

Avoid half-measures in adopting CDS system

THE proposal for adopting the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) system was first floated by Lord Mountbatten, then Governor General of India. He had firsthand experience in leading a unified command (Army, Navy and Air Force) during World War II. But his proposal was given the cold shoulder by then PM Jawaharlal Nehru. Mountbatten then left to Lord Ismay to resolve this issue. He faced opposition from both the PM and then Defence Minister Krishna Menon.

Later, when Nehru stayed at Mountbatten's residence (in Broadlands, UK), he was warned by the latter of possible Chinese aggression and the prospect of India's quick defeat. Mountbatten urged Nehru to appoint Gen KS Thimayya as the CDS and form integrated theatre commands (ITCs). But Nehru responded by saying that there was no question of a war, as India wished to be at peace with everybody. This neglect of national security and the non-adoption of an appropriate defence policy and command structure have been India's bane through the ages. From Alexander's invasion of India to the Battle of Plassey, a fuzzy, ponderous and pedestrian system of higher defence organisations, as articulated by historian Jadunath Sarkar, runs like a warp thread in the management and conduct of India's battles. Even during the battles fought by India after Independence, complete integration between the Army and the Air Force has been missing.

During the 1962 war against China, the Indian Air Force (IAF) stayed out, yet the then Indian Prime Minister wrote two letters to the US President, seeking fighter aircraft support for the Indian Army. As regards coordination between the Army and the Air Force during the 1965 war with Pakistan, Air Vice Marshal KL Sondhi's assessment of the IAF's performance (as recorded in Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh's book, War Despatches) goes thus: "This also exemplified the IAF's own half-hearted participation before the desperate reaction of Pakistan's air force, which led to an air war — but the IAF missed a rare opportunity to demonstrate more fully to the Indian Army that it exists otherwise than a fighting service for its own good."

Unfortunately, the core and kernel of the CDS system in its full spectrum have been missing from the IAF's perception as well as that of some defence experts. Germany's spectacular victories and rapid advances across Europe and the USSR during World War II were the result of a close integration of mechanised forces and the Luftwaffe. What most miss out is that war is akin to an orchestra, where, on one part, all musical instruments are played, conforming to the same tune, and, on the other, there has to be only one conductor. Similarly, all elements taking part in military operations have to focus on the same objective, with one overall commander, in line with the principle of war called 'unity of command'. Somehow, the IAF appears to be missing out on the adoption of the concept of ITCs and the principle of 'unity of command'. Its imperatives seem to skip the Air Force's grasp and thinking. Here, it would be appropriate to quote Gen Albrecht von Wallenstein: "Never will I accept divided command, even were God Himself to be my colleague in office. I command alone or not at all." This is the essence of unity of command. Equally, with the adoption of the CDS system in totality, the three service chiefs are left with only staff functions and no operational role. Hence, they have given the proposal short shrift.

Since the time Mountbatten's proposal was turned down by Nehru, India has simply overlooked the importance of integrating the potential of its three services, the very concept of the CDS system and the need to adopt it in its full spectrum. After the 1999 Kargil conflict, two panels were constituted — the K Subrahmanyam Committee and the Arun Singh Committee. In my presentation to the latter, it was recommended that two ITCs — Andaman & Nicobar (A&N) and Northern — be created and an Air Force officer could be the first commander of the Northern ITC to allay any apprehension on the part of the IAF. The remaining ITCs could be formed in stages. It was recommended that one Mountain Corps be raised for the Northern Theatre Command.

The great Indian transfer bazaar

The institution of the police and other civil services which constitute the criminal justice system lies broken

MY mind goes back to the mid-1990s when I was posted at the police headquarters in Chandigarh in an administrative capacity. One afternoon, the Director General of Police (DGP) called me over and desired that I should accompany him to a meeting with the chief minister at Punjab Bhawan. Both of us reached there in time but the CM was not there; after some time, a colleague of his turned up on his behalf. After the exchange of pleasantries, the minister pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket and handed it over to the DGP. My boss was well known for a short fuse and I could see him turning red in the face. He then handed the paper to me; it had a list of about 20 transfers. The proposed transfers were based on one principle: all the rakes go to the field and all the good officers to desk jobs. The DGP asked me for my opinion, I seconded him and held forth that not even one proposal was acceptable. The DGP got up, and as we prepared to move out, the minister suggested that we could discuss the matter and make some changes. He was told in no uncertain terms that we were not into bargaining, and we exited the meeting on that note. I dropped the DGP at his place and told him to be prepared for a transfer. After two days, both of us were shifted out as also was the chief secretary (evidently, he had had a similar experience). However, times were different and values and principles still existed as none of our careers were adversely affected. In fact, the DGP went as the Governor of a state, the chief secretary as Principal Secretary to the PM and I was appointed DGP of Jammu and Kashmir.

Will this unholy alliance ever be broken? It seems only the combined will and strength of the people can fix this malaise.

This incident took place when we were still not completely out of the woods as far as militancy was concerned. Even otherwise, the old rules and regulations regarding postings and transfers were still being followed. Proposals were sent from the DGP to the Home Department and differences, if any, were ironed out between the home secretary and the DGP and then the names were sent to the

merit-based system. These reforms were also introduced in the British Home Civil Service. In a paper written by Elke Frank (Hunter College, City University of New York), he describes the importance of the bureaucracy in transition: "Because bureaucracy is the 'core of modern government', the role of the bureaucrats is especially crucial in the process of political transition. When one government succeeds another, whether the transfer of power reflects a revolutionary change in the political system, or merely a reversal of party fortunes within the established constitutional framework, the bureaucrats are expected to remain at their posts and attend to the activities of government much as usual. However drastic the changes in the policy machine, the wheels of government may not grind to a halt. Essential programmes and operations must be continued; basic commitments must be respected, lest the whole social fabric disintegrate."



It is this premise of meritocracy and that basic commitments must be respected which form the heart of democracy and a competent government. However, with the general fall in standards of political and administrative competence, accountability and morality, outside interference began to creep into the civil services. It began with those in power wanting officers of their choice in their areas of influence and officers using their political connections to go to positions they wanted — a quid pro quo was established. In the beginning, it was a trickle and then the floodgates opened. The reason for this was politicisation of the civil services and the emergence of the politician-criminal-police nexus, which was augmented by the introduction of the halqa incharge system by political parties (the halqa incharge went by different names in different states). Civil servants openly aligned with political patrons and in turn patronised criminal gangs in order to help their political masters with money and muscle. Transfers at the district and subdivision levels, i.e. of the DSP, SDM and SHO, were farmed out to the halqa incharge, who then became the conduit for these officers, whose allegiance was no longer to their seniors and the service but to this mafia. This development broke the back of the hierarchy in civil services and its moral spine, and the days of the civil services being committed to the rule of law were over. Most of the good officers were sidelined or opted for deputation to the Government of India (it took some time for the malaise to spread there also, but now it is well-entrenched). Because of the increasing need for money and muscle, corruption grew exponentially, and big 'dirty' money came from organised crime syndicates which supplied the muscle also. It ushered in the era of full-time smugglers, drugs and money-laundering mafias — the gangs. Gangs that had never been heard of, but now it is difficult to keep up with their proliferation. There are gang shootouts, fights in jails and targeted killings of the drug mafia. In the extensive network here and abroad, the inimical hand of political parties is always there. This network has become even stronger as the way elections to the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha are conducted, they both need increased money and muscle power.

Israel vs Hezbollah

The US is letting things spin out of control

IN her acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention last week, US presidential candidate Kamala Harris vowed to always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself. - File photo

IN her acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention last week, US presidential candidate Kamala Harris vowed to always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself. This right, abused to the hilt time and again by Israel, has brought West Asia to the brink of a regional war beyond Gaza. The Israeli military has carried out 'pre-emptive' strikes against what it said were 'terror targets in Lebanon' after claiming that Iran-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah was preparing to fire missiles and rockets toward Israeli territory. Hezbollah has rejected the allegations but has responded with retaliatory strikes. Israel has brought it upon itself after it killed senior Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur in an airstrike in the Lebanese capital Beirut last month.



Tel Aviv is also being blamed for the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, even as Iran has renewed its threat to launch a retaliation. Unfortunately, Israel's persistent belligerence, bordering on recklessness, is not

getting the international flak it deserves. The United Nations has merely warned against 'escalatory action', describing the barrage of attacks as 'worrying'. In the US, former President Donald Trump has confined his potshots to 'Sleepy Joe' while warning that World War III is not too far away. The Biden administration has certainly not helped matters by letting Israel get away with one provocative move after another.

Israel's actions have put a question mark on the efforts to resume talks aimed at wrapping up a hostage release and truce deal in Gaza. Lebanon, which had managed to hold its own in a month-long war with Israel in 2006, will find the going tougher this time in view of its prolonged political and economic crises. Israel, which fears there is an enemy behind every tree and beneath every rock, must be made to see reason as its military overzealousness is a threat to global security and stability. But the all-important questions is: Who will bell the cat?

India must learn from EU experience of approving GM products

We must assess holistically the long-term effects, both positive and negative, of the technology before according approval.

THE Supreme Court recently asked the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to develop a national policy on genetically modified (GM) crops. The skeptics have been able to block the entry of GM crops in the country for the past two decades, and they are likely to again oppose it tooth and nail.

