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## Kharge Urges PM Modi to Hold All-Party Meet on Delimitation Bills

New Delhi, July 16 (GNS): Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and urged him to convene an all-party meeting to discuss the government's revised Bills on delimitation before they are introduced in Parliament during the upcoming Monsoon Session. In his letter, Kharge recalled that the Congress had repeatedly sought broader consultations on the issue earlier this year.

He said that throughout March and April 2026, he had written to the Parliamentary Affairs Minister requesting an all-party meeting on the government's delimitation proposals, but those requests were not accepted. Kharge also referred to the fate of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which failed to secure the constitutionally mandated two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha on April 17, 2026. "All of March and April, 2026, I had been writing to the Hon'ble Minister of Parliamentary Affairs requesting that the Union Government convene an All Party Meeting to discuss its proposals regarding delimitation, etc. Unfortunately, these requests had not been accepted. The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, then failed to secure the required two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha by a clear margin," Kharge wrote.

The Congress chief said media reports indicate that the Centre is planning to reintroduce a revised version of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, during the forthcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament. "In light of these reports, I would once again request you to convene an All Party Meeting to discuss the Government's revised proposals on delimitation and related issues, and provide adequate time for political parties to examine them in detail before they are introduced in Parliament," he said.

The letter was shared by Congress General Secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh and has also been posted by Kharge and the Congress party on X.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment) Bill, 2026, along with the Delimitation Bill, 2026, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, was not passed by the Lok Sabha in April after failing to secure the required support. The proposed constitutional amendment seeks to advance the implementation of women's reservation in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies. It also provides for a substantial increase in the strength of the Lok Sabha and lays the groundwork for the next nationwide delimitation exercise, which would redistribute parliamentary seats among states for the first time since 1976.

## Hyderabad native critical after US mall stabbing

Hyderabad, July 16 (GNS): In an alleged hate crime, a man from Hyderabad was stabbed multiple times in a shopping mall in the United States. According to information reaching the family of Syed Sohailuddin, he is in critical condition after being stabbed by a man in Valley Fair Mall in West Valley City, Utah. The assailant reportedly asked the victim if he was a Muslim before stabbing him more than 15 times. Sohailuddin, 37, was running a kiosk in the shopping mall for the last two-and-a-half years. Some bystanders overpowered the assailant and took his knife before police arrived. He was identified as Peter Michael Larsen, 48. He allegedly told police he targeted the Muslim victim and intended to kill him.

The incident occurred on July 13. Disturbing visuals of the attack were widely circulated on social media. The victim has been admitted to a hospital in West Valley City and is reported to be in a critical condition. The family of Sohailuddin, a resident of the Toli Chowki area here, has appealed to the government to immediately intervene in the matter. They have requested Minister for External Affairs S. Jaishankar to take up the issue with the US authorities and arrange visas for them to travel to the US.

Sohailuddin's wife, Amreen Firdouse, fainted on learning about the attack. The couple has two children, aged five and three years. His sister-in-law, Asma Firdouse, requested the External Affairs Minister to take up the issue with US authorities and issue an emergency visa to at least two family members.

Majlis Bachao Tehreek (MBT) spokesman Amjed Ullah Khan called on the family members of Sohailuddin.

## Delhi HC orders daily health monitoring for fasting Sonam Wangchuk

New Delhi, July 16 (GNS): As educationist and climate activist Sonam Wangchuk's fast-unto-death entered its 19th day, the Delhi High Court on Thursday directed the Centre and the Delhi government to ensure daily clinical monitoring of his medical condition and undertake all necessary medical intervention to address any deterioration in his health.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia passed the direction while disposing of a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking urgent medical intervention for Wangchuk, who has been on an indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the Delhi government, submitted that Wangchuk's health is already being monitored regularly by government doctors and medical experts. "The health condition of Wangchuk shall be regularly monitored on a daily basis by government doctors. Depending on the opinion of the doctors, whatever medical intervention is needed to check the deteriorating health condition of Wangchuk shall also be taken," the SG Mehta told the Delhi High Court on instructions. Recording the assurance, the CJ Upadhyaya-led Bench observed: "Life of any citizen is precious and all efforts ought to be made by the government authorities to save the same."

During the hearing, the Delhi High Court orally remarked that it wanted Wangchuk to be examined regularly by government doctors and that any medication required on the basis of medical opinion should be administered.

## SC Questions Third Language Introduction in Class 9 Under CBSE

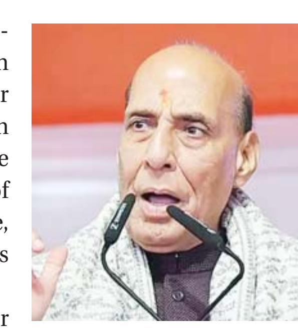
New Delhi, July 16 (GNS): The Supreme Court on Thursday expressed concern over the introduction of a third language at the Class 9 level under the CBSE curriculum, observing that requiring students to begin learning a new language at that stage could place unnecessary stress on those preparing for Board examinations. A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and R. Mahadevan made the observations while hearing the Tamil Nadu govt's appeal against a Madras HC judgment directing it to facilitate the establishment of (JNVs) in every district of the state.

Although the validity of the CBSE's revised three-language policy was not directly under challenge in the proceedings, the issue surfaced during arguments relating to TN's opposition to JNVs on the ground that the schools follow a three-language framework. Questioning the rationale behind introducing a new language at the secondary level, the Justice Nagarathna-led Bench remarked: "Don't have a new language in 9th standard please. In 5th or 6th standard, you can start a third language. And by 9th standard, it should stop, the third language. See the stress they are having. Advise your government. The student in me is still alive!"

When informed that the third language becomes compulsory only from Class 9 in CBSE schools, the top court remarked that such a move would impose avoidable academic pressure.

