of Pradhan's resignation letter and wrote, "Resigned!!!!"



Prakash Raj's post read, "Congratulations my Dear Cockroaches.. Dear Sonam sir and every single one who stood by the youth. You Have proved that you can bring a regime down to its knees (sic)."



DINESH KARTHIK (Cricketer): "The clarity, collaboration and relentlessness of the younger generation is something that I'm extremely in awe of. The future is bright and the next generation is going to take us to new heights. At the end of the day, we're all working towards a better India. Jai Hind."



VIJAY VARMA reacted with a tongue-in-cheek post, sharing a picture of Pradhan alongside the caption with lyrics from Channa Mereya: "Accha chalta hoon.. duaaon mein yaad rakhna."

VAANI KAPOOR acknowledged the perseverance of the students at the heart of the protests, writing, "For every student who kept pushing, kept questioning, and kept hoping.. this moment is for you."



Jyotika speaks out for student protestors

Proud of you, Gen Z; we want to raise our children to be like you, says the actress

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

THE ASIAN AGE

Voices supporting the ongoing nationwide student protests in Delhi, led by the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP), are growing louder by the day. The latest to join the list of prominent South Indian film personalities endorsing the cause is popular actress Jyotika. Hours before Union Education Minister stepped down, she expressed her support for the student movement, and specifically called for Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over the controversial competitive NEET-UG examination process.

Taking to her official Instagram account, the actress wrote, "Step down Dharmendra Pradhan. Resign. I stand with the students and future of our nation! I stand with accountability. I stand for a democratic India. I stand for a reformed education." Jyotika also applauded climate activist Sonam Wangchuk and youth leaders Abhijeet Dipke and Saurav Das.

"As mothers, we want to raise our children to be like you. Proud of you, Gen Z, for being unfiltered. You have proved that together, 'WE' are India. Thank you for breaking the pressure. Thank you for making us fearless. Jai Hind." — Jyotika



THANK YOU MR CJI!

"Thanks for calling us cockroaches. If he hadn't called us cockroaches, I wouldn't have come to India. This movement would never have started," Abhijeet Dipke said at Jantar Mantar after Dharmendra Pradhan resigned as Union education minister.

On May 15, 2026, CJI Surya Kant made a verbal observation during a Supreme Court hearing regarding employment in the legal profession. The Chief Justice reportedly remarked that "there are youngsters like cockroaches, who don't get any employment and don't have any place in the profession."

Although the CJI later clarified that he had been misquoted and that his remarks were directed at people with fake degrees, the perceived insult sparked the birth of the Cockroach Janata Party.

The movement shook the government with nationwide protests, culminating in the education minister's resignation.



PHOTO: AFP



PHOTO: INSTA



PHOTO: INSTA



PHOTO: INSTA



PHOTO: INSTA

PHOTO: INSTA

PHOTO: INSTA



Protesters carry placards at Jantar Mantar

PHOTO: AP



World feasts on cockroach meme fiesta

Gen Z protesters give police excesses a meme makeover, add humour, satire and smiles to their anger and sufferings, win hearts and global accolades

NEIL PATE

Humour has always been part of protest movements. But the Indian Gen Z have taken it to another level at the ongoing Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) protest across the country. Undeterred by the police lathi-charge, rain, tear gas, and blocked internet services, they have tapped into the power of laughter!

HUMOUR IN UNIFORM

Hundreds of reels and first-person dispatches of police excesses and government pressure have turned into meme makeovers on Instagram and Facebook. Reels of police chases became live 'fitness checks' with *Chadk de India* and *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* scores. NEET-ly attired Spider-Man, Batman and Superman gave tips on how to dodge police batons, pellets and water cannons. Gen Z's Brave beauty facials, Subway Surfers, Cockroach Crawlers all helped ease the tension. They flashed 'V' Victory signs. Exchanged roses and heart emojis for police batons. And within minutes, the entire world became a well-connected *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (Sanskrit phrase: the world is one family).

"Satire can be one of the most



powerful languages in times of dissent," says Vilas Deshmukh, a political observer and sociologist. Today's youngsters know the power of social media. "In this case, the youngsters have clearly flipped the social media game."

The whole world is now keenly watching the CJP protests and the government's response."

VISUAL STORYTELLING

Unlike the older generation, Gen Z are digital natives. They know the significance of viral trends, memes and sardonic humour. One click, and your meme can

reach millions of people across the world in a jiffy. The photo of a masked girl carrying a placard saying, "U F**ed With The Wrong Generation" has suddenly become the world's most popular slogan. Overnight, T-shirts and caps have flooded the streets. There is another viral video of a 20-something girl all dressed up, smiling into the camera, saying, "Aa rahi hu police se maar khane (Getting ready to get beaten by cops)."

The use of irony is everywhere. News channels across the world are broadcasting the viral image of a rain-soaked Rhiya Ahir, a

young girl from Mumbai blocking a police van carrying students. "The cops aren't doing their job rightly. If they won't be responsible, then we will take responsibility for our citizens," she thundered, while stopping the police van near Shivaji Park, Mumbai. A young Delhi student recorded the entire cop chase on his mobile, calling it a real-time 'fitness check'. He even shared details of the run time, pulse rate, etc.

GENUINE CONCERNS

The students are livid over the repeated leaks of NEET exam papers, rising unemployment and the lackadaisical approach of the government. They demanded the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, ₹1 crore compensation to the families of the students who died after the paper leaks and a complete overhaul of the competitive examination system.

"To ignore the voices of India's angry youth and instead label them as 'anti-nationals', 'CIA agents', 'goons', a 'violent mob' and use police force to subdue them is a grave mistake," says a senior lawyer from the Supreme Court. "The only way forward is an honest dialogue."