Last week, farm union leaders from 18 states organised a national convention on GM crops and its effects on the environment, trade of goods, agricultural diversity and human and animal health. They were unanimous in their opposition to GM crops. India is struggling to form an appropriate and acceptable policy regarding GM organisms. The European Union (EU) has wrestled for long to restrict the entry of GM products/seeds in its member countries. The EU has been able to form a fairly good, though not perfect, policy on GM organisms and that offers lessons for India. The history of agricultural growth tells us that the world has witnessed three 'Green Revolutions' so far. The first started in the 1930s in Europe and North America. It brought quick yield increases in maize and other temperate-climate crops with increased, intensified and effective use of fertilisers, pesticides, crop species, machinery and farm management. The second one took place in the 1960s and 1970s — including in some Indian states — and it passed almost the same technologies to the developing world and crops grown in the tropics. Of course, these technologies were customised to suit local conditions by using local applied research and extension networks. GM products, especially the seeds produced by using genetical engineering in agriculture, appeared in the 1970s and were commercialised in the 1990s, mainly in North America. Advocates of this technology claim that it would result in another enormous

increase in agronomic productivity and provide qualitative improvements in the food supply.

The big differences between the first two Green Revolutions and the third one is that the latter has not been received with conclusive inquisitiveness. There is persisting skepticism about the long-run negative



effects of GM technology on human, animal and plant health. EU countries have framed severe regulatory restraints on GM products, whereas the US, Canada, Argentina and Brazil have allowed most of the agri-biotech applications. Most of the other countries, including India, are struggling to find the right path. European countries were the first to confront this technology and adopted a severe GM-restrictive policy. Most of the European governments and the EU embraced the precautionary approach (called the 'better safe than sorry' principle), keeping

in view uncertainty about risks associated with GM organisms. The US claimed that under World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules, particularly those enshrined in the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, required a strong 'sound science' evidence to restrict the import of 'like' products ('like' product is a directly competitive or substitutable products). It means the potential importers or recipient countries must provide irrefutable scientific evidence that a GM seed/product (if a like product) in question is unsafe for human or animal or plant health. Interestingly, the onus was not on the GM seed/product exporters to provide evidence that the seed/product was 'safe' but on the importers to prove that the seed/product was 'unsafe'. In other words, it was the responsibility of the buyer to prove that the product was unsafe rather than on the seller to prove that it was safe. So, all countries must assume that any GM seed/product is perfect unless proved wrong. Therefore, in the free trade regime that is accepted and endorsed by the WTO, the EU cannot

restrict imports of GMs from the US in the absence of 'sound science' evidence. Disagreeing with the US perspective, the EU used all available means to restrict the import of GM seeds/products by its member countries, starting with a moratorium on approval of GM crop varieties (1998-2004).

Irrked by the moratorium, the US, Argentina and Canada initiated a lawsuit in the WTO against the EU's regulatory policy for GM products in 2003, claiming that the EU's GM policy was creating illegal trade restrictions. The WTO Dispute

Settlement Panel issued a verdict in September 2006 in favour of the complainant countries and asked the EU to bring its GMO approval process in line with WTO rules. The EU changed its decision-making process even before the WTO decision and that has remained very complex till today. The risk assessment is done in close consultation with member countries' scientific bodies. The opinion is made accessible to the public for open consultations. As per EU regulations, a member state has the right to opt out, prohibit or restrict the cultivation of the crop based on a wide range of grounds, such as environmental or agricultural policy objectives, town and country planning, land use and socio-economic impact. Resultantly, very few agricultural biotech applications have been approved for commercialisation in the Europe. Despite the WTO decision and the consistent pressure from the US Government, EU members and other European countries have continuously avoided according easy approval to GM crops and other products, especially those that are part of the food chain. The reluctance of the EU and other countries has weakened the WTO and the GM technology generators' pressure on the governments. The deflated pressure puts India in a better position to choose its independent path.

The apex court has rightly accorded the responsibility to the Centre to bring in an appropriate and acceptable policy on GM organisms. Indian policymakers must examine the European experience. Earlier, we accepted the Green Revolution technology that resulted in a tremendous increase in agricultural productivity and production, but not without some long-term negative effects. This time, as far as possible, we must assess holistically the long-term effects, both positive and negative, of the technology before according approval.

Gold, silver price: Precious metals witness dip on MCX

NEW DELHI: Both gold and silver prices recorded a dip on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) on Wednesday, August 28, 2024. Gold futures, maturing on October 4, 2024, stood at Rs 71,900 per 10 grams on the MCX, after recording a dip of Rs 222 or 0.31 per cent. The previous close was recorded at Rs 72,122.

Similarly, silver futures, maturing on September 5, 2024, witnessed a dip of Rs 430 or 0.50 per cent and were retailing at Rs 85,228 per kg on the MCX against the previous close of Rs 85,658. The gold and silver prices in India depend on several factors, including the value of the rupee against the dollar. Global demand also plays a key role in determining the trends observed in the rate of precious metals.

GOLD, SILVER PRICES IN INTERNATIONAL MARKET

Gold prices slipped on Wednesday as the dollar ticked up, while investors awaited a key U.S. inflation report due this week for more clarity on the size of a likely September rate cut, news agency Reuters reported.

According to the latest metal report, spot gold fell 0.4 per cent to \$2,514.11 per ounce by 0313 GMT, while, U.S. gold futures fell 0.2 per cent to \$2,549.00.

Sensex, Nifty open flat tracking global cues; LTIM shares gain 3%

New Delhi. Benchmark stock market indices opened flat on Wednesday, breaking a nine-session rally amid weak global cues. Analysts expect Dalal Street investors to remain cautious ahead of key economic data later this week. The S&P BSE Sensex was down 51.46 points at 81,660.30 at 10:21 am, while the NSE Nifty50 fell 20.55 points to trade at 24,997.20. Most of the other broader market indices were also trading flat, reflecting the weak momentum on D-Street. Major heavyweight Nifty sectoral indices such as Nifty Bank and Nifty Financial Services were trading in negative territory, while Nifty IT gained in view of the recent rally in the US markets. The top five gainers on the Nifty50 were LTIM, IndusInd Bank, BPCL, Wipro and M&M. On the other hand, the top losers were Hero MotoCorp, Adani Enterprises, Asian Paints, Tata Steel and Axis Bank. Dr. V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said, "The market has entered a consolidation phase with low volatility and this trend is likely to continue in the near-term. Falling bond yields in the US has restrained FII selling and they have even turned marginal buyers." "Going by previous trends, DIIs are likely to sell if FIIs continue to buy. This trend will keep the market within a range with a slight upward bias. This is a desirable and healthy trend, given the elevated valuations in the market," he added.

The next major catalysts for the markets will be the upcoming domestic quarterly growth figures and the US inflation data, both expected later this week.

Microfinance sector heading for a bumpy ride as bad loans mount

MUMBAI. The microfinance sector is headed for a bumpy ride with overleveraged borrowers missing installments, forcing the lenders to go slow on new loan sales in the first quarter of the current fiscal. There has been a steep 24% drop in disbursements, came on top of the 30% plunge in the previous quarter.

In the June quarter, MFIs saw their collections falling, leading to higher delinquencies as well as a slowdown in the growth of assets under management, which is 24% in the reporting quarter, came in on top of a 30% fall in new loan sales in the March quarter, India Ratings said in a report on Tuesday.

Bihar and UP grew at a major pace over the past three-to-four years, making Bihar as the largest MFI market since July 2023. Bihar and UP grew 30.5% and 35.7%, respectively, during fiscal 2022 through fiscal 2024, as against overall industry growth of 18.1%. Tamil Nadu clipped at 21% during this period.

The industry was on a song since the pandemic along with the harmonisation guidelines including the removal of interest rate caps, easy funding from banks along with banks' own growing need for priority sector loans. All these led to substantial loan growth.

"MFIs are facing headwinds due to many events, including the heatwave conditions across the country, general elections, and field-level attrition, among others. Further, overleveraging in some pockets also continues to be a reason for concern forcing MFIs to take corrective actions which can take one or two quarters to show full results even though already the new loan generation has fallen by 24 percent in Q1."

Further, seasonality should also provide some relief in the second half contributing higher share of the annual business, says the report.

IT freshers with AI/ML skills in demand, command higher salaries

BENGALURU. As specialised skills such as Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning and full-stack developer are in demand, companies are ready to pay from Rs 8.2 lakh to Rs 10.2 lakh per annum for freshers. Ramesh Alluri Reddy, CEO, TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship, said candidates with niche skills, particularly in high-demand areas such as AI/ML, cybersecurity, and cloud computing, are compensated at a premium. "Freshers possessing these specialised skills can command starting salaries 20-30% higher than their peers, reflecting the intense demand and limited supply of talent in these critical areas. This trend is evident across both IT and non-IT industries," he said. In IT services sector, average salary for freshers ranges from Rs 3.5 lakh to Rs 6 lakh per annum, depending on role and organisation. "In case of IT product companies, salary can have 50-80% upside, depending on specialisation the fresher brings," he said. In its recent report, TeamLease Digital stated AWS and Microsoft Azure are sought-after skills. IT companies are offering salaries in the Rs 3.6-Rs 4.5 lakh range for engineering freshers.