"No, that is very bad. 9th standard is stressful. Why do you introduce a new language in 9th? You introduce it in 6th," Justice Nagarathna said, recalling that students during her schooling began learning a third language in middle school itself. She said students in her school had the option of studying Kannada, Hindi or Sanskrit as the third language, and added that "the earlier, the better" when it comes to language learning. The apex court judge further observed that students already start preparing for the Class 10 Board examinations from the end of Class 8 and introducing a new language in Class 9 would only add to the burden.

## Border Infrastructure Crucial Despite Tech Warfare: Rajnath



New Delhi, July 16 (UNI)Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said border infrastructure will remain indispensable in the future despite the evolution of technology-driven warfare, which increasingly entails non-contact conflicts.

Speaking at the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) Strategic Infrastructure Conclave here, Singh said, "Even as state-of-the-art weapons and platforms are being inducted into the armed forces to address the challenges posed by the evolving nature of warfare, ports, airfields, roads and tunnels will continue to play an indispensable role in the future." He emphasised that while the outcome of a war was largely determined by military prowess, precision capabilities and modern technologies, basic infrastructure remains central to enabling military operations. The minister said the first front of a war was not at the border itself, but on the roads that take soldiers to the frontline. He commended the BRO for adopting niche technologies to create robust infrastructure and for carrying forward the Narendra Modi government's resolve to build world-class infrastructure, strengthen national security and transform India. Stating that the focus on infrastructure after Independence did not match the nation's capabilities and requirements.



## Sharjeel Imam seeks bail in delhi riots case

New Delhi, July 16 (UNI): Sharjeel Imam has moved the Delhi High Court seeking bail in the case alleging larger conspiracy into the commission of 2020 North East Delhi riots registered under UAPA. The matter will be heard tomorrow by a division bench comprising Justice Prathiba M Singh and Justice Vikas Mahajan.

Imam has challenged the trial court order denying him bail on July 04. Vide the impugned order, the trial court had said that the judgment of Gulfisha Fatima and Syed Iftikhar Andrabi has already been referred to a larger bench by the SC and as such unless the issue is settled, it could not consider the bail application of Imam on any ground. The judge added that he has no option but to follow the SC's judgment denying bail to Imam. The Court noted that the Supreme Court had said that only on the completion of the examination of the protected witnesses or upon expiry of one year from the date of said order, whichever is earlier. Imam would be at liberty to renew their prayer for grant of bail.For context, Khalid had filed plea seeking review of Supreme Court's January 5 order, which was dismissed. Imam had filed regular bail pleas after a coordinate bench of the Supreme Court questioned the ruling denying bail to him.

## Rajya Sabha Monsoon Session to Focus on Judicial, Tax and MSME Reforms

New Delhi, July 16 (UNI) The Rajya Sabha is set for a busy Monsoon Session beginning from July 20, with the Union government unveiling a tentative Legislative agenda that places judicial reforms, taxation measures and support for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) at the forefront.

According to the Parliamentary Bulletin issued on Thursday, Members will deliberate on five new Bills, alongside key pending legislation, covering areas such as the expansion of the Supreme Court's strength, amendments to income tax provisions, reforms in the MSME sector, stricter birth and death registration norms, and changes to the law on national honour, reflecting the Government's broad reform priorities.

The bulletin announced that Rukmini Mallik, Rajya Sabha member from West Bengal, has resigned from the House. Her resignation has been accepted by the Upper House Chairman C.P. Radhakrishnan with effect from Thursday, resulting in the vacation of her seat, it added. Importantly, five new Bills are expected to be introduced during the session. These include the Income-tax (Amendment) Bill, 2026, intended to replace an Ordinance and deepen India's sovereign debt market; the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, proposing an increase in the sanctioned strength of Supreme Court judges from 33 to 37 (excluding the Chief Justice of India); the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which seeks to tighten provisions relating to delayed registration; the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026; and the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026, aimed at improving the ease of doing business, addressing delayed payments, strengthening arbitration enforcement, and reforming MSME facilitation councils.

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# No, India Is Not Israel, And Pak Is Not Palestine

**Ashraf Nehal**

In the immediate aftermath of the April 2022 Pahalgam terror attack - where Indian civilians were targeted in a region long destabilised by cross-border militancy - an old but deeply flawed analogy began circulating with renewed vigour: that India is becoming Israel, with Pakistan being touted as the new 'Palestine'. This comparison, invoked by a range of commentators from populist influencers to academic quarters, attempts to overlay the Middle Eastern fault lines onto South Asia. However, while superficially tempting, this analogy is strategically misleading, historically untrue, and morally hazardous.


At its core, the Israel-Palestine conflict is a struggle between a militarily dominant state and a stateless people living under occupation. It is defined by asymmetric power, a denial of sovereignty, and ongoing territorial annexation. India and Pakistan, by contrast, are both fully sovereign states that emerged from a negotiated partition of British India in 1947, each with their own internationally recognised borders and UN memberships. The bilateral conflict, especially over Kashmir, stems not from a denial of statehood but from unresolved territorial claims. Pakistan's continued insistence on linking Kashmir to Palestine flattens these distinctions and obfuscates the history of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism across Indian territory - from Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir to episodic destabilisation in India's Northeast.

Equating Pakistani actions with Palestinian resistance also undermines the moral and strategic integrity of the Palestinian cause. It erases the fact that, unlike Palestinians under occupation, Pakistan has used its sovereign apparatus to sponsor and shelter groups involved in acts of terror. This deliberate state complicity - acknowledged even by global institutions - makes Pakistan an aggressor, not an aggrieved actor.

One of the more dangerous simplifications of the analogy lies in the misrepresentation of internal minority politics in both regions. It is true that India is facing criticism over recent communal tensions, polarised discourse, and policies perceived as marginalising Muslims. However, equating that with the condition of Palestinians under occupation ignores the difference between a flawed democracy and an apartheid state structure.