NO LAUGHING MATTER

The zoomers have captured their collective angst and pain through humorous reels and memes to expose an ugly truth. A caption on a viral meme video made by a student on Instagram reads: "Today, we rang Parliament's doorbell and ran." To dismiss it as 'frivolous' or 'teach them a lesson' through brutal force would be the biggest mistake. Because the joke is on you then!

Puff of controversy

Nayanthara's smoking scene in Toxic sparks internet frenzy

Director Geethu Mohandas is keeping her gangster drama *Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups*, starring Yash and Kiara Advani, firmly in the spotlight ahead of its global release on August 26, with a marketing strategy centred on edgy, adult content.

Following the Internet backlash for the film's first song, *Tabaahi*, over themes of hyper-masculinity and censorship concerns, the newly-released track Thadumaarudhe has sparked fresh debate. The buzz focusses on a brief sequence where Nayanthara accepts a casual puff from a cigarette that Yash offers her.

It has triggered a massive reaction online, and fans speculate that Nayanthara's character Ganga will play a fearless and morally complex character in the drug-trade saga produced by KVN Productions and Yash's Monster Mind Creations.



'Mom texted from beyond'

Lisa Kudrow reveals eerie experience after mother's death

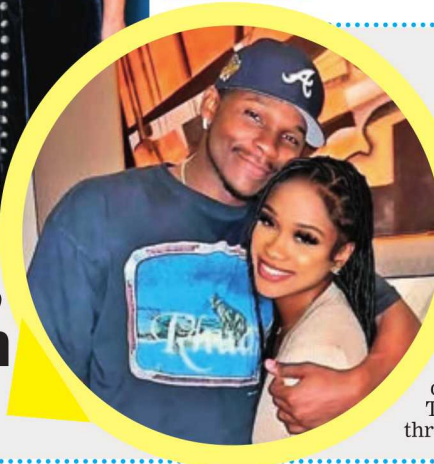
Friends star Lisa Kudrow has shared an eerie personal experience following the death of her mother, Nedra Stern.

Speaking on Mayim Bialik's *Breakdown* podcast, Kudrow said her father, brother and husband were all unexpectedly awake when they received news of her mother's death. "I thought, 'She flew around and woke everybody up when she passed.' The only one she didn't wake was me." The actress also recalled a spooky incident while preparing a slideshow for her mother's funeral, when the word "MOM" repeatedly appeared in a text she didn't remember typing. Fans were quick to point out the resemblance to Phoebe Buffay's quirky spiritual beliefs in *Friends*.



KUDROW JOKED IT WAS A TEXT "FROM THE BEYOND," WHILE MAKING IT CLEAR SHE WAS SIMPLY SHARING A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, NOT CLAIMING ANYTHING SUPERNATURAL.

Anthony Edwards, girlfriend Shannon Jackson married



NBA Star Anthony Edwards and longtime girlfriend Shannon Jackson are now officially married.

According to Minnesota public records, the Minnesota Timberwolves shooting guard, 24, and Jackson, 37, tied the knot on July 16, 2026. The couple, who have been together since at least 2020, share a 2-year-old daughter named Aislynn. The marriage news comes just three months after Edwards faced

accusations from Ayesha Howard, the mother of his 8-month-old daughter Aubri' Summers. Howard alleged that Edwards intentionally hid financial assets to evade child support payments. A Georgia judge recently ordered Edwards to pay Howard \$3,222 per month in child support, while her separate case in California remains ongoing.

Jackson, a social media influencer and mother to son Krue with rapper Chief Keef, has been a regular courtside presence at Timberwolves games.



'Jo darr gaya vo mar gaya'

Salman Khan has dropped a cryptic post on Instagram amid the ongoing buzz around his recent remarks on the NEET paper leak controversy. The superstar dropped two gym photos on Instagram, captured right after an intense workout. In the images, Salman is seen flaunting his abs. The caption,

however, has become the real talking point. He wrote, "Salman Khan darrrrr Gaya.... Hmmm Jo darr gaya vo mar gaya. [Salman Khan is scared... hmmm... the one who is scared is dead.]" This comes shortly after Salman posted a message on X supporting students affected by the NEET issue.

Selena Gomez's dream birthday in Italy



Benny Blanco's surprise for the singer is making everyone swoon

Selena Gomez and Benny Blanco are embracing newlywed bliss in Italy.

Fresh off her 34th birthday, the couple shared a romantic getaway in Tuscany, complete with yacht days, scenic views, and intimate moments. Gomez treated fans to a carousel of photos from their idyllic European escape. According to *People*, Blanco went the extra mile by plan-

ning a special birthday celebration at Il Borro, the Ferragamo family's Tuscan estate. The couple enjoyed making fresh pasta, a romantic dinner, and horseback riding. Additional highlights included sunny yacht moments, playing Scrabble, and exploring Florence's historic streets.

On her birthday, Gomez also marked six years of her Rare Impact Fund, writing that "little me would never believe" she'd reach this point.



...just three months after child support allegations from another woman

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WHEN THE BODY BECOMES A BATTLEFIELD

Hunger. Power. Conscience

ARJUN R SANKAR

 A hunger strike does not begin with shouting. It begins with silence. A plate remains untouched, a stomach empties, and slowly a body starts speaking where words have failed. That is how Sonam Wangchuk's latest protest ended after 26 days. He resumed eating only after the government assured that no legal action would be taken against protesters at Jantar Mantar.



“Sometimes the hardest negotiations happen not across a table, but across an empty plate.”