Related-party transactions may be kept out of GST ambit

"Imposing tax on revenue neutral transactions, which do not contribute to the government exchequer, would defeat the objective for ease of doing business."



NEW DELHI. The government is likely to exclude related-party transactions from the ambit of goods and services tax (GST) if there is no commercial consideration involved, as per sources.

The decision will benefit companies across the sectors, particularly those with foreign branches that engage in transactions with one another. This development follows the recent decision regarding GST on corporate guarantees, in which government exempted companies that can claim full tax credit

and deal exclusively with taxable goods and services. Sources say tax treatment of related-party transactions is somewhat convoluted, and the government aims to eliminate ambiguities by simplifying the law. "Several companies are facing issues regarding related-party transactions. Though the government came up with circular 210 clarifying about the

applicability of GST on imported services, there are instances where the law has been wrongly interpreted," a top official said on the condition of anonymity. "We want to enable ease of doing business and not complicate things for business entities. Though we have been coming out with circulars giving clarification on taxability of goods and

services, confusions do crop up time and again," he added. "Imposing tax on revenue neutral transactions, which do not contribute to the government exchequer, would defeat the objective for ease of doing business. Wrong interpretation of circular by revenue would lead to constitutional disputes and give wrong flavour to the global business community," said Abhishek A Rastogi, founder of Rastogi Chambers. Rastogi hopes the GST Council would come up with a solution to protect the industry. As per Vivek Jalan, Partner at Tax Connect Advisory Services LLP, "Recent updates from Circular 210/2024 and Circular No. 199/11/2023-GST, along with amended Rule 28 of CGST Rules suggest in related party transactions where recipient is eligible for full input tax credit (ITC), GST may not apply if no invoice is issued by supplier. This extends to import of services; a self-invoice raised by Indian recipient under section 31(3)(f) of the CGST Act is required for it to be treated as a valid GST invoice, for Import of services."

Blinkit, Swiggy Instamart may get a new quick commerce rival next year

New Delhi. The competition to dominate India's rapidly expanding quick commerce sector is heating up, with a new contender set to join the fray early next year, reported The Economic Times.

US-based e-commerce giant Amazon is gearing up to launch its quick commerce service in the country, targeting the lucrative 20-30 minute delivery window that has become the industry standard. The company has been quietly working on its quick commerce strategy for several months, with plans to roll out the service in the first quarter of 2025, added the report. The development comes as Amazon's local unit undergoes a leadership reshuffle, entrusting the new quick commerce division to senior executive Nishant Sardana, previously head of PC, audio, camera, and large appliances at Amazon India. "The action in quick commerce just can't be ignored anymore," a person familiar with the



matter told ET, highlighting the urgency with which Amazon is approaching this sector. The company is also rumoured to be in discussions to acquire a stake in Swiggy's Instamart, further signaling its intent to strengthen its position in the quick commerce arena. Although Amazon has a strong presence in the grocery delivery segment through its Pantry and Fresh services, the quick commerce model—promising deliveries within 20-30 minutes—represents a significant shift in consumer expectations. Amazon's potential entry

into this space underscores the competitive landscape, which has already seen the likes of Flipkart, Blinkit, and Zepto vying for dominance. With the quick commerce market projected to reach \$6 billion by 2025, Amazon's entry could intensify competition as it tries to catch up with established players. In the meantime, Flipkart has already made strides with its quick commerce offering, 'Minutes,' which launched in Bengaluru and is expanding to New Delhi and Mumbai.

As the battle for quick commerce heats up, platforms are expected to ramp up their product offerings, with some aiming to stock as many as 20,000 items by the Diwali festive season.

The rapid growth of this sector, driven by changing consumer habits, has already seen grocery sales surge by over 38% in the first half of this year, according to industry estimates.

THIS State Govt Announces Waiver Of Old Electricity Bills For A Particular Section Of Society

Dumka (Jharkhand). Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren has announced the waiver of the old electricity bills of families living below the poverty line. Addressing a gathering in Dumka on Tuesday, Soren said, "Our government is giving 200 units of free electricity and now in the first phase, all the old electricity dues of the poor who do not give Income Tax Returns will be waived off. The government will also assess middle-class families. The government is trying to send a zero rupee bill to everyone's house." The Jharkhand Chief Minister said that the BJP is scared of the development work of the state government, and is now engaged in a campaign to break the government and MLAs, but he will not let their plans succeed. When the media questioned the apprehension related to former Chief Minister Champai Soren joining the BJP, Hemant Soren said



that he would not say anything on this subject at present. The Jharkhand CM transferred Rs 73 crore 29 lakhs through DBT to the bank accounts of 7 lakh 32 thousand 906 women of all the six districts of the State including Dumka, Deoghar, Godda, Sahebganj, Jamtara and Pakur under the Jharkhand Mukhyamantri Maiya Samman Yojana. While targeting the Centre and BJP, CM Hemant Soren said that the State government is ready for the all-round development of the State and the people of the State but the opposition is

busy misleading the people. The Chief Minister said that the state will move forward only if it strengthens and empowers half the population. "Participation of women is necessary in all circumstances for the development of the state. This is the reason why our government is committed to empowering half the population. Our government is working to bring smiles to the faces of women through various schemes," he said. With former Jharkhand Chief Minister leader Champai Soren deciding to join their party, BJP leaders took a dig at Hemant Soren on Tuesday and said more leaders will leave Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. Jharkhand BJP chief Babulal Marandi alleged that people were "feeling humiliated and are slowly leaving the party" due to "corrupt officials" surrounding Hemant Soren.

Indian Railways links DigiLocker with its hiring portal; here's how it will reduce railway jobs recruitment time frame

New Delhi. Indian Railways has integrated DigiLocker, a digital document wallet launched by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, with its recruitment portal. This integration allows job aspirants to link their digital documents, which are considered equivalent to the original physical ones. According to an ET report, the move is expected to significantly reduce the recruitment time frame for Indian Railways jobs from the current 18-24 months to less than six months. As the largest recruiter in the country, the Indian Railways receives applications from millions of candidates. The integration with DigiLocker will streamline the document verification process, reducing the time required to vet documents and minimizing instances of fake documents being uploaded to claim eligibility for government jobs. The Railway Board has decided to fully integrate all Indian Railways recruitments with DigiLocker, making the entire document verification process DigiLocker-based. Additionally, calls for medical check-



ups and appointment letters will also be issued through DigiLocker. Since the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, the railways has conducted two major examinations involving more than 23.7 million candidates, resulting in the recruitment of 1,30,581 candidates, as informed by Union railways minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to the Rajya Sabha. To further streamline the recruitment process, a system of publishing an annual calendar for recruitment to various categories of group 'C' posts has been established this year. Between January and July 2024, five centralised employment notifications for 40,554 vacancies were issued under the annual calendar, covering posts such as assistant loco pilots, technicians, sub-inspectors, constables in Railway Protection Force, junior engineers, depot material superintendents, and chemical and metallurgical supervisors.

'Not for sale': Bikaji clarifies amid interest in Indian snacks market

New Delhi. Indian snacks maker Bikaji Foods is "not for sale" and is instead on the prowl itself, aiming to cash in on the growing appetite for savoury brands in the world's most populous country, a top executive told Reuters. The Indian savoury snacks sector has ballooned in recent years as consumers splurge on packaged foods. "Bikaji is not for sale. Whatever price someone offers, there are certain things that are not for sale," Chief Operating Officer Manoj Verma said earlier this month, without disclosing whether the company has received buyout offers. His comments came after India's Tata Group and a consortium including Blackstone and Singapore's GIC held acquisition talks with market leader Haldiram's. Shares in Bikaji, which is majority-owned by founder Shiv Ratan Agarwal and his family, have gained around 67% to value the company at \$2.55 billion since Reuters reported on investor interest in Haldiram's last September.

Rameshwaram Cafe blast planner calls for attacks on trains across India

Indian agencies are on alert after coming across a video of terrorist Farhatullah Ghorri, who reportedly orchestrated Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Cafe blast, calling on the sleeper cells in India to carry out attacks on trains across the country.

New Delhi: Intelligence agencies in India are on high alert after coming across a video that showed terrorist Farhatullah Ghorri asking the sleeper cells in India to carry out attacks on trains across the country. Sources have informed India Today that Ghorri, a fugitive jihadist who is currently based in Pakistan, orchestrated the blast in Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Cafe through a sleeper cell with the support of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The video shows Ghorri, who has been on the Indian agencies' radar for years, calling on the sleeper cells to derail the railway network in India. He explains the various methods of bomb blasts using pressure cookers. Ghorri also talks about plans to target the petroleum pipelines in India, and Hindu leaders. He says that the Indian government



is weakening the sleeper cells by targeting their properties via the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the National Intelligence Agency (NIA). But we will return and shake the government," Ghorri is heard saying in the video. According to sources from



intelligence agencies, the video was released on Telegram about three weeks ago. At least 10 people were injured in the Rameshwaram blast on March 1. The NIA, which took over the case on March 3, had on April 12, arrested two key accused, Abdul Matheen Ahmed Taahaa and

Mussavir Hussain Shazib. While Taahaa was the mastermind, Shazib had allegedly placed the IED at the popular cafe. They were arrested from a lodge near Kolkata, where they were staying under assumed identities. The two are allegedly members of the Islamic State (IS) module based in Karnataka's Shivamogga. Shariq, a member of the same module, had carried out a blast in Mangaluru in November 2022.