In India, Muslims remain an electorally significant, constitutionally recognised group whose cultural, linguistic, and religious institutions are protected under law. Their political presence - though under strain - remains visible. From Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the country's first Education Minister, to Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, one of India's most beloved Presidents, the leadership and legacy of Indian Muslims is historically well-anchored. In contemporary times, figures like Asaduddin Owaisi, a staunch government critic, and Salman Khurshid, a senior Congress leader with no constitutional post, were both part of an all-party delegation sent abroad to brief international counterparts in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor. Their inclusion, despite being politically oppositional, signals a rare bipartisan consensus on matters of national security.

Contrast this with Pakistan, where Ahmadiyyas are constitutionally barred from calling themselves Muslims, and Shias are frequently targeted in sectarian violence. The state's own structures are often complicit in marginalising non-Sunni groups, with blasphemy laws regularly weaponised against minorities. These are not merely social biases but systemic exclusions - legally and politically embedded.

Meanwhile, in Palestine, the question is not one of minority rights within a sovereign state but of basic human existence under foreign occupation. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza live without freedom of movement, due legal process, or political autonomy. Lumping these distinct contexts together does violence to the nuance required to address each problem on its own terms.

India's security doctrine has consistently emphasised that its conflict is not with the people of Pakistan but with its military-intelligence apparatus and its use of terrorism as statecraft. From the insurgency in Kashmir and the Khalistani separatist movement in Punjab to arms flowing into the Northeast in the 1980s and 1990s, India's internal challenges have often traced back to external sponsorship. These were not acts of a stateless community demanding dignity but the result of a neighbour using irregular war to destabilise a regional adversary.

Israel, by contrast, has often responded to Palestinian armed resistance with disproportionate force - demolishing homes, bombing refugee camps, and applying collective punishment policies. These actions have generated global concern about human rights violations, and rightly so. However, attempts to map these punitive actions onto India's counter-terror operations obscure the scale, nature, and intent of both countries' military strategies.

What makes the analogy particularly hollow is India's long-standing commitment to the Palestinian cause. Even under the Modi government, which has expanded strategic ties with Israel, India has repeatedly reaffirmed its support for a two-state solution and spoken against occupation at UN fora. Far from mimicking Israeli policy, India has walked a diplomatic tightrope - deepening bilateral defence relations with Israel while maintaining principled solidarity with Palestine. Conflating these divergent positions is not only analytically lazy but diplomatically counterproductive. It risks damaging India's credibility in the Global South, especially at a time when New Delhi seeks to position itself as a mediator and developmental partner in multilateral spaces.

# The World can no longer ignore bioterrorism as a threat

**Raina MacIntyre**

A new case of alleged smuggling of biological materials into the US has occurred, with a Chinese student arrested on June 8 for posting four packages over a six month period to the University of Michigan. These contained biological materials for cultivating roundworm.

Only days before that, two other Chinese nationals were charged for attempting to smuggle a crop-damaging fungus, Fusarium graminearum, into the same lab at the University of Michigan. Two separate cases involving Chinese nationals and the same US university is a red flag that American authorities would no doubt be investigating. More broadly, it raises concerns about inadequate oversight of international biological research collaborations. Roundworm is not a biological weapon, but the fungus smuggled in the earlier incident could be used to damage crops, which would be agricultural bioterrorism.

Biological weapons are the use of bacteria, viruses, bacterial toxins and other biological material to inflict harm on humans, animals or crops. When used by nation states, it is called biowarfare, and when used by non-state actors (such as terrorist groups) it is called bioterrorism. Smuggling of dangerous biological materials is only one geopolitical aspect of biosecurity.

Three years ago, an illegal laboratory was accidentally identified in Reedley, California, containing genetically engineered mice and a range of viruses. This lab was owned by a Chinese biotech company that was supposedly making COVID rapid antigen tests. For this one lab that was detected, how many other clandestine labs may be flying under the radar? And how many illegal importations of biological materials have never been detected?

Bioweapons are called "the poor man's nuke" because they are far more accessible than nuclear weapons. Whilst we do not know if there was nefarious intent around these few identified incidents, they highlight the risk of a Trojan Horse attack in any country, where biological weapons can be smuggled in using the postal service, or can be developed on site using a shopfront with a seemingly harmless purpose.

We need screening, surveillance, early warnings, regulation, oversight and legislation to address this complex threat. Some methods exist for screening postal mail, which are specific for detecting anthrax, or which treat the mail with radiation or heat, but broader screening is needed. Early warning systems that use AI to detect potential biological attacks can improve preparedness. The technology for creating new viruses and genetic engineering of existing viruses to make them more lethal has advanced at a much faster pace than our systems for regulating biological risks. Gene synthesis has dropped in cost by more than 250-fold in a decade and Canadian scientists created an extinct virus, very closely related to smallpox, in a lab in 2017. This means the virus that caused smallpox, could be created in a lab. It could be smuggled into another country or created onsite in a rogue lab. Do it yourself (DIY) biology, too, is expanding rapidly, and self-regulated. The popularity of DIY biology means lab-in-a-box and other equipment are readily available for purchase online. This means terrorists could acquire all the necessary means to produce and then deploy a biological weapon.

There is also the "insider threat" where highly skilled insiders may collude with terrorist groups or hostile states within regulated laboratories. Currently most countries do not have adequate awareness or processes to detect espionage within universities. Nor do we have adequate legislation to urgently remove a suspected rogue scientist from a lab - the FBI investigation into the main suspect of the 2001 anthrax attacks in the US took years, which is too long for prevention of a planned biological attack.

In terms of other laws and regulations, such as the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the Cartegena Protocol, local gene regulation laws and the International Health Regulations (IHR), none adequately address the need. The BWC focuses on nation states as actors rather than on terrorists, and is not enforceable or auditable.