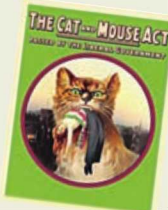
India has long understood this unusual language. A hunger strike is more than refusing food. It is a public wager that power still possesses a conscience. Sometimes that wager changes history. Sometimes it earns only a promise. Sometimes it changes nothing except the person willing to suffer. Mahatma Gandhi used fasting repeatedly for freedom, communal harmony and the fight against untouchability. In 1952, Potti Sriramulu fasted for 58 days demanding a separate Andhra state. His death forced the government to act, eventually reshaping India's map along linguistic lines. Nearly six decades later, Anna Hazare's 12-day fast shook Parliament and pushed the government towards the Jan Lokpal movement. Not every sacrifice ends in triumph. Medha Patkar's 1991 fast against the Narmada dam brought assurances but not the outcome she sought. Sunderlal Bahuguna endured 45 days of fasting, and later 74 more, yet the Tehri Dam still rose. Some hunger strikes win policy. Others win only memory. Yet even in defeat, they remind a nation that the human body can become its most powerful argument.

THE FASTS THAT FORCED GOVERNMENTS TO BEND

CAT AND MOUSE ACT OF 1913



Women fighting for the right to vote were jailed in Britain, and many refused food in protest. The prison force-fed them, and the public was horrified. So the government tried something new: release the starving woman until she recovered, then arrest her again with no trial to finish her sentence. People called it the Cat and Mouse Act, like a cat toying with a mouse. It backfired, turning public sympathy toward the women's cause.



THE PROFESSOR WHO DIED FOR THE GANGA



Guru Das Agrawal, an IIT Kanpur professor turned Ganga activist, fasted 38 days in 2009 against a hydro project on the Bhagirathi, forcing the government to halt construction. In 2018, he fasted again, demanding legal protection for the Ganga. This time there was no letter, no reprieve. After 111 days, he died at 86, the law he sought still unwritten.

THE GANDHIAN FIGHT AGAINST AI



In September 2025, protesters took a strategy from India's freedom movement to Silicon Valley. Guido Reichstadter fasted 30 days outside Anthropic's San Francisco office, demanding the company halt what he called reckless development toward artificial general intelligence and address the harms it was already causing. Michael Trazzi did the same outside DeepMind in London for about a week, calling on its CEO to pledge a pause if rivals did the same.

THE WOMAN WHO FASTED AGAINST PLASTIC



Diane Wilson, a former shrimp boat captain from Texas, had already won a major environmental battle against Formosa Plastics years earlier. In March 2026, she began a hunger strike outside Dow's Searift plant, demanding an end to plastic pellet pollution in San Antonio Bay. She was arrested on the 25th day while delivering a demand letter but continued fasting, completing a 30-day hunger strike.

SHE SPOKE KURDISH. JAIL AND HUNGER STRIKES FOLLOWED.



In the 1990s, Kurdish leader Leyla Zana became the first Kurdish woman elected to Turkey's Parliament. After taking her oath in Turkish, she added one sentence in Kurdish, a language then banned in public life. She was jailed for 15 years. Later, coordinated hunger strikes by Kurdish political prisoners drew global attention to Kurdish rights. Zana later received the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

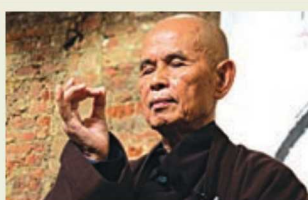
SANS-PAPIERS: HUNGER FOR HOME



In 2021, about 400-500 undocumented migrants, known as sans-papiers ("people without papers"), began a 60-day collective hunger strike in Brussels. They demanded legal residency and the right to work after years of living without official documents. As the strike continued, many became critically ill, and some even stopped drinking water. The strike ended after negotiations, though only a small number later received residency permits.

A MONK'S FAST FOR PEACE

During the Vietnam War, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh became a global voice for peace through nonviolent protest. In 1963, he undertook hunger strike to draw attention to human rights abuses in Vietnam and urge international action. Along with other Buddhist monks and nuns, he showed that peaceful self-sacrifice could become a powerful protest against war and injustice.



THE HUNGER STRIKE WITH SEWN LIPS

In 2002, lip-sewn asylum seekers at Australia's Woomera Detention Centre began a hunger strike to protest long delays in processing refugee claims and harsh detention conditions. More than 200 detainees joined the fast, while around 50-60, including children and teenagers, stitched their lips together as a symbol of silence and suffering. The shocking images drew worldwide attention to Australia's refugee detention policies.



"History is written in many ways. Sometimes it is written on paper. Sometimes in blood. Sometimes, it is written in hunger."



ANUSHREE CHAURASIA

 Women spend years learning about menstruation, fertility, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause. Yet one of the most important muscle groups in the female body often goes unmentioned. The pelvic floor, a group of muscles that supports the bladder, uterus, and bowel while playing a vital role in continence, sexual function, and core stability, remains one of the least understood aspects of women's health.

For many women, the first time they hear the words "pelvic floor" is after giving birth or when they begin experiencing symptoms such as urine leakage, pelvic pain, or a sensation of heaviness. By then, experts say, the opportunity for early awareness and prevention may already have been missed.

Healthcare professionals believe this knowledge gap has left generations of women accepting treatable conditions as an inevitable part of life, rather than seeking timely care.

THE SILENT GAP

Despite increasing conversations around reproductive and menstrual health, pelvic floor health is still rarely included in school curricula and routine health check-ups. Unlike heart health or bone health, it often remains hidden behind embarrassment, cultural taboos, and misconceptions.

Because the pelvic floor cannot be seen and its functions are rarely discussed openly, many women fail to recognize when something is wrong. Symptoms are frequently dismissed as 'just part of being a mother,' 'getting older,' or 'going through menopause.'