Farhatullah Ghorri and his son-in-law Shahid Faisal have a strong network of sleeper cells in south India. Faisal was in touch with both the accused in the Rameshwaram Cafe blast, and was the handler in the case.

WHO IS FARHATULLAH GHORRI?

Farhatullah Ghorri, also known as Abu Sufiyan, Sardar Sahab, and Faru, has been

linked to several high-profile attacks, including the 2002 Akshardham Temple attack in Gujarat that killed over 30 people and injured 80 others. He was also behind the 2005 suicide attack on the Task Force office in Hyderabad. Ghorri is allegedly orchestrating online jihadist recruitment, Delhi Police said last year after arresting three most-wanted terrorists from the national capital and Uttar Pradesh, respectively. They revealed that Ghorri was the handler of the terrorists. A few months ago, Delhi Police took the name of Ghorri on record after several terrorists of the Pune-ISIS module were arrested from across the country. Officials had claimed at the time that the ISI was running sleeper cells in India and recruiting young people to carry out attacks.

DMK leader on actor Vijay's political entry: Not everyone can become like MGR

Nagapattinam. DMK organisational secretary RS Bharathi indirectly took a jibe at actor Vijay, who floated his own political party, and said that not everyone can become like former Tamil Nadu chief minister MG Ramachandran. Addressing an event in Nagapattinam, Bharathi said, "We are not worried about anyone starting a political party. They may survive one or two new moon cycles, but not more than that. Not everyone who floats their own party can become like MGR."

Notably, MGR left the DMK and formed his own political party, the AIADMK, in 1972. He then went to become the chief minister of Tamil Nadu for three consecutive terms. RS Bharathi further said that even MGR didn't float a party "of his own", but left the DMK and started his own party. "He (MGR) divided the DMK and took a portion of leaders along with him. Seeing this, many people may launch their own parties and dream of entering the Assembly just the next day," he said.

The DMK leader further said that the leaders return from the Assembly "in the same speed" in which they entered it. He said that the reason behind it was that the youth understood that such parties were empty vessels. This party (DMK) has worked for 75 years and survived several storms and tsunamis, stated RS Bharathi. Notably, actor Vijay, who announced the formation of his political party in February, recently launched the party's flag and its anthem. Vijay launched the party after his fan club, Vijay Makkal Iyakkam, gave its nod to the formation of the new political party.

"Any Incriminating Statement...": Supreme Court's Fresh Fire On Bail Denials

New Delhi: Stressing that bail is the rule and jail exception, the Supreme Court today said any incriminating statement given by an accused to the investigating officer while in custody in a money laundering case will not be admissible as evidence.

The court made the strong observation while granting bail to Prem Prakash, allegedly an aide of Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, in a money laundering case. This comes a day after the Supreme Court granted the relief to Bharat Rashtra Samithi leader K



Kavitha, who was arrested in March in a money laundering case linked to Delhi's now-scrapped liquor policy. Earlier this month, AAP leader Manish Sisodia was also granted bail in a money laundering case. In today's judgment, the bench of Justice BR Gavai and KV Viswanathan said, "Relying on the judgment in Manish Sisodia, we have said that even in PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act), bail is a rule and jail the exception."

The bench referred to Section 45 of the PMLA that mentions twin conditions for bail -- there should be prima facie satisfaction that the accused has not committed the offence and that he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail. All that Section 45 specifies, the court said, is the conditions to be met for bail. "Liberty of the individual is always the rule and deprivation, by procedure established by law, the exception. Twin test does not take away this principle," it added. The bench clarified that any incriminating statement made by an accused in custody in a PMLA case before an investigating officer will not be admissible in court. "It will be extremely unfair to make such statements admissible as it will be against all canons of justice."

Bengal minister questions Nabanna protesters: 'Do they look like students?'

New Delhi: West Bengal Minister Shashi Panja criticised Tuesday's march towards West Bengal secretariat Nabanna, questioning whether the protests were even led by students. Speaking with India Today TV about the protests, Shashi Panja said, "These should have been peaceful protests from the very beginning, and peaceful protests are more than welcome. But the agenda itself was nefarious, which was evident. The protesting junior doctors had already distanced themselves from that so-called banner of Chhatra Samaj."

"If you look at the visuals that are emerging, do these people look like students? Are they really seeking justice? Or were they trying to promote their own political agenda? Look at the vandalism," she added.

The 'Nabanna Abhijan' call was given by

an unregistered student body 'Paschim Banga Chhatra Samaj' and a dissident state government employees' platform 'Sangrami Joutha Mancha' who demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over the alleged rape-murder of a medic at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital on August 9. The protest march, however, turned violent as protesters took to incessant pelting of stones and glass bottles on the police at several spots. In response, the police resorted to lathi-charge, unleashed water cannons and lobbed tear gas shells to disperse the aggressive crowd. Shashi Panja, who is the Minister of Women and Child Development in the state government, alleged that the opposition BJP was behind the protests.

"You saw what videos emerged yesterday, which have now become

Congress, National Conference's 'friendly fight' for 5 seats in J&K polls

Srinagar. The Congress and the National Conference, which is also part of the INDIA bloc, finalised seat-sharing talks ahead of the Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir. While the National Conference will contest from 51 seats out of the 90 constituencies, the Congress will contest from 32 seats. Meanwhile, both parties will take on each other in "friendly fights" in five Assembly constituencies, which include four in Jammu division and one in the Kashmir valley. The Congress and the National Conference will contest against each other in Banihal, Doda, Baderwah and Nagrota constituencies in Jammu, and in Sopore region in Kashmir. Sources said that it was the only option left for both parties as an alliance agreement on these five seats would have triggered a rebellion in both parties.

BANIHAL CONSTITUENCY

Congress has fielded Vikar Rasool Wani

from the Banihal constituency, while the National Conference has fielded Sajjad Shaheen from the Muslim majority seat. Wani was elected as the Banihal MLA twice, in 2008 and 2014, and also served as the Jammu and Kashmir Congress president from 2022 to 2024. He was recently replaced by Tariq Hameed Karra as the Congress chief. Meanwhile, Sajjad Shaheen is the National Conference's district president of Ramban. Notably, he contested from Banihal in 2008 and 2014, but was defeated by Wani.

DODA CONSTITUENCY

The Doda constituency was split into two seats after demilitation, into Doda and Doda West. Doda is a Muslim majority seat, while Doda West is a Hindu majority seat. In 2014, the BJP had won the Assembly elections in Doda. The Congress has fielded Sheikh Riyaz from Doda, while the National Conference has fielded Khald Najib

Suharwady from the region. Sheikh Riyaz started his political career as a sarpanch and was the general secretary of J&K Congress when Vikar Wani was the Congress president. His wife is a District Development Council member. On the other hand, Najib Suharwady comes from a political family. His father, Maulana Attaullah Suharwady, had won from Doda in the 1996 Assembly elections. Najib Suharwady was elected from Doda in the by-elections in 1997 after his father's demise. Najib served as J&K's home minister from 2001 to 2002 in the then chief minister Farooq Abdullah's government. He also served as an MLC from 2009 to 2015 and is seen as a strong candidate.

BHADERWAH CONSTITUENCY

Congress has fielded Nadeem Sharief from the Baderwah constituency, while the National Conference has fielded Sheikh.

Autopsy says UP girls found hanging from tree died due to suffocation

New Delhi: The postmortem report of the two teenage girls, who were found hanging from a tree in Uttar Pradesh's Farrukhabad, has revealed that they died due to asphyxiation (suffocation). Police said that the entire case is of double suicide and that no injury marks were found on either of the girls' bodies. They will now investigate what led the girls to die by suicide. The autopsy report came even as the families of the teenagers, aged 18 and 15 and belonging to the Schedule Caste, alleged the case to be of murder. The girls, who were close friends, were found hanging from the same dupatta from the same tree in a mango orchard. Superintendent of Police, Alok Priyadarshi, said that their necks were "tied at each of the dupatta which went across the tree".



Both the girls had gone out to watch the Janmashtami programme with their families late on Monday night, and the orchard where their bodies were found was 150 metres away from the venue. The mobile phone of the cousin of one of the girls was recovered from the scene along with a SIM card from the clothes of one of the victims. According to the police, the cousin watched the Janmashtami programme with the families of the girls. The recovered items have been sent for further investigation into the matter.

FAMILIES ALLEGE MURDER

The father of one of the girls has alleged that both the teenagers were murdered. "My daughter and her friend, who lives in the neighbourhood, had gone to see the (Janmashtami) programme. When they did not return till late night, we thought she (his daughter) must have stayed back at her aunt's house, who lives in the same village. In the morning (Tuesday), we got the information that two girls had hanged themselves.