# Why India Is Pushing FATF To Ease Its Rules For UPI Payments

The global payments ecosystem stands at a regulatory crossroads. At its upcoming June 2025 plenary, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the international body that sets anti-money laundering standards, will decide whether its Recommendation 16 (R.16) reforms keep pace with the times or if they reinforce a status quo that disadvantages innovation in the Global South.

The issue on the table is deceptively narrow: whether to continue exempting card payments from certain reporting obligations under R.16 while denying the same relief to instant payment systems (IPS), even when they offer equal or better safeguards. But the implications are sweeping - touching on competitiveness, financial inclusion, and global equity in digital infrastructure. The FATF's own consultations have revealed a clear trend. Industry players, regulators, and development institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have urged the task force to treat similarly secure systems equally. Yet, a carve-out for card networks, prevalent in the developed world, remains intact, while newer, fast-growing IPS, like India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI), remain excluded.

This exemption appears to rest on the assumption that card-based payments are inherently less risky. The data, however, tell a different story. UPI processed over $2.2 trillion worth of transactions in FY 2023-24, with a fraud-to-sales ratio below 1 basis point, lower than comparable figures for cards in many OECD countries. Unlike many card transactions that lack identity-level details, UPI transactions are tightly monitored through real-time analytics, dual-factor authentication, and regulatory oversight. India has made its case forcefully. In its submission to FATF, it argued that a blanket denial of exemptions to all IPS, despite objective evidence of compliance and safety, amounts to regulatory inequity. And it isn't alone. Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, and several others have voiced similar concerns. The FATF Secretariat itself, to its credit, proposed a middle path: allow exemptions for IPS that meet defined AML/CFT thresholds and security protocols. But several FATF members appear reluctant to move forward.

That hesitation risks entrenching an outdated framework. Card networks, mostly headquartered in the West, benefit from historical precedence. IPS, by contrast, are homegrown innovations in emerging markets, cheaper, faster, and vital for financial inclusion. Exempting one while penalising the other undermines the FATF's stated goal of being technology-agnostic and global in its outlook.

The principle at stake is straightforward: same risk, same regulation. No one argues that all IPS are equal. But if an IPS meets or exceeds the risk controls in card networks, it should be treated accordingly. Anything less is not only inefficient - it is unfair. The FATF's challenge is further complicated by geopolitics. Its membership is dominated by developed nations, while its standards are binding across a much broader global network. This disparity risks alienating large swathes of the developing world, where IPS are not only tools of convenience but of inclusion. Denying them equitable treatment will raise uncomfortable questions about FATF's legitimacy and representation.

India has rightly argued that if fairness cannot be embedded into the final R.16 amendment, then the entire reform package should be deferred. The current Mexican presidency of the FATF has prioritised financial inclusion. Pushing through a standard that sidelines IPS would starkly contradict that agenda.

Global standard-setting cannot operate on legacy assumptions. The FATF must seize this moment to align its rules with the realities of modern payments. A framework that extends card-like exemptions to qualifying IPS would not only support innovation but also encourage best practices globally. Failing that, the FATF risks losing both credibility and relevance.

India and its peers in the Global South have made their stance clear: equity in financial regulation is not optional, it is fundamental. The ball now lies in FATF's court. The world will be watching.

The debate over FATF Recommendation 16 highlights a larger question about the future of digital finance and whether global regulations can adapt to rapidly changing technologies. As countries increasingly adopt instant payment systems, regulatory frameworks must evolve to recognise innovations that improve transparency, accessibility, and security.

For developing economies, digital payment platforms have become powerful tools for expanding financial inclusion. Millions of people who previously lacked access to traditional banking services are now participating in formal financial systems through mobile-based payment solutions. Any regulatory approach that limits the growth of such systems could slow down progress toward inclusive economies.

India's UPI model has emerged as a global example of how technology-driven payment infrastructure can combine speed, affordability, and security. Several countries have shown interest in adopting similar systems, reflecting the growing demand for alternatives to traditional payment networks.

Experts argue that global financial rules should focus on measurable risks rather than the origin or type of payment technology. A risk-based approach would encourage innovation while ensuring that strong safeguards against money laundering and terrorist financing remain in place.

The FATF's decision will also influence how emerging markets approach future digital infrastructure investments. Fair treatment of advanced payment systems could encourage more countries to develop secure domestic platforms and reduce dependence on older international networks.

At the same time, regulators must maintain a balance between innovation and financial security. Greater flexibility for instant payment systems should come with clear compliance requirements, including transaction monitoring, identity verification, and data protection measures.

The outcome of the FATF discussions could set an important precedent for international digital finance governance. A technology-neutral framework would strengthen cooperation among countries and ensure that regulatory standards remain relevant in a rapidly changing financial landscape.

As the global economy becomes increasingly digital, equal treatment of secure payment systems will be essential for building a more inclusive and balanced financial ecosystem. The decision on Recommendation 16 will determine whether global regulations support the next generation of payment innovations or remain tied to traditional models.

# India's house price index up 3.1 pc in Q4 FY25, Kolkata leads: RBI

New Delhi, July 16 (GNS): The house price index (HPI) across India increased by 3.1 per cent in the January-March period (Q4 FY25), maintaining the same pace as the previous quarter (Q3).

The Reserve Bank released its quarterly HPI data for Q4, based on transaction-level data received from the registration authorities in 10 major cities. "All-India HPI increased by 3.1 per cent (YoY) in Q4 2024-25 as compared with 3.1 per cent growth in the previous quarter and 4.1 per cent growth a year ago; annual HPI growth varied widely across the cities - ranging from a high growth of 8.8 per cent (Kolkata) to a contraction of 2.3 per cent (Kochi)," according to a RBI statement. On a sequential basis, all-India HPI increased by 0.9 per cent in Q4.