Delayed diagnosis can allow manageable problems to progress, affecting physical comfort, confidence, relationships, and overall quality of life.

COMMON DOESN'T MEAN NORMAL

One of the biggest misconceptions is the belief that bladder leaks or pelvic discomfort are simply unavoidable milestones of womanhood. **Dr. Taruna Dua**, Senior Consultant and Unit Head, Obstetrics & Gynaecology at Aakash Healthcare, says many patients assume symptoms such as uri-

Drop the shame, lift the floor game

Pelvic floor education is missing from Women's Health conversations, experts talk about awareness and timely care



 **MANY PATIENTS ASSUME SYMPTOMS SUCH AS URINARY LEAKAGE, PELVIC HEAVINESS, PAIN DURING INTERCOURSE, CONSTIPATION, OR FREQUENT URGENCY ARE NATURAL CONSEQUENCES OF CHILDBIRTH, AGEING, OR MENOPAUSE.**

— **Dr. TARUNA DUA**,
Sr. Consultant and Unit Head,
Obstetrics & Gynaecology,
Aakash Healthcare

nary leakage, pelvic heaviness, pain during intercourse, constipation, or frequent urgency are natural consequences of childbirth, ageing, or menopause. "These symptoms are common, but they should never be considered normal or ignored," she says. "Women should seek medical advice if they experience urine leakage while coughing or exercising, a feeling of pressure or heaviness in the pelvis, difficulty controlling the bowel or bladder, persistent pelvic or lower-back pain, or discomfort during intimacy." Early evaluation can help identify the problem and allow time-

ly treatment through pelvic floor physiotherapy, lifestyle changes, medication, or other appropriate medical interventions.

MORE THAN JUST WEAK MUSCLES

Another widespread myth is that every pelvic floor problem can be solved by simply doing Kegel exercises. This one-size-fits-all approach can sometimes do more harm than good. **Dr. Rishma Dhillon Pai**, Consultant Gynaecologist at

 **MOST WOMEN ONLY HEAR ABOUT IT AFTER PREGNANCY OR WHEN THEY DEVELOP SYMPTOMS."**

— **Dr. SMITI JAIN**,
Consultant in Obstetrics and
Gynaecology

Lilavati, Hinduja, and HN Reliance Hospitals, Mumbai, and President-Elect of the International Federation of Fertility Societies, says, "Another misconception is that pelvic floor problems are always caused by weak muscles and that doing more Kegel exercises is the universal solution. In reality, the pelvic floor can also be overactive or excessively tight and can cause difficulty during intercourse, and the right treatment depends on the underlying cause."

She adds that symptoms including urinary leakage while coughing, pelvic heaviness, prolapse, bowel control problems, persistent pelvic pain, or discomfort during intimacy should never be dismissed as routine consequences of motherhood or ageing.

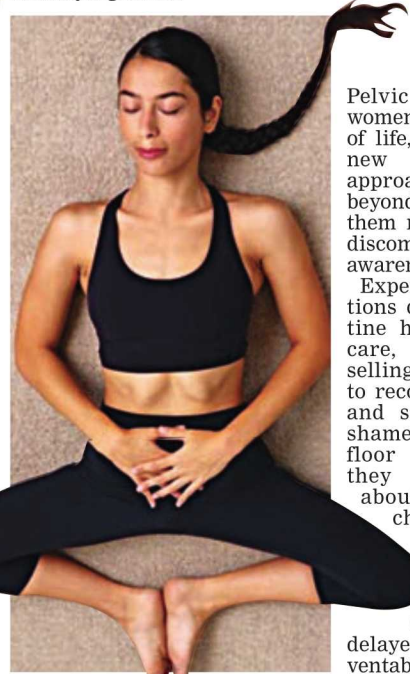
AWARENESS MATTERS

Doctors argue that pelvic floor education should not begin only after pregnancy or when problems develop. It should start much earlier. **Dr. Smiti Jain**, Consultant in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, says the pelvic floor remains overlooked because it is considered a "hidden" part of the body. "Most women only hear about it after pregnancy or when they develop symptoms," she explains. "Because of this lack of awareness, many ignore early warning signs and delay seeking medical help. Early education can help women recognize problems sooner, adopt healthy habits, and prevent complications that may otherwise affect their quality of life for years."

BREAK THE SILENCE

Pelvic floor disorders affect women across different stages of life, from young athletes and new mothers to women approaching menopause and beyond. Yet conversations about them remain overshadowed by discomfort, stigma, or lack of awareness.

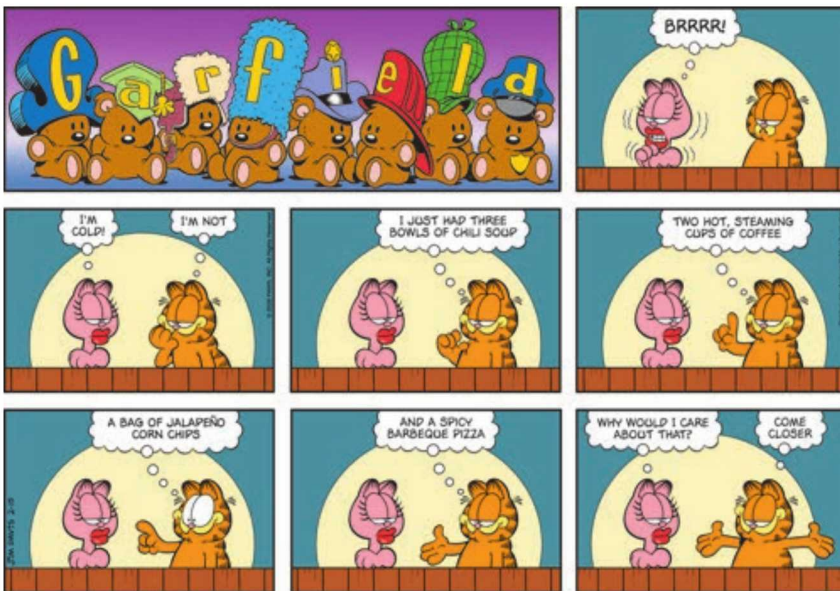
Experts say simple conversations during adolescence, routine health visits, pregnancy care, and menopause counselling could empower women to recognise symptoms earlier and seek treatment without shame. For many, the pelvic floor remains the muscle they were never taught about. Doctors hope that changing this narrative will not only improve awareness but also help millions of women avoid years of unnecessary discomfort, delayed diagnosis, and preventable health complications.