In visuals: Gujarat districts most affected by heavy rains

New Delhi: Eighteen out of total 33 districts of Gujarat were pounded by more than 200 mm of rainfall in a span of just 72 hours, flooding neighbourhoods, sending rivers overflowing and disrupting transport network and public life. Weather data analysed by India Today shows the coastal district of Dang received 508 mm (or 20 inch) of rainfall, followed by Valsad (487.8 mm), Anand (374.5 mm), and Panchmahal (343 mm) between 6 am of August 24 and 6 am of August 27. The state's largest city, Ahmedabad, was lashed by 204 mm of rainfall during the same period, while Vadodara and Rajkot received 252 mm and 195 mm of rain respectively, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Many districts have received nearly double the amount of precipitation they normally get in August, the weather office's data suggests. Already water-saturated, scenes of waterlogging and flood-like situations started appearing in many cities over the



weekend, and have been exacerbated by incessant rains. Some cities witnessed heavy downpours in a matter of a few hours. For instance, Ahmedabad and Vadodara were pounded by 129 mm and 126 mm of rain in 12 hours, ending at 6

am, August 27. Rajkot received 102.4 mm of rain. Anand, Panchmahal, and Morbi received 258 mm, 226 mm, and 198 mm of rainfall during the same period. Fourteen talukas of Gujarat received more than 10 inches of rainfall in

the last 24 hours, as per the IMD.

Heavy rainfall is likely to continue in the entire state for at least two more days. For Tuesday, August 27, the IMD has issued a red alert -- the highest level of warning -- in seven districts while an orange alert is in place for 26 others. The Indian Army has deployed six companies or nearly 720 troops in Anand, Vadodara, Devbhumi Dwarka, Kheda, Morbi, Rajkot for relief and rescue operations. The excessive rainfall has been attributed to a deep depression -- a weather system which, if intensified, turns into a cyclone -- over southern Rajasthan and north Gujarat. It is expected to bring more rain in Saurashtra and Kutch over the next two days.

As many as 280 people were shifted to safer places from the low-lying area in Bharuch city after nearly 4 lakh cusecs water was released into the Narmada river from Sardar Sarovar Dam, officials said on Monday.

News box

AT&T outage in US impacts thousands, carrier cites 'software issue'

World Thousands of AT&T customers across the US experienced outages on Wednesday, leaving their phones in SOS mode for over several hours and unable to make or receive calls or send texts. The outage began on Tuesday at around 4 pm (local time), with as many as 5,800 reports made by 6.46 pm. The outage impacted people in major cities like Tennessee, Florida, Los Angeles and Arkansas, among other cities. An AT&T spokesperson, while speaking to CNN, said that the outage could be due to a "software issue" and efforts have been made to rectify the issue. "We are working to address a software issue that may affect the ability of a limited number of our customers to connect to our wireless network," the AT&T spokesperson was quoted as saying by CNN.

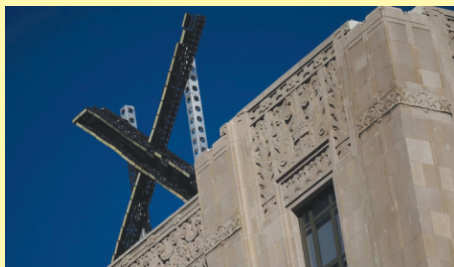
"Keeping our customers connected is our highest priority, so we appreciate their patience as we work to resolve this issue," the spokesperson said, as per CNN. Earlier on Tuesday, in Tennessee, the emergency services in Hawkins County announced that an AT&T wireless service outage "may affect the ability of some AT&T wireless customers to reach our 911 centre". In a post on X, the agency also urged people to call its non-emergency line if they were unable to connect with 911. Similarly, in Florida, police announced a "reported outage with our non-emergency and district phone lines," but added that 911 was not affected.

In California, police in Pinole said that some AT&T wireless callers "may have issues calling 911," but added that "landlines as well as other wireless carriers not affected." Earlier in February this year, thousands of AT&T customers across the US also experienced similar outages, leaving their phones unable to make or receive calls or send texts.

X suffers brief outage, thousands of users report interruptions

World Microblogging platform X on Wednesday suffered a brief global outage, with services down for thousands of users.

The outage lasted for a few minutes, with pages failing to load on the site. Users were shown the "something went wrong, try reloading" message on the screen. According to outage tracking website Downdetector.com, 915 outages were reported in India at 9.15 am. In US, meanwhile, nearly 36,000 outages were reported at 11.15 pm ET (8.45 am IST). The website, which tracks outages by collating



status reports from several sources including users, also showed more than 3,300 reports of outages in Canada and 1,600 reports in the UK as of 11.20 pm ET (8.50 am IST).

Japan braces for typhoon Shanshan, flights and trains cancelled

Tokyo. Japan on Wednesday braced for Typhoon Shanshan, with heavy rain and strong winds forecast, forcing airlines and railways to cancel some services over the coming days.

Shanshan is expected to strike Japan's southwestern Kyushu island over the next few days, and the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said it may issue a special warning to Kagoshima prefecture.

"Maximum caution is required given that forecasts are for strong winds, high waves and high tides that have not been seen thus far," the JMA warned. The typhoon is expected to approach Japan's central and



eastern regions, which includes the capital Tokyo, around the weekend, according to JMA. ANA Holdings 9202.T plans to cancel 110 domestic flights on Wednesday slated to leave or arrive in southwestern Japan, affecting around 4,200 passengers, public broadcaster NHK said. Rival Japan Airlines 9201.T plans to cancel 80 domestic flights from Wednesday to Friday, according to the report. Some Shinkansen bullet train services in the area are expected to be cancelled on Wednesday and Thursday, NHK said.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy says he will present plan to Biden to end war with Russia

Kyiv Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Tuesday that the war with Russia would eventually end in dialogue, but that Kyiv had to be in a strong position and that he would present a plan to US President Joe Biden and his two potential successors. The Ukrainian leader, addressing a news conference, said Kyiv's three-week-old incursion into Russia's Kursk region was part of that plan, but that it also comprised other steps on the economic and diplomatic fronts. "The main point of this plan is to force Russia to end the war. And I want that very much - (that it would be) fair for Ukraine," he told reporters in Kyiv of the war launched by Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. He did not elaborate further on the next steps, but said he would also discuss the plan with Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris and probably also with Republican Donald Trump, the two nominees for the US presidential election. Zelenskyy said he hoped to go to the United States in September to attend the UN General Assembly in New York and that he was preparing to meet Biden. His remarks indicated that he sees the main potential

forum for talks as a follow-up international summit on peace, at which Ukraine has said it wants Russia to have representatives.

The first summit to advance Kyiv's vision of peace, held in Switzerland in June, pointedly excluded Russia, while attracting scores of delegations, but not from China, the world's second largest economy, despite Kyiv's push to win over the global south. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Aug. 19 that talks were out of the question after Ukraine launched a major cross-border incursion into Russia's Kursk region on Aug. 6. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was in Kyiv last week, spoke by phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday and told him he supported an early and peaceful resolution to the Ukraine conflict.

'NO COMPROMISES WITH PUTIN' Zelenskyy has been adamant that Russia wants



to dictate terms to Ukraine in any settlement of the war, something that Kyiv sees as unacceptable. Putin has said any deal needs to start with Ukraine's acceptance of "realities on the ground", that would leave Russia with possession of substantial chunks of four Ukrainian regions as well as Crimea. Now Ukraine says it controls more than 1,200 square km (463 sq miles) of Russia's Kursk region. "There can be no compromises

with Putin, dialogue today is in principle empty and meaningless because he does not want to end the war diplomatically," Zelenskyy said at the news conference. He said the offensive into the Kursk region had reduced the number of governments around the world calling for Ukraine to make compromises with Russia to end the war and give up swathes of territory.

On the battlefield, Zelenskyy mocked Putin, who he said was prioritising the capture of Ukrainian land over the defence of Russia's own territory. He pointed to Kursk region where Ukraine has claimed the capture of 100 settlements, while Russian forces continue to inch forward in the eastern Donetsk region. The Ukrainian leader also said that Kyiv was continuing to make progress on its domestic weapons production and that it had conducted its first test of a domestically-produced ballistic missile.

North Korea's Kim Jong Un oversees test firing of new rocket launcher system

Seoul. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attended the test of an upgraded 240mm rocket launcher system, state media said on Wednesday. The system "proved its superiority in mobility and strike concentration" during the inspection testing, state news agency KCNA said.

Earlier this week, Kim oversaw tests of new "suicide drones," and urged researchers to develop artificial intelligence for the unmanned vehicles. US and South Korean officials have accused North Korea of supplying Russia with artillery shells, missiles and other equipment in recent



months for Moscow to use in its war on Ukraine. From last year until August 4, North Korea has shipped more than 12,000 containers to Russia, sending three

or four kinds of shells of different sizes including rockets, and separately also supplied dozens of short range missiles, South Korean Defence Minister Shin Won-sik told Reuters this month.

Moscow and Pyongyang have denied accusations of arms transfers but have vowed to deepen military relations.

A Russian delegation led by the vice minister of industry held talks with North Korean counterparts on Tuesday to further develop economic cooperation between the two countries, according to KCNA.