Bengaluru, Jaipur, Kolkata and Chennai are the major cities recording a sequential rise in house prices during the latest quarter, the data showed. Kolkata topped the chart with an 8.8 per cent increase, while Kochi was the only city to witness a contraction, recording a decline of 2.3 per cent. The 10 cities covered in the index include Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Jaipur, Kanpur, Kochi, Kolkata, Lucknow, and Mumbai. "House is not just an asset but also a durable consumption good for households, providing shelter and other services. A change in the house price affects the households' perceived lifetime wealth and hence influences the spending and borrowing decisions of households," according to Central Bank. An increase in the house price raises the value of the housing relative to construction costs; hence a new construction is profitable when house price rises above the construction costs.

Residential investment is, therefore, positively related with house price increase. House prices also affect bank lending and vice versa. Further, house price gains increase housing collateral.

The potential two-way link between bank lending and house prices give rise to mutually reinforcing cycles in credit and real estate markets. These indicate that house prices may affect economic activity through private consumption of households, residential investment and credit allocation of the financial systems. Thus, understanding the price trends of this segment of asset class is important for monetary policy formulation.

# Indian stock market shrugs off midweek volatility, ends week on robust note

Mumbai, July 16 (GNS): The Indian equity benchmarks wrapped up the session on a robust note last week, decisively breaking through critical resistance level, propelled by sustained institutional accumulation, analysts said on Saturday.

The Nifty 50 convincingly closed above the psychologically significant 25,000 mark on Friday, underscoring bullish momentum. At the closing bell, the Sensex rallied 1,046.30 points, or 1.29 per cent, to settle at a fresh high of 82,408.17, while the Nifty 50 advanced 319.15 points, or 1.29 per cent, to end at 25,112.40.

"Relentless inflows from institutional investors both Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) and Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs)—acted as key tailwinds, offsetting headwinds from prevailing geopolitical uncertainties and reinforcing positive sentiment across the street," according to a note by Bajaj Broking Research. Nifty Index formed a sizable bull candle with a higher high and higher low signaling resumption of up move after recent corrective consolidation. The index in the process closed firmly above the 25,000 levels signalling strength.

"Going forward, we anticipate the index to retest the upper boundary of the recent five-week consolidation zone, currently pegged near the 25,200 mark. A decisive breakout above this resistance band could open the door for an upward extension towards the 25,500 zone in the near term," said the note. The Indian stock market shrugged off midweek volatility triggered by escalating tensions in the Middle East and a sharp spike in crude oil prices. The Reserve Bank of India's relaxation of project financing norms provided a boost to financial stocks. "The RBI's continued dovish tone — signalling potential rate cuts on validating subdued inflation — further reinforced market confidence, positioning monetary policy as a key stabilizing force amid global uncertainty," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd. Crude prices surged early in the week due to geopolitical unrest, sparking concerns over inflation. However, the pace of growth in oil prices tapered significantly after the initial spike, helping to ease fears of a sustained inflationary rebound.

Investor sentiment toward the pharmaceutical sector has turned cautious following the proposed imposition of new tariffs, said analysts.

With the deadline for a 90-day pause on reciprocal tariffs approaching, markets are closely tracking trade negotiations and deal-making activity expected to unfold over the next two weeks. "Meanwhile, geopolitical uncertainty continues to loom, as statements from world leaders regarding possible military involvement in the Middle East keep markets on edge.

# Centre unveils Rs 2.3 crore startup challenge to boost renewable energy innovation

New Delhi, July 16 (GNS): The government on Saturday launched an innovative 'Start-Up Challenge' with a total prize pool of Rs 2.3 crore to accelerate rooftop solar and distributed renewable energy innovations in the country. The selected innovators will compete for Rs 2.3 crore, including Rs 1 crore for first prize, Rs 50 lakh for second prize, Rs 30 lakh for third prize, and 10 consolation prizes of Rs 5 lakh each. Last sate for application is August 20 and the result will be announced on September 10. Winners will also gain incubation support, pilot implementation opportunities, and mentorship from domain experts and investors, facilitated by MNRE and NISE, according to a Ministry of New and Renewable Energy statement.

The unique national innovation challenge aims to identify and support breakthrough solutions for India's rooftop solar and distributed energy ecosystem. It is being implemented under the aegis of MNRE with support from the National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE), and in coordination with StartUp India, DPIIT. The Start-Up Challenge seeks applications from innovators and startups in India, focusing on four key categories to boost renewable energy adoption.

These are affordability – making rooftop solar affordable for low- and middle-income households using innovative financing, modular systems, and circular economy strategies. Resilience is another category, to enhance climate resilience, grid stability, and cybersecurity in solar infrastructure, especially for vulnerable and remote areas.

Inclusivity – expanding access to underserved communities through community solar, virtual net metering, and inclusive financing models, and 'environmental sustainability' – promoting eco-friendly technologies such as solar panel recycling, land-neutral solar deployment, and hybrid clean energy models, are the last two categories.

# No more obstacles in case of NSE IPO: SEBI Chairman


Mumbai, July 16 (GNS): There is "no obstacle" remain for the National Stock Exchange (NSE) to proceed with its much-awaited IPO plans, SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey has said. Speaking at the FE CFO Awards here, Pandey said there is no obstacle that "will remain in the case of NSE IPO". However, when asked whether the NSE IPO could see the light of the day ahead of Diwali this year, the markets regulator chief declined to comment on any timeline.

Earlier this month, Ashish Kumar Chauhan, Managing Director and CEO of NSE, said NSE is waiting for the no objection certificate (NOC) from the capital markets regulator and once it is received, the stock exchange would begin the process of filing its draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) for a much-awaited IPO.

Speaking to IANS, Ashish Chauhan said the exchange has sought a 'No Objection Certificate' (NOC) from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). After getting the NOC, "we will prepare our draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) and then, we will send it back to the SEBI. After that, they will take their time to approve it", said Ashish Chauhan.