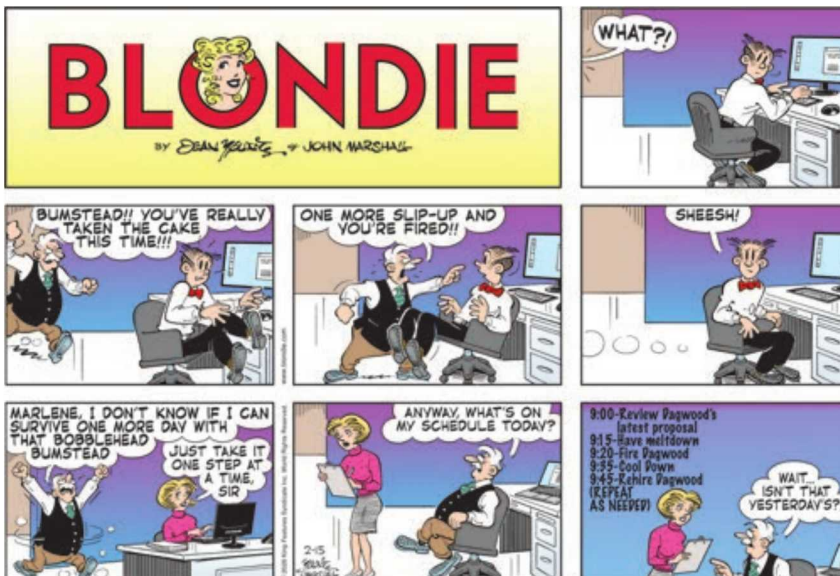
PHANTOM



GARFIELD



BLONDIE



FUNDAMENTALS SENJAM RAJ SEK HAR

With the Commonwealth Games now underway, here's a quiz on the history of the Games-from memorable firsts and legendary champions to traditions and iconic moments. Write with your suggestions, questions (with answers) to senjam@gmail.com.

COMMONWEALTH GAMES

1. The baton relay is a unique feature of the Commonwealth Games. What was tried for the first time in Commonwealth Games history for the 2026 games King's baton relay?
2. What is the contribution of a little known sports person named Rashid Anwar to Commonwealth games history?
3. During the parade at the opening ceremony of all the games, as per tradition the host nation marches last. Who is the first nation to march at the Parade?
4. Till the 1998 Kuala Lumpur edition only a particular type of competition was allowed in Commonwealth games. What changed in KL?
5. Which is the only city to host the Commonwealth Games twice - 1970 and 1986?
6. his one is easily workable - Which nation made its last appearance in the 1994 Commonwealth Games, never to take part again?
7. Don Quarrie has won the maximum number of gold medals in athletics at the Commonwealth

FUNDA OF THE WEEK

Newspapers were earlier printed on small sheets. What led to the large-format broad-sheets newspapers that we know today? (Philip Joshua, Secunderabad)

ANSWER: In the early 18th century, Britain taxed the number of pages, not the size. To cut costs, publishers made each page larger instead of giving rise to the broadsheet format.

- Games (5) in 100 and 200 metres. Which country is he from?
8. What is common to Finnie, Keyano, Matilda, Mac, Goldie, Klee Wyck, Wira, Kit and Karak with reference to the Commonwealth Games?
9. The 5th edition of the Games in 1954 at Vancouver was televised live for the first time across the world. The 1500 metres was dubbed the 'Miracle Mile' as both the gold and silver medalist broke the four minutes barrier. Identify both the athletes?
10. Event: 440 yards race. Bronze : Terry Tobacco (Canada) Silver: Malcolm Spence (South Africa). Who won the gold?

ANYTHING GOES

1. India has had two women Presidents, but never a woman Vice

- President. Only two women have contested the Vice-Presidential election, and neither was elected. Who were they? (K Vinuthna Hasini, Secunderabad)
2. What is it that Chief Ministers could not do on Independence Day until August 15th 1975? (P Mohan, Chennai)
3. Only two women have served as Speaker of the Lok Sabha since the office was created in 1952. Who? (S Shresta Nivriti, Secunderabad)
4. Kapalik and Vedamati are the two styles of a celebrated folk storytelling tradition of Chhattisgarh based on tales from the Mahabharata. Which one? (Bikram Keshari Jena, Nayagarh)
5. Which famous father often shared a core lesson that he learned from his father: "Behind every gift, there's some selfish reason, an expectation of a return of the favor." (Venkat Medam, Warasiguda)
6. What's common to the following words/phrases: Black and White TV, conventional warfare, silent movie, whole milk, and acoustic guitar? (Ravi Sharma, Kolkata)
7. Samhainophobia is the fear of Halloween. But how did the phobia get its prefix Samhain? (Madhavi Chandran, Kochi)
8. Europeans travelling through India would come across a trading community playing their trade under the shade of a particular species of tree. Name the community and the tree? (Deepak Bhatia, Chennai)