Trump agrees to debate with 'comrade' Kamala Harris on September 10

World Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has agreed to a debate with his Democratic opponent Kamala Harris on September 10, saying that "the rules will be the same as the last CNN debate, which seemed to work out well for everyone." "Sharing a post on his social media platform Truth, Trump said, "I have reached an agreement with the Radical Left Democrats for a debate with Comrade Kamala Harris. It will be broadcast live on ABC FAKE NEWS, by far the nastiest and most unfair newscaster in the business, on Tuesday, September 10th, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania." This comes after a statement issued by the former US President over the weekend, hinting at possibly cancelling the debate due to ongoing disputes between the campaigns over the debate rules. On Truth Social,



Trump stated that he and Harris had reached an agreement to follow the same set of rules that he and President Joe Biden followed during the June 27 debate, including no live audience and muted microphones when the candidates aren't speaking. After the June debate, US President Joe Biden quit the presidential race and endorsed Kamala Harris for

president.

Trump stated that with the CNN rules, the candidates would not be able to bring notes or "cheat sheets." "We have also been given assurance by ABC that this will be a "fair and equitable" debate and that neither side will be given the questions in advance (No Donna Brazile!)," he added. The 78-year-old former US President went on to say that the "Radical Left" would not agree to the third debate, which was supposed to be broadcast live on Fox News on September 4. "Harris would not agree to the Fox News debate on September 4th, but that date will be held open in case she changes her mind or Flip Flops, as she has done on every single one of her long-held and cherished policy beliefs. A possible third debate, which would go to NBC FAKE NEWS, has not been agreed to by the Radical Left," he stated.

Two sworn enemies hold the key to ending the war in Gaza. Does either man want a deal

World The latest flurry of Gaza cease-fire talks — the back-and-forth over now-familiar sticking points and appeals from around the world — obscures a grim truth about the months-long efforts to end the Israel-Hamas war and free scores of hostages. Any deal requires the signatures of two men: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar. They are sworn enemies, notoriously tough negotiators and know that the outcome of the talks will profoundly shape their legacies. In Sinwar's case, it could mean life or death.

Both have strong incentives to end the war. But they may also think they stand to gain by holding out a bit longer, and that war is preferable to a deal that falls short of their demands. Here's a look at the two leaders and the constraints they face.

What does Netanyahu want?

Netanyahu has promised "total victory" over Hamas and the return of all the hostages held

in Gaza — goals that many believe are incompatible. He has come under tremendous pressure from the hostages' families and much of the Israeli public to make a deal to bring them home, even if it leaves a battered Hamas intact. The United States, which has provided key military aid and diplomatic support to Israel, is also pushing for such a deal. But Netanyahu's governing coalition relies on far-right ministers who want to permanently reoccupy Gaza and have threatened to bring down the government if he concedes too much. That would force early elections that could drive him from power at a time when he is on trial for corruption. It would also hasten a broader reckoning over the security failures surrounding the Oct. 7 attack in which Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people in southern Israel, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 others — on Netanyahu's watch. Netanyahu has rejected calls for a government investigation until the war is over. The

longer the war drags on, the more likely Israel is to achieve something that looks like victory — the killing of Sinwar, the rescue of more hostages — and the longer Netanyahu has to repair his political standing and reshape his legacy. But it also comes with risks as the number of soldiers killed in action rises nearly every day and Israel becomes increasingly isolated because of the suffering it has inflicted on Palestinians.

Netanyahu has clashed with his own defense minister over the endgame. Israeli media is filled with reports quoting unnamed senior security officials expressing frustration with Netanyahu, especially his demand for lasting control over two strategic corridors in Gaza. Some have gone so far as to accuse him of sabotaging the talks. Both Israel and Hamas say they have accepted different versions of an evolving U.S.-backed cease-fire proposal in principle, while suggesting changes and accusing the other of making unacceptable demands. Yohanan Plesner,

head of the Israel Democracy Institute, a local think tank, acknowledged the anger directed at Netanyahu but said it was impossible to know which leader was the greater roadblock. "If we saw Sinwar was serious about getting a deal, that would force Israel and Netanyahu to expose their cards," Plesner said. The current situation is "almost like negotiating with oneself."

What does Sinwar want?

Sinwar wants to end the war — but only on his terms. Israel's offensive has killed over 40,000 people, according to local health officials, displaced 90% of Gaza's population and destroyed its main cities. Hamas has lost thousands of fighters and much of its militant infrastructure. Sinwar's only bargaining chips are the roughly 110 hostages still held in Gaza, around a third of whom are believed to be dead. And he needs much more than a temporary pause in the fighting if he hopes to salvage anything resembling victory from the Oct. 7 attack that he helped mastermind.

Australia Restricts Foreign Student Intake For 2025, Indians Impacted

← **The limit includes higher education courses as well as vocational education and training courses, Australia's Education Minister Jason Clare said.**

World Australia has announced that it will be limiting its international student intake to 2.7 lakh in 2025 in a bid to tackle record levels of migration that has led to skyrocketing house rental prices. The limit includes higher education courses as well as vocational education and training courses, Australia's Education Minister Jason Clare said today. The move is set to impact Indian

students hoping to go abroad for higher education, especially those from Punjab which accounts for a large number of such students.

"In June 2022, Australia capped the foreign student intake at 5.10 lakh. This number was reduced to 3.75 lakh in 2023. Now they have reduced the annual planning levels further. These levels are accorded to individual universities for all international students and not just for Indian students. The universities will distribute the quotas country wise then state wise," Sunil Jaggi, a member of Migration Agents Registration Authority of Australia, said. "The students who were preparing to take admission for the February intake will get affected by this announcement. Students from Punjab will be worst affected," he further said. "This will affect my career. My family is taking loans for my education as the cost of studying in Australia is quite high," a student from



Haryana, who wishes to study nursing in Australia, said. "The Indian government must put forward students' point of view to the Australian government," another student said.

Notably, the Australian Education Minister on a visit to India last year had signed an agreement to expand in-country access to Australian higher education institutions for Indian students. According to India's

Ministry of External Affairs, around 1.22 lakh students from the country study in Australia. India's Quad partner is the fourth most popular destination for Indian students studying abroad, after Canada, the US and the UK. Australia also increased its non-refundable visa fee for foreign students from AUD 710 to AUD 1,600, another measure that seemingly aims to reduce migration levels. Canada has also announced new restrictions on its temporary foreign workers' programme. Starting September 26, businesses will only be allowed to fill up to 10 per cent of their workforce with low-wage foreign workers, down from the previous 20 per cent. The decision to limit the number of low-wage foreign workers comes in response to rising unemployment rates in Canada. The overall unemployment rate has climbed to 6.4 per cent, with the rate for younger workers reaching 14.2 per cent.

NEWS BOX

Zaheer Khan set to join LSG as team mentor for IPL 2025

Lucknow Super Giants are set to appoint former India speedster Zaheer Khan as their mentor ahead of the IPL 2025 mega auction.

New Delhi. Lucknow Super Giants are set to appoint former India speedster Zaheer Khan as their mentor ahead of the IPL mega auction. The appointment marks the return of the 45-year-old left-arm pacer to the IPL fold after two years, having been associated with five-time champions Mumbai Indians from 2018-2022. A formal unveiling is scheduled at the RPSG Group Headquarters here on Wednesday. "Zaheer has been appointed as team mentor and the unveiling will happen later today," sources told PTI. Zaheer will thus take up the role left vacant by Gautam Gambhir last year when he went to join his former franchise, Kolkata Knight Riders, and guided them to the IPL title in 2024. Gambhir is now the Indian head coach.

At Mumbai Indians, Zaheer first served as the director of cricket before taking on the role of head of global development. LSG currently do not have a bowling coach after the departure of South African speedster Morne Morkel, who has joined Gabhr's



coaching staff. It is learnt that Zaheer will also be involved in scouting and player-development programme during the off season. Before his coaching career, Zaheer played for three IPL teams -- Mumbai Indians, Royal Challengers Bangalore, and Delhi Daredevils. Over 10 seasons, Zaheer appeared in 100 matches for these teams, claiming 102 wickets with an economy rate of 7.58. His final appearance in the IPL was in 2017 when he captained the Delhi Daredevils, after which he retired from all forms of cricket. LSG have Justin Langer as head coach with the Australian replacing Andy Flower before the last IPL as he is set to continue with his deputies Lance Klusener and Adam Voges.

Carlos Alcaraz to win 3 Grand Slams in same season Spaniard hopes 'to be alive'

New Delhi At just the age of 21, Carlos Alcaraz has achieved beyond believable numbers as he became the youngest to win the Roland Garros and Wimbledon titles in the same season. However, he has a chance to become only the third player after Rafael Nadal and Rod Laver to win three Grand Slam titles in the same season. It turns out, the Spaniard is also off to a great start with a 6-2, 4-6, 6-3, 6-1 win over Australia's Li Tu in the Round 1 of the US Open 2024. However, the 21-year-old is not thinking too much about it and is emphasising on staying focussed towards getting results. "Well after this interview I'm gonna clear my mind and try to pretend I never heard that. Obviously it would be a great achievement if I make it. But I have 6 matches ahead. Every round is against a better opponent. It's gonna be difficult. The slam is 2 weeks. Staying 100%



focused every day makes it really tough. So I'm trying to think every day to just try to feel better each day in practice and in matches. Let's see if I'm still alive in 2 weeks," Alcaraz told the ESPN.

History awaits Alcaraz

The 21-year-old from Spain has been setting one record after the other. With his Round 1 win in the US Open 2024, he won his 60th out of the 70 Grand Slam matches. He is 15-0 in his first-round matches at the Grand Slams and has won 21 out of his last 24 matches. With four Grand Slams at the age of just 21, Alcaraz appears to be the standard-bearer for the future of the tennis sport.