Last month, SEBI Chairman had said the pending issues surrounding the NSE IPO will be resolved soon, and the regulator will move forward with the process.

At the 'FE CFO Awards', SEBI Chairman said that market manipulation will not be tolerated and they will keep a close watch, as manipulation in SME initial public offerings (IPOs) is rising. The capital markets regulator has, in the recent past, issued multiple orders related to SME IPOs, alleging fund siphoning, manipulation of issue subscriptions, incorrect disclosures, and other irregularities.

"We will continue to watch. On market manipulation, we will come down very hard going forward. I mean, we have come hard earlier also, but I think going forward, market manipulation will be one which we will not tolerate," he said during an event here.

# LIC Housing Finance cuts lending rates to 7.50 pc on new home

Mumbai, July 16 (GNS): LIC Housing Finance on Saturday said it has reduced rate of interest on new home loans by 50 basis points. With this revision, interest rates on new home loan sanctions will now start from 7.50 per cent, effective June 19, coinciding with the company's 36th Foundation Day. This move follows the recent repo rate cuts announced by the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), with LIC HFL passing on the benefit to new home loan customers to encourage home ownership and improve affordability.

"As we mark our 36th Foundation Day, we remain committed to making home ownership more accessible. The rate cut is a continuation of our effort to align with RBI's policy direction and pass on the benefits to our customers," said Tribhuwan Adhikari, MD and CEO, LIC Housing Finance.

"We are confident this move will provide an added boost to housing demand, especially in the affordable and mid-income segments, where aspirations of owning a home are closely tied to interest rate dynamics," he added. Earlier this week, the State Bank of India (SBI) reduced its lending rate by 50 basis points following the Reserve Bank's policy rate cut. With the latest round of reduction, the Repo Linked Lending Rate (RLLR) of SBI would come down by 50 basis points to 7.75 per cent.

SBI has also reduced the External Benchmark Based Lending Rate (EBLR) by similar basis points to 8.15 per cent from 8.65 per cent earlier. The State Bank of India revised interest rates came into effect from June 15.

Following the RBI action, most of the banks have slashed lending rate. Earlier, HDFC bank had also cut its lending rate to offer a maximum interest rate of 6.6 per cent per annum on Fixed Deposits with principal amount less than Rs 3 crore for general citizens.

# Salem steel plant to play key role in achieving 300 MT production target by 2030: Minister

New Delhi, July 16 (GNS): Steel is not just a material but the backbone of national development and from infrastructure to innovation, the government's goal is 'growth with responsibility', Minister for Steel and Heavy Industries, HD Kumaraswamy, has said. During his visit to Salem Steel Plant, a unit of SAIL, the minister said the level of technological sophistication and discipline I've seen here is commendable. "This plant reflects the true spirit of Make in India," the minister noted. The visit came as part of the broader vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make India a global leader in steel production, targeting 300 million tonnes (MT) by 2030, achieving Net Zero emissions by 2070, and building a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

During his tour of the plant, Kumaraswamy observed first-hand the comprehensive process of steel production — from raw scrap to molten metal and finished slabs. He visited critical operational areas including the Scrapyard, Steel Melting Shop, Electric Arc Furnace (EAF), and Slab Caster. He also witnessed advanced equipment like the Torch Cutting Machine and the transformation of molten iron into hot rolled coils and cold rolling mill.

The Electric Arc Furnace-based route at Salem plays a key role in cleaner, sustainable steelmaking aligned with India's decarbonisation commitments. Kumaraswamy also visited the Cold Rolling Mill, where premium-quality stainless steel is produced for wide-ranging uses. "The finished products emerging from this plant touch millions of lives every day from homes to industries," he stated. These outputs serve critical sectors such as railways, defence, energy, infrastructure.

# DGCA Orders Removal of 3 Air India Officials, Airline Complies


New Delhi, July 16 (GNS): After the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) launched stringent action against Air India over serious lapses in crew scheduling protocols, directing it to remove three senior officials from rostering department without delay, the airline said on Saturday it has acknowledged the regulator's directive and have implemented the order. DGCA ordered Air India to remove the three officials from all roles and responsibilities related to crew scheduling and rostering.

According to a formal directive issued by the aviation regulator, it identified the trio as being directly responsible for multiple violations, including unauthorised and non-compliant crew pairings, breaches of mandatory licensing requirements, and a failure to adhere to flight crew recency norms.

The DGCA described the situation as a "systemic failure" in both scheduling procedures and supervisory oversight. An Air India spokesperson said that in the interim, the company's Chief Operations Officer will provide direct oversight to the Integrated Operations Control Centre (IOCC). "Air India is committed to ensuring that there is total adherence to safety protocols and standard practices," said the airline. According to the DGCA, "these three officials have been involved in serious and repeated lapses regarding crew rostering," adding that internal disciplinary proceedings must be initiated against them within 10 days.

Currently reeling under the devastating AI 171 Boeing 787 Dreamliner crash that killed at least 270 people, including 241 passengers and crew members, Air India is facing intense heat as the Aviation Industry Employees' Guild (AIEG) has demanded.

# Gross direct tax collections up 4.9 pc at Rs 5.45 lakh crore, refunds rise 58 pc


New Delhi, July 16 (GNS): The gross direct tax collection (corporate tax, non-corporate tax, securities transaction tax and other levies) in the current fiscal (2025-26) rose by 4.86 per cent to Rs 5.45 lakh crore (as of June 19), according to the latest figures released by the Income Tax (I-T) department. However, net collections saw a marginal decline due to a rise in refunds. Net direct tax collection saw a marginal decline of 1.39 per cent to Rs 4,58,822 crore from Rs 4,65,275 crore in the previous year. The government issued direct tax refunds of Rs 86,385 crore till June 19 — an increase of 58.04 per cent as compared to the corresponding period of 2024-25, as per the official data. According to the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), net direct tax collection includes corporate tax at Rs 1.72 lakh crore (net of refund), non-corporate tax at Rs 2.72 lakh crore and securities transaction tax at Rs 13,013 crore (net of refund). As the non-corporate tax collection fell 2.68 per cent in advance tax, corporate tax grew by 5.68 per cent. Overall advance tax receipts grew by 3.87 per cent to Rs 1,55,533 crore.