ANSWERS

1. Rashid Anwar won India's first medal at the Commonwealth Games (earlier known as the Commonwealth Empire Games). He won a bronze in freestyle wrestling in 1934 in London.
2. Unfurl the National Flag. The rules were changed after a representation was made by Dr. M. Karunanidhi of Tamil Nadu.
3. Meera Kumar and Sumitra Mahajan.
4. Pandavani.
5. Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.
6. They are examples of retronyms - words or phrases created because an existing term that was once used alone, needs to be distinguished from a term referring to a new development (Color TV, nuclear warfare, electric guitar, skimmed milk, etc).
7. The term comes from Samhain, the ancient Celtic festival that marked the end of the harvest season and is considered the precursor to modern Halloween.
8. Banias, from whom was derived the name of the tree, The Banyan.
9. Roger Bamister of England and John Landy of Australia.
10. Milkha Singh in 440 yards race.

ANYTHING GOES

1. Every individual nation and territory received its own unique Baton. Each country was invited to custom-decorate its Baton to celebrate local heritage and identity. All 74 customized Batons were brought together and reunited at the Glasgow opening ceremony.
2. Rashid Anwar won India's first medal at the Commonwealth Games (earlier known as the Commonwealth Empire Games). He won a bronze in freestyle wrestling in 1934 in London.
3. The host nation of the previous game.
4. Team sports were introduced for the first time in Kuala Lumpur. Cricket, hockey, netball and rugby were introduced in 1998.
5. Edinburgh, Scotland.
6. Hong Kong. It became a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China in 1997 and moved out of the Commonwealth and the games.
7. Jamaica.
8. They have all been mascots of the Games. Karak, the Cockatoo was the mascot at the 2006 Melbourne Games. Shera was the mascot of the Delhi edition and Clyde of the Glasgow Games.

BRIDGE | Goren

East-West vulnerable, West deals

NORTH
 ♠ A Q 4
 ♥ A 9 8
 ♦ Q 10 7 6 3
 ♣ 8 7

WEST
 ♠ 10 2
 ♥ 7 4 2
 ♦ A J
 ♣ K Q J 5 3 2

EAST
 ♠ J 9 7 6
 ♥ Q 6 3
 ♦ K 9 8 4
 ♣ 10 4

SOUTH
 ♠ K 8 5 3
 ♥ K J 10 5
 ♦ 5 2
 ♣ A 9 6

The bidding:
 WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
 1♣ Dbl 1♠ 2♣
 Pass 2♥ Pass 2♥
 Pass 3♣ Pass 3♣
 Pass 4♥ All pass

Opening lead: 10 of ♠

South in today's deal was Chinese World Champion Jack Zhao, who has lived in Boca Raton, Florida, for many years.. The auction at the table is unknown to us, mainly because Zhao refuses to disclose it. We offer the possible auction above, where South's two-club cue bid created a game force. The reason for West's spade lead, rather than a high club, is also unknown to us, perhaps for the same reason. Zhao won the opening spade lead in hand with the king to lead a diamond. West rose with his ace and led another spade to dummy's ace. Zhao led a heart to his 10, winning the trick, and led his remaining diamond. West played the jack and Zhao made the excellent decision to play low from dummy!

Should East overtake to give West a diamond ruff, Zhao would discard a spade from hand and eventually discard two more black losers on good diamonds in dummy. West's jack won the trick, and he shifted to the king of clubs. Zhao won with his ace, cashed the king of hearts, and led a heart to dummy's ace. This drew the trumps and Zhao led the queen of diamonds for a ruffing finesse. East covered and Zhao ruffed with his last trump. The queen of spades was an entry and dummy took two diamond tricks to give Zhao his contract. Very nicely played!

(Bob Jones welcomes readers' responses sent in care of this newspaper or to Tribune Content Agency, LLC., 16650 Westgrove Dr., Suite 175, Addison, TX 75001.)

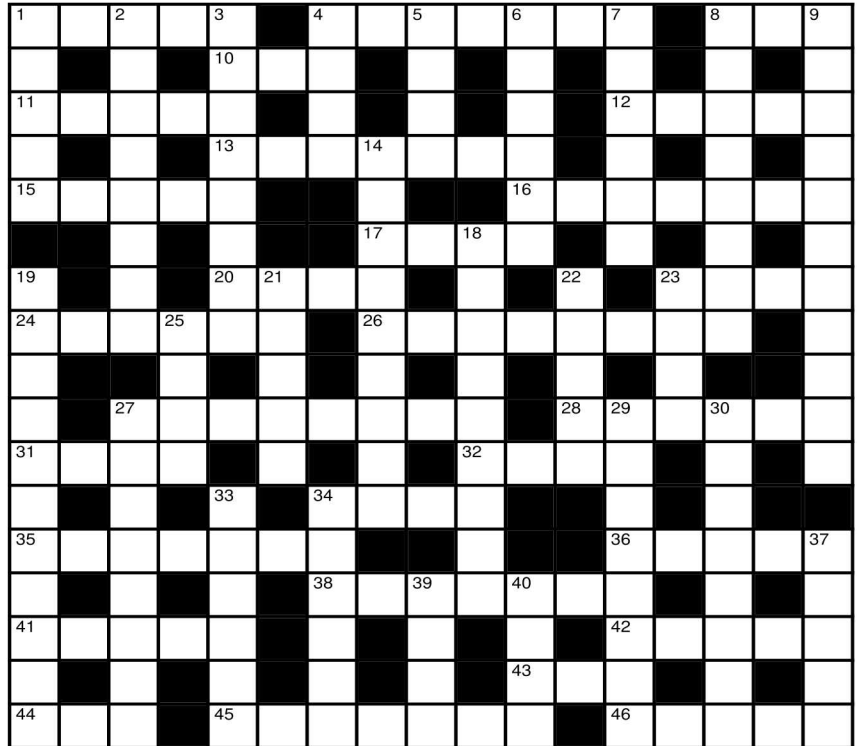
SUNDAY CROSSWORD — 1257

ACROSS :