Alcaraz in US Open 2024

He is back at Flushing Meadows where he created history by becoming the youngest to win US Open in 2022 and if he wins the title, he will register his name among the greats.

Alcaraz created 19 break chances and converted seven of them, across the two-hour, 42-minute contest. The four-time Grand Slam winner hammered 50 winners and won 80 per cent of his first-serve points. More than half of his unforced errors came in the second set.

Dani Olmo scores on debut as Barcelona clinch comeback win vs Rayo Vallecano

LaLiga: The latest FC Barcelona signing Dani Olmo scored a late winner to secure a 2-1 win over Rayo Vallecano on Tuesday, August 27. Olmo helped Barcelona come from behind and make it three wins in a row in the League.

New Delhi. Dani Olmo marked his Barcelona debut with a decisive late goal, securing a 2-1 comeback win at Rayo Vallecano on Tuesday, August 27, extending the club's perfect start to the LaLiga season. The victory, Barcelona's third in a row, keeps them at the top of the standings. Olmo, who joined Barcelona from RB Leipzig after



playing a pivotal role in Spain's Euro 2024 success, had been waiting to make his debut due to registration issues caused by LaLiga's financial regulations. He finally got his chance in the second half and made an immediate impact. The match started with Rayo Vallecano taking an early lead. Unai Lopez capitalised on a quick counter-attack initiated by Jorge de Frutos from the right side of the pitch, scoring in the ninth minute. Rayo continued to press, with Alvaro Garcia and Isi Palazon both missing chances to

extend their advantage.

Barcelona struggled in the first half but improved after the break. Manager Hansi Flick brought on Olmo, who had been a standout performer in Spain's recent Euro triumph, finishing as a joint top scorer and earning a spot in UEFA's Team of the Tournament. In the 60th minute, Barcelona equalised with a goal from Pedri. The play began with a counter-attack; Pedri passed to Raphinha on the left and then received the ball back to finish into the bottom

corner. Barcelona should always aim for title: Hansi Flick. Barcelona thought they had taken the lead in the 71st minute when Robert Lewandowski scored, but the goal was disallowed following a VAR review due to a foul in the build-up. Olmo secured the win in the 82nd minute with a well-placed strike. After a clever interplay with Lamine Yamal, who provided the assist, Olmo curled a shot into the far post, sealing the victory for Barcelona. Barcelona now lead the LaLiga standings with nine points from three games, two points clear of second-placed Villarreal. Rayo Vallecano sits eighth with four points.

Olmo was ecstatic after his debut with the club. The Spain star was a prodigy at the junior team in Barcelona, but made a name in the Bundesliga with his creative play. "I've been looking forward to my debut for a long time, and it couldn't have come in a better way," Olmo told DAZN. "It's been many years since Barcelona won here, and this result is just unparalleled." Olmo expressed his satisfaction with his performance, adding, "I felt very good and was really looking forward to this match. It finally happened, and I'm thrilled to have helped the team and even better to have scored."

US Open, Day 3 Schedule of Play: Djokovic, Sabalenka back in action in Round 2

New Delhi After a rusty win in the first round of the US Open, Paris Olympics gold medallist Novak Djokovic returns in action on Wednesday, August 28. The defending champion plays the showpiece event of the day, against Laslo Djere at the Arthur Ashe Stadium. Depending on preference, tennis fans in India will either have to pull an all-nighter or wake up early in the morning, to watch Djokovic weave his magic on the court.

There are several top-seeded stars who are going to be in action on Wednesday. 14th-seed Madison Keys will kick off the action at the Arthur Ashe Stadium against Michaela Joubert at 9:30 PM IST. At the Louis Armstrong Stadium, Paola Badosa, Alexander Zverev and Aryana Sabalenka will play back-to-back matches in the day session of US Open. It is going to be a packed line-up for the fans present in the court. Later in the event, Victoria Azarenka will take on Clara Burei, while Taylor Fritz will play against Matteo Berrettini. Earlier

Shreyas Iyer imitates Sunil Narine's mystery bowling action in Buchi Babu

Shreyas Iyer imitated his KKR teammate's mystery bowling action during the Buchi Babu tournament match between Mumbai and TNCA XI.

New Delhi It looks like the Indian players are not taking anything for granted and don't want to leave any stone unturned to impress the selectors ahead of the big Test season. Shreyas Iyer was spotted showcasing his all-round abilities during the ongoing Buchi Babu tournament. The middle order batter displayed his bowling skills during Day 1 of the match between TNCA XI and Mumbai. He was in the Sarfaraz Khan-led Mumbai's playing XI alongside Suryakumar Yadav at the Sri Ramakrishna College Cricket Ground. Iyer rolled his arms in the last session of the day 1 play as he came out to

bowl in the 90th over. His off-spin bowling grabbed attention as it was similar to his KKR teammate Sunil Narine. Iyer led KKR to an IPL 2024 win this season and Narine



was adjudged as the MVP of the tournament for his contributions with both the bat as well as ball. Narine's mysterious bowling action has often come under scrutiny, and he was also banned from bowling in international cricket in 2015 as his arm bent more than the threshold limit. However, Iyer drew inspiration from Narine's version of hiding the face of the ball to bluff the batter. Iyer

bowled just one over by the end of the day's play and imitated his KKR teammate's action.

Batters to become part-time bowlers?

He came in to the attack in the final minutes of the day when TNCA XI were at 287/5. He gave just one run off the first five ball but was smacked for a six on the last delivery by R. Sonu Yadav. Under the coaching of Gautam Gambhir, the explosive batters like Suryakumar and Rinku Singh rolled their arms to bowl and help the team win. India's interim bowling coach Sairaj Bahutule revealed that the Indian batters will be given ample opportunities to bowl. Iyer will be eager to make a Test comeback after a long break from red-ball cricket. After the Buchi Babu tournament, he will be captaining Team D in the Duleep Trophy 2024, which will begin from September 5 in Bengaluru. The team comprises players like Axar Patel, Arshdeep Singh, Ishan Kishan, Harshit Rana and others.

Naomi Osaka breaks down in tears after 1st win in US Open since 2021

Naomi Osaka was emotional after winning her first-ever US Open game in last four years as she beat Jelena Ostapenko 6-3, 6-2/

New Delhi. Naomi Osaka was left teary-eyed after registering her first-ever win in the US Open since 2021. The former US Open champion beat 2017 Roland Garros winner Jelena Ostapenko on her comeback at Flushing Meadows in the opening round of US Open 2024. It was Osaka's first-ever top-10 win in the last 4 years at this grand slam event in New York. She is a two-time US Open champion, with the first of her four Grand Slam titles coming in 2018, followed by 2020. She missed last year's tournament after giving birth to daughter Shai but watching from the crowd,



reignited her spirit to compete. Osaka also admitted that she was unsure if she was physically fit to return to the hard court after her maternity leave. "I was trying not to cry when I walked out. Last year I watched coco play and I so badly wanted to step on these courts again. I don't know if I could. I don't know if athletically physically if I was able to. Just to win this match and to be in this atmosphere means so much to me. So thank you."

Osaka's special win at US Open

Arriving in her green outfit with full of bows, she was dispatching the no. 10 seed Ostapenko with barrage of powerful serves. She fired over 19 winners, including nine aces, and made just five unforced errors.

"My daughter didn't want to sleep at night!" It was stressful. She was hitting some really good shots. I told myself keep going for every point and maybe you'll have an opportunity. Eventually, I did. The. I looked up and saw so many faces. So I was like

woah!" Juggling a Grand Slam tournament and motherhood would not be easy, but Osaka has been embracing the challenge after she gave birth in July 2023. "At night my daughter didn't wanna go to sleep at her bedtime so I had to hold her for a while. I was like 'oh wow she picked the perfect day to not go to sleep.' Moments like that are so precious to me. I can only hope I keep having more."



on Tuesday, August 27, Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz bagged wins to progress to the second round of the competition. Both players were wobbled in one of the sets in the match but managed to grow into the game and clinch the win in 4 sets.

US Open: Jannik Sinner reacts to doping chatter

One of the biggest highlights on Tuesday was Dan Evans' match against Karen Khachanov, which went beyond the 5-hour mark. The battle between the two set the record for the longest match in the professional era of the US Open. Evans defeated Khachanov 6-7(6), 7-6(2), 7-6(4), 4-6, 6-4 after making an epic comeback from 0-4 down in the final set of the match.

Fans throng Suryakumar Yadav for pics while fielding during Buchi Babu

A bunch of fans gathered at the venue of Buchi Babu tournament match to get pictures and autographs of India's T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav during the match between TNCA XI and Mumbai.