Levied on the income or profit of a person, Direct taxes are directly paid by an individual to the government. The I-T department recently launched the 'e-Pay Tax' feature which aims to simplify tax-related procedures for taxpayers. The Union Budget has proposed a comprehensive overhaul of the Income-tax Act, 1961, to make the Act more transparent. Meanwhile, India's gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection for May 2025 reached Rs 2.01 lakh crore, marking a 16.4 per cent rise compared to the Rs 1.72 lakh crore collected in May 2024. This marks the second month in a row that GST revenues have stayed above the Rs 2 lakh crore mark, indicating healthy economic activity and steady consumption growth. In April, GST collections had touched an all-time high of Rs 2.37 lakh crore, which was a 13 per cent jump from March, according to the Ministry of Finance data.

# Telangana Govt committed to maximising Godavari waters, completing Sitarama project: Bhatti

Hyderabad, July 16 (GNS) Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on Thursday said the Congress government is committed to maximising the utilisation of Godavari river waters through gravity and lift irrigation projects and completing the Sitarama Lift Irrigation Scheme at the earliest.

Speaking to the media fter inspecting the Sitarama Lift Irrigation Scheme and the Seethamma Sagar Multipurpose Project in Bhadradri Kothagudem district along with Ministers N Uttam Kumar Reddy and Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, Bhatti said the government was implementing a comprehensive plan to tackle

climate change challenges and ensure water security for agriculture.

He said all pumps at the Devadula Lift Irrigation Scheme were recently operated at full capacity to fill 22 reservoirs across 12 districts and 17 Assembly constituencies, and directed officials to expedite works under the Sitarama project to ensure irrigation reaches the tail-end ayacut.

Alleging that the previous BRS government redesigned the Rajiv Sagar and Indira Sagar projects, leading to a sharp escalation in costs, Bhatti said the Congress government had decided to complete the project after reviewing it in view of the substantial public investment already made.

He said pending works, including distributary canals, reservoir connectivity, and link canals to fill the Wyra and Paleru reservoirs, were being expedited under a monthly action plan.

Reiterating the government's commitment to transparency, Bhatti said every possible effort would be made to utilise Godavari waters effectively and fulfil the long-pending irrigation needs of farmers in the region. Bhatti Vikramarka further stated that irrigation projects would be executed with a focus on long-term sustainability and efficient water management. He said the government was prioritising completion of ongoing projects rather than leaving them incomplete, ensuring that the benefits reach farmers at the earliest.

He also directed officials to closely monitor the progress of works and maintain coordination among various departments involved in the projects. The Deputy Chief Minister said strengthening irrigation infrastructure would play a key role in improving agricultural productivity and supporting the livelihood of farmers across Telangana.

# Hindu Student Of Hyderabad School Asked To Read 'Kalma'

Hyderabad, July 16 (GNS) A controversy erupted at a private school in Hyderabad following an allegation that a Hindu student of Class 2 was assigned Islamic religious verses as homework. The student was asked to recite 'Kalima' and 'Sura Fatiha'. The incident occurred at a school in the Saidabad area.

The parents of the student confronted the school management, questioning the appropriateness of such an act within an academic environment. The parents lodged their protest with the management of 'Success' school and demanded action against the teacher involved. Following the protest, the school management sacked the teacher. She has been permanently disqualified from applying for employment in future in the 'Success' group of educational institutions.

According to the parents, the teacher had given the homework on July 15. "Read Sura Fatiha", mentioned in the school diary under the subject 'Deeniyath'. Earlier on July 11, the teacher had written 'Read Kalima', but the same was struck off by the teacher, apparently after realising that the subject did not apply to the non-Muslim student. According to the school management, almost all the students in the school are Muslims, and they have the subject of 'Deeniyath' or Islamic teaching. However, the subject is not taught to non-Muslim students.

'Kalima' is the Islamic declaration of faith and testimony, while 'Surah Fatiha' is the first chapter of the Holy Quran. The management clarified that it was an inadvertent mistake, but they still took the action of terminating the services of the teacher.

Meanwhile, independent MLA T. Raja Singh Lodh condemned the incident. He said it was deeply shameful that a Class 2 student was allegedly pressured by the school management to recite the Kalma. "This is not the first such case in Telangana; there have been several similar incidents in the past. Yesterday, when the parents of the child went to the school and questioned the management about how they could pressure their Hindu child to recite the Kalma, the school authorities had no answer," he said He demanded that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy take action against schools which are forcing Hindu children to recite 'Kalma'. The former BJP MLA questioned the silence of AIMIM chief and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi on the issue.

# Telangana Congress bans milk, water ablutions during party

Hyderabad, July 16 : Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) has banned milk and water ablutions during party programmes, party sources said on Thursday.

The ruling party has also banned garlanding leaders with JCBs and bulldozers.

State Congress Chief Mahesh Kumar Goud has issued instructions to the party cadres not to perform 'palaabhishekam' (milk ablutions) and 'jalabhishekam' (water ablutions) under any circumstances at any Congress party programme, irrespective of the occasion or venue. He said that such programmes go against the principles of the Congress party. He warned that those violating the party directions would face disciplinary action.

TPCC Vice-President T. Kumar Rao on Thursday issued a circular in this regard. It states that the decisions have been taken in accordance with the directions of AICC In-Charge for Telangana, Meenakshi Natrajan. He made it clear evert party functionary is required to adhere to the decision prohibiting 'Palabhishekam' and 'Jalaabhishekam'. "Such practices are completely contrary to the ideology and principles of the Congress Party which involves wastage of food items, specifically when people face malnutrition," the circular said.