- 1 Maulana Abul ___ Azad (5)
- 4 Great musician (7)
- 8 ___ into: corrode? (3)
- 10 Woodchopper (3)
- 11 Three-dimensional (5)
- 12 Sums owing (5)
- 13 Assaults (7)
- 15 Pointed weapon (5)
- 16 Escape of liquid or gas (7)
- 17 Large book (4)
- 20 Near or close by, in old English (4)
- 23 Explosive device (4)
- 24 Source (6)
- 26 "A + B = C + D" for example? (8)
- 27 Be very eager about something? (4,2,2)
- 28 Electric generator (6)
- 31 Repast (4)
- 32 It fits to ___ (it fits perfectly) (1,3)
- 34 Current types (2-2)
- 35 Beethoven contemporary (7)
- 36 Not urban (5)
- 38 Restoration or re-establishment (7)
- 41 Shrub of the cashew family (5)
- 42 Should (5)
- 43 Local Area Network (3)
- 44 Yes or aye (3)
- 45 Rectified (7)
- 46 Catches breath, strains for air (5)

DOWN :

- 1 Strikes with the foot (5)
- 2 Opera texts (8)
- 3 Tubes of pasta (8)
- 4 Flesh (4)
- 5 Heroic tale (4)
- 6 Fight or wrestle (6)
- 7 Period of trial (6)
- 8 Embellish; proclaim (8)
- 9 Was simulated by early success? (6,5)
- 14 Genuine (9)
- 18 Facial hair (9)
- 19 Capital of Papua New Guinea (4,7)
- 21 Not suitable (5)
- 22 Piano piece (5)
- 23 Famous city of Germany (4)
- 25 Ancient France (4)
- 27 Ex-India and Hyderabad batsman (8)
- 29 Lasting 365 days (8)
- 30 Means (8)
- 33 The large claw of a crab (6)
- 34 Car safety device (3,3)
- 37 Type of waterlily (5)
- 39 Bird's home (4)
- 40 Untamed (4)



SOLUTION FOR CROSSWORD - 1256



WIN A PRIZE

Here's your chance to win a cash prize of ₹200 each.

All you need to do is rush in your completed crossword entry to us by Wednesday with your full name and address. Mark the envelope to:

Sunday Crossword-1257
Sunday Magazine,
 36, S.D. Road,
 Secbad-03

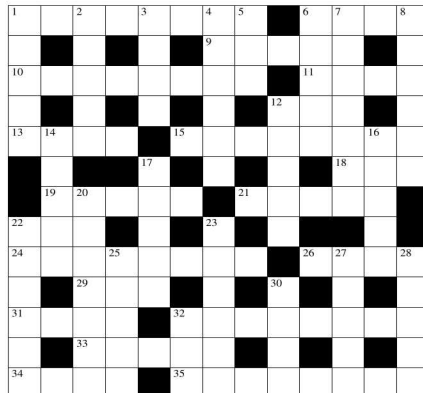
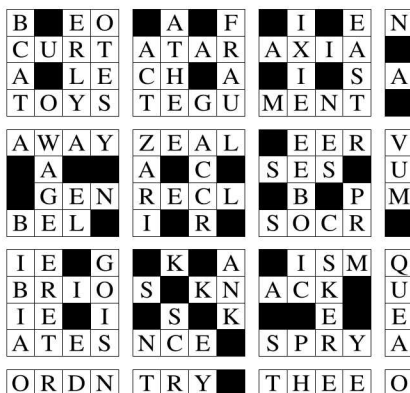
WINNERS OF CROSSWORD 1256

Amar Singh,
 Secunderabad

Priyanka Thakur,
 Secunderabad

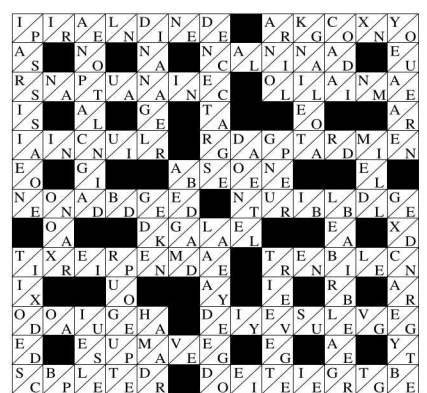
CROSSWORD JIGSAW

Here the crossword puzzle is broken up into fragments which may or may not be shuffled. Your task is to reconstruct the complete puzzle from the fragments. We have retained the black squares in the grid to help you out.



STRIKE OUT

This crossword has no clues and the answers there waiting for you. All you have to do is find it! In each square you have a choice of two letters, one of which you must strike out. If you chose correctly, you will be left with a grid that contains real words.



New queens of Tollywood

A fresh crop of talented actresses is reshaping Tollywood, intensifying the race for top roles and giving filmmakers a wider pool of performers. While the competition is fierce, insiders say the industry still needs more leading ladies to meet the growing demand

B.V.S. PRAKASH

THE ASIAN AGE

Tollywood is witnessing the rise of a dynamic new generation of actresses, with Meenakshi Chaudhary, Bhagyashri Borse, Kayadu Lohar, Mamita Baiju and Srinidhi Shetty leading the charge. Joining them are actresses Sri Gouri Priya, Shivani Nagaram, Faria Abdullah and Manasa Varanasi, making the race for plum roles more competitive than ever.