New Delhi, Suryakumar Yadav boasts of a great fandom across the country and the explosive batter has been kind enough to oblige to the love showcased by his fans. During the ongoing Buchi Babu tournament, Suryakumar Yadav was fielding near the boundary. He was thronged by the fans at the

maidan who wanted to get a glimpse of India's T20I captain. He obliged for pictures as well as autographs to a bunch of fans while fielding during the match. In the video, he was seen posing for selfies with the fans and even told them that he would click pictures with them after the match. However, the ardent fans were persistent and made Suryakumar give his autograph on his photographs and jerseys. The security had to intervene to set the crowd aside but Suryakumar, who was fielding at the deep mid-wicket boundary, showcased his heart-warming gestures by being very polite to his fans. Most of them were school kids who were elated after getting an autograph from the 33-year-old star batter. It was the Day 1 of the match between TNCA XI and Mumbai at the Sri Ramakrishna College Cricket Ground. The star-studded Mumbai line-up with the likes of Shreyas Iyer and Suryakumar is under the captaincy of Sarfaraz Khan. The hosts TNCA XI scored 295/5 on the Day 1 of the match on the back



of three half centuries from the team. However, the Buchi Babu tournament is just a warm-up with the Duleep Trophy starting from September 5 in Bengaluru. Suryakumar recently opened up about his desire to return to the whites for India. He wants to use the domestic tournaments as a platform to offer his contention for a spot in India's Test playing XI.

Suryakumar aims for Test comeback

"Red-ball cricket has always been my priority. When I grew up in the maidans of Mumbai and played a lot of local cricket, I started playing with the red cherry. The love for the longest format began there, and has always been there. I've taken part in a lot of First Class matches for more than 10 years now and I still cherish playing this format. There's no question about it and that's why I'm here before the Duleep Trophy," Suryakumar told Sports Star. "There are a lot of people who have worked really hard to earn their place and even I want to earn that spot again. I made my debut for India in Tests. After that, I got injured as well. There were a lot of people who got an opportunity and have done well too. They deserve that opportunity right now."

There are 10 Test matches lined-up this year with India playing the all-important Border Gavaskar Trophy against Australia, starting in November.

Shraddha Kapoor

Says Stree 2 'Centres Around A Woman' Amid Rajkummar Rao Credit War: 'Reins Of Narrative...'

Amid the ongoing credit war between Shraddha Kapoor and Rajkummar Rao for the success of Stree 2, the actress has opened up about how the franchise has empowered her. Shraddha Kapoor said that Stree and Stree 2 revolve around a woman's story – the ghost of Stree – and she is the backbone of the film. "Stree has empowered me. The film is centred around a woman and she holds the reins of the narrative," Shraddha Kapoor told Hello! Indo-Arabia in a recent interview. Stree 2 has proven to be one of the biggest films in Shraddha Kapoor's career and has even fast-tracked her popularity on social media, especially Instagram.

Meanwhile, Stree 2 continues its unstoppable journey at the box office, surpassing the Rs 400 crore mark on its 12th day. The film, starring Rajkummar Rao, Shraddha Kapoor, Pankaj Tripathi, Aparshakti Khurana, and Abhishek Banerjee, has become the seventh Hindi film to join this elite club, standing tall among industry giants like Jawan, Gadar 2, Pathaan, Animal, Baahubali 2 (Hindi), and KGF Chapter 2 (Hindi). Produced by Maddock Films, Stree 2 has turned into an all-time blockbuster, thanks to its massive box office performance. After recording the biggest second weekend of all time, the film continued to perform exceptionally well, even on its third Monday, benefitting from the partial Janmashami holiday. The movie added another Rs 18 crore to its collection on this day, bringing its total to an impressive Rs 403.50 crore net in India. With its current momentum, Stree 2 is set to cross the lifetime Hindi collection of KGF Chapter 2 (Rs 427 crore) within the next few days. Moreover, the film is on track to record the biggest third week in Hindi cinema history. The next major milestone for Stree 2 is the Rs 500 crore club, which is now almost certain. Industry experts predict that the film will reach this milestone by next week. Owing to the film's massive success, a 'credit war' began between Shraddha Kapoor and Rajkummar Rao for the film's success. Abhishek Banerjee told Zoom TV, "I don't understand PR. I don't understand the kind of conversations that happen on social media. Whenever something is successful, there will always be some negative points. Kuch toh negativity chahiye logo ko jisse woh baat karein, cheezon ko bada banaye. We don't focus on these things."

He added, "Jab humne shuru kiya tha, hume kisi ne nahi bola tha ki film iski hai ya uski hai. Jab humne film sign ki thi. Aapne khud hi dekha hoga bohot baar logo ne bola hai ki Jana ki entry pe log sabse zyada taaliyan bajate hain. Itne bade stars ke beech main kya hai Jana? Yeh film ensemble cast ki film hai. Yeh sabki film hai and that is the beauty of the film jo kisi shor ya comparison se change nahi hoga."

Aparshakti also commented on the credit war and told Zoom TV, "Main ispe kuch bolunga, baat khulegi toh door tak jaayegi, main kuch bolna nahin chahunga, audience jo kahe wo sahi hai". He said that while the film is minting money at the box office, there is a "PR game" going on of "upping and downing somebody". Directed by Amar Kaushik and produced by Dinesh Vijan of Maddock Films, the film is the sequel to 2018's Stree. The filmmaker has previously confirmed that a third instalment, Stree 2, is also under works.



Mohanlal Met Mammootty Before Quitting as AMMA President? SHOCKING Details Emerge: Report



Mohanlal discussed resigning as the President of AMMA (Association of Malayalam Movie Artists) with his fellow actor Mammootty before he shared the news with the press, a new report has claimed. On Tuesday, Mohanlal left the Malayalam film industry in shock after he decided to quit as AMMA's President. His 17-member executive committee also followed his lead and resigned their positions in the association. Hours after the news broke, a report has hinted that Mammootty was aware of the shocking move. Popular Malayalam news publication, Manorama, claimed that Mohanlal held a private consultation with Mammootty. The report also claimed that Mammootty 'supported' his decision. Mammootty allegedly agreed that it was the 'best course of action.' The report also claimed that there were attempts made to urge Mohanlal to reconsider his decision but the actor was unwilling to budge. News18 couldn't verify the claims at the time of reporting.

On Tuesday, Mohanlal issued a statement to press that he was stepping down as the President of AMMA. "AMMA has decided to disperse the executive committee on moral grounds in the light of allegations made by some actors against some of the committee members. A new committee will be formed after an election within two months," the statement read. The association informed that within two months the general body meeting of the association will be called to select the new governing body. "We hope that a leadership that is capable of revamping and strengthening the association will take over soon. Thankful to everyone for pointing out our errors," it added. Mohanlal's decision came amid the ongoing sexual harassment allegations in the Malayalam film industry. For the unversed, a report by the Justice Hema Committee detailed in on a sexual assault incidents in the Malayalam film industry.

When Dia Mirza Called Out Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein for 'Sexism,' 'Stalking': 'People Were Thinking...'



R Madhavan and Dia Mirza's Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein is set to re-release this weekend. The film, which also stars Saif Ali Khan in a pivotal role, was released 2001 and was loved by many. However, over the years, the film has left cinepiles divided. While many continue to love the film, a section of film lovers have also confessed the film 'glorifies' stalking. Coincidentally, Dia had also called out the film for its sexism and did not appreciate the stalking aspect of the film. In two different interviews, Dia Mirza shared her candid thoughts about RHTDM. Speaking with Brut India in 2021, Dia said, "People were writing, thinking and making sexist cinema and I was a part of these stories... Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein has sexism in it... I was acting with these people. I was working with these people. It's crazy. I will give you small examples. A makeup artist could only be a man, could not be a woman. A hairdresser only had to be a woman... When I started working in films there were at best about four or five women on any given crew with a unit strength of over 120... sometimes 180 people."

In an interview with Outlook in 2023, Dia confessed she would not do Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein in today's day and age if the script did not rectify a few issues. "If I was offered that film, I would question certain aspects of the film and hope that the writers would change it. I internalised some aspects of that film and realised that had to do with the right propagation of love. I am strongly against stalking. I think it is a terrible thing to do," she said. Addressing the discussion around the glorification of stalking in the film, Dia said, "Not only does Maddy's character stalk Reena, but he also lies to her. Of course, she breaks off the relationship with him once she discovers the truth, only to then realise that he is remorseful and genuinely loves and cares for her. But there is no justification in this world for stalking, lying is bad, and stalking is worse."

Urfi Javed

Reveals She's Friends With Samantha Ruth Prabhu: 'Sam Is The Best, Humari Baatein...'

Urfi Javed has become the talk of the town with her latest show, Follow Kar Lo Yaar. In the show, the social media sensation made several revelations and even talked about her personal life. In the show, Urfi claimed that she has no friends in the film industry who support her. However, in a recent chat, Urfi revealed she maintains a virtual friendship with Samantha Ruth Prabhu. "Samantha and I are Instagram friends. Usko agar mera koi video bhi pasand aata hai toh she uploads it on her story. I don't think there's a motive behind it. She's just genuinely supporting me. She is a girl's girl. Sam is full-on like a girl's girl. Sam and I have a common friend, so Instagram pe baat hui hai, but indirectly humari baatein hoti hain... Sam is the best," Urfi told Galatta India.



to break the ice and maybe, just maybe, catch his attention," Urfi told Galatta India. Meanwhile, on the work front, Urfi Javed's series – Follow Kar Lo Yaar was recently released on Prime Video. The nine-episode series is produced by Sol Productions' Fazila Allana and Kamna Menezes and directed by Sandeep Kukreja. It has been described as "an unfiltered and immersive viewpoint into the vibrant and captivating life of Javed, India's biggest viral sensation".