Producer-director Madhura Sreedhar says the industry actually needs a larger pool of heroines. "Finding the right heroine is one of the biggest challenges today, whether it's for a star hero or a young actor. Demand is growing every year, and we need more talented actresses."

Meenakshi Chaudhary has cemented her place with the success of *Lucky Baskhar* and *Sankranthiki Vasthunam*, while Bhagyashri Borse has emerged a sought-after name after earning praise for *Kantha* and scoring a commercial hit with *Lenin*.

Malayalam actress Mamita Baiju, who won Telugu fans with *Dude*, is set to make her Tollywood debut opposite Suriya in *Viswanath and Sons*. Kayadu Lohar has bagged Nani's *The Paradise*, while *KGF* actress Srinidhi Shetty, after impressing in *HIT 3*, is awaiting the release of *Adarsha Kutumbam* with Venkatesh.

"These actresses bring both talent and glamour. Many are also proving themselves across multiple languages, which is a healthy sign for the industry," says Sreedhar.

He, however, feels it is far too early to rank them. "They have shown tremendous promise, but rankings come only after sustained success. They need time to establish themselves," he adds.

The influx of fresh talent



Manasa Varanasi



Meenakshi Chaudhary



Bhagyashri Borse



Sri Gouri Priya



Srinidhi Shetty

AFTER JUST ONE HIT, SOME DEMAND HUGE FEE HIKES, TRAVEL WITH LARGE ENTOURAGES AND INSIST ON LUXURY ACCOMMODATION. PRODUCERS END UP SPENDING AN EXTRA ₹40,000-₹50,000 A DAY ON PERSONAL STAFF ALONE. YOUNG ACTRESSES SHOULD MANAGE SUCCESS WISELY AND RELY ON PROFESSIONAL MANAGERS WHO THINK LONG TERM. UNNECESSARY EXTRAVAGANCE ONLY PUSHES UP PRODUCTION COSTS."

— MADHURA SREEDHAR, Producer-director

has naturally intensified competition for established names such as Sreeleela and Krithi Shetty. "Every actress goes through highs and lows, and one solid hit can completely transform a career," Madhura Sreedhar also cautions young actresses against letting early success go to their heads. "Actresses should manage success wisely and rely on professional managers," he observes.

Director Trinadha Rao, who is working with Nargis Fakhri and Kavya Thapar

in *Nenu Ready*, believes South actresses need not worry about competition from Bollywood stars. "Bollywood actresses do only selective Telugu films, so South heroines will continue to enjoy more opportunities. Some roles demand a certain blend of glamour and performance that Bollywood actresses bring, but Telugu cinema will continue to draw most of its leading ladies from the Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam industries."

Shabana Azmi down with swine flu

The 75-year-old also suffered an asthma attack after tear gas exposure during the 'Sansad Chalo' march

✓ Veteran actor Shabana Azmi was forced to miss the student protest in Mumbai on July 24 after being diagnosed with swine flu. She is currently running a high fever of 102°F. The 75-year-old said she will remain in isolation for five days.

Shabana was scheduled to join the student demonstration at Shivaji Park in Mumbai on Friday, July 24, 2026. Before falling ill, she had spent three days actively participating in the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP)-led student protests at Jantar Mantar in Delhi over the NEET exam irregularities.

Speaking exclusively to *The Asian Age*, Shabana said, "This is my second bout of swine flu. I was willing to join the protest at Shivaji Park despite the fever, but I've been advised strict bed rest."

Earlier in the week, on July 20, she suffered an asthma attack after being exposed to tear gas during the "Sansad Chalo" march, but briefly returned to the protest after using her inhaler.

— SKJ



"THIS IS MY SECOND BOUT OF SWINE FLU. I WAS WILLING TO JOIN THE PROTEST AT SHIVAJI PARK DESPITE THE FEVER, BUT I'VE BEEN ADVISED STRICT BED REST."

— SHABANA AZMI

'Cinema has enriched my life,' says Sara Arjun

Having tasted immense success, the *Dhurandhar* star feels a great sense of responsibility to her fans and the characters she portrays

SUBHASH K JHA

✓ It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say Sara Arjun became an overnight sensation after *Dhurandhar*. She is still sorting out the volume of her stardom. "The love I've received has been overwhelming. I'm still trying to fully take it in. Sometimes I pause and think about the fact that people have their own lives, a hundred responsibilities, and yet they take a moment out of that to tell me they felt something because of my work. That means more to me than I can put into words." She shares that with success comes a sense of responsibility.

Despite starting out as a child actor, Sara says, "as a child, I was very uninhibited and completely raw in front of the camera. Now, I have to consciously work to reach that same space."

THE LOVE I'VE RECEIVED HAS BEEN OVERWHELMING IN THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WAY...IT MAKES ME WANT TO WORK HARDER, AND CHOOSE MY STEPS CAREFULLY. BECAUSE WHEN SOMEONE CONNECTS WITH WHAT YOU DO, THAT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU TAKE LIGHTLY."

— SARA ARJUN

Unlike many child actors, Sara doesn't feel she missed out on a normal childhood. "If anything, it has enriched my life and given me experiences I'm very grateful for," she says. "My parents placed great importance on schooling and travel, so I grew up in a balanced environment. I've always tried to make time for the things I enjoy outside of work. Sara is the daughter of actor Raj Arjun. "My father definitely guides me, he's been my strongest pillar of support. All the decisions we make are collaborative."