The TPCC suggested that the party cadres may instead undertake distribution of food items.

"Further it has been observed during the visits of senior party leaders across the State, some leaders have been using JCBs, bulldozers and other heavy machinery to place oversized garlands on them. This practice is strictly prohibited. As these vehicles are symbols of oppression, from now onwards, the use of such vehicles or machinery for garlanding party leaders will also invite disciplinary action," it said.

# Skyroot set for maiden orbital launch of Vikram-1 on July 18

Hyderabad, July 16 (UNI) Hyderabad-based private space startup Skyroot Aerospace is set to attempt the maiden test flight of its orbital launch vehicle Vikram-1 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC-SHAR), Sriharikota, on July 18 at 11.30 am, marking India's first orbital launch attempt by a privately developed rocket. The mission, christened "Mission Aagaman", signifies the entry of India's private sector into the global orbital launch market.

Airspace and maritime authorities have issued the required Notices to Airmen (NOTAM) and maritime advisories, designating restricted zones along the rocket's flight path. In a release here on Thursday, Skyroot Cofounder and Chief Executive Officer Pawan Kumar Chandana said all ground testing had been completed and the company was eager to evalu-

ate the rocket's performance in real flight conditions.

"This is our first test flight and the data generated will be invaluable. It will lay the foundation for establishing a regular launch cadence," he said. Vikram-1 will carry technology demonstration payloads from Grahaa Space, Cosmoserve, DCubed and Skyroot's own SCOPE payload, besides Cosmos Diamonds' artwork Cosmic Bloom and a microart payload. Chandana said the global small satellite launch market continued to face supply constraints even as demand for satellite-enabled services was growing rapidly, presenting significant opportunities for the company.

He described the launch clearance following extensive testing as a defining milestone in India's space journey and said the mission marked the beginning of Skyroot's effort to provide wider access to space. Skyroot Cofounder and Chief Operating Officer Naga Bharath Daka said the mission represented the efforts of nearly 1,000 people, over 400 suppliers and almost 3,000 days of development.

"The in-flight data from this mission will help us validate every technology developed over the years and enable us to build a reliable, on-demand launch company from India," he said.

According to the company, all stages of the Vikram-1 launch vehicle have been integrated and stacked on the launch pad, while final integrated checks, telemetry interface tests and radar tracking system validations have been completed.

Standing about seven storeys tall, Vikram-1 is a multistage orbital launch vehicle built with an all-carbon composite structure and powered by indigenously developed propulsion systems, including 3D-printed engines and high-thrust solid rocket motors. It is designed to place satellites weighing up to 350 kg into Low Earth Orbit, with the maiden mission targeting a 450-km orbit at a 60-degree inclination.

# SC, ST Welfare Must Reach Every Eligible Beneficiary: Commission Chairman

Nirmal, July 16(GNS):State SC and ST Commission Chairman Bakki Venkataiah on Thursday directed officials to ensure that welfare schemes meant for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes reach every eligible beneficiary through effective coordination among all government departments. He also instructed officials to expedite the investigation and disposal of pending SC/ST atrocity cases to ensure timely justice for victims.

Chairing a high-level review meeting at the Collectorate conference hall, District Collector Bhavesh Mishra reviewed the implementation of SC/ST welfare schemes, pending atrocity cases, land-related issues and the implementation of reservation rules. Before the meeting, Bakki Venkataiah, Collector Bhavesh Mishra, Superintendent of Police Dr G. Janaki Sharmila and Commission members paid floral tributes to Dr B.R. Ambedkar and Babu Jagjivan Ram.

The Commission reviewed the progress of welfare schemes, registration and investigation of atrocity cases, filing of charge sheets and disbursement of compensation to victims. Officials also discussed the status of SC/ST students studying in government educational institutions, implementation of the Ambedkar Overseas Education Scheme, financial assistance for inter-caste marriages, Indiramma housing, and employment generation under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Addressing the meeting, Venkataiah directed officials to ensure that benefits under welfare schemes are delivered to eligible beneficiaries without delay. He stressed that investigations into SC/ST atrocity cases should be completed transparently within the stipulated time and compensation should be released promptly to victims.

He further instructed officials to organise Civil Rights Day every month during the last week at the mandal level to create awareness about welfare schemes and legal safeguards. District Vigilance and Monitoring Committee meetings should be held once every three months without fail, he said. He also called for adequate employment opportunities for all MGNREGS job card holders and directed officials to ensure proper infrastructure and amenities in SC/ST welfare hostels.

The Commission Chairman assured that he would take up the issue of any pending development funds for SC/ST welfare with the Chief Minister to facilitate their release.



# India Advances Global Green Hydrogen Leadership under National Green Hydrogen Mission

Hyderabad, July 16 (GNS) In a significant milestone under the National Green Hydrogen Mission (NGHM), ACME Cleantech Solutions Private Limited (ACME Group) today secures long-term offtake deal with leading Japanese companies—IHI Corporation for Green Ammonia and Mitsubishi Gas Chemical Company, Inc. (MGC) for Green Methanol during a ceremony held at Atal Akshay Urja Bhawan, New Delhi.

The National Green Hydrogen Mission, approved in January 2023 with an outlay of 19,744 crore, aims to position India as a global hub for the production, utilisation, and export of green hydrogen and its derivatives. Under the Mission, the Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) Programme provides financial support for production through a transparent bidding process conducted by the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI). ACME Group has been awarded a production capacity of 3,70,000 tonnes per annum (370 kTPA) under the SIGHT Programme, forming the foundation for these export-oriented agreements.

Under the deal with IHI Corporation, ACME will supply a total of 4,05,000 tonnes per annum (405 kTPA) of green ammonia. This arrangement is supported by Japan's Contract for Difference (CfD) scheme for low-carbon ammonia, administered by METI, which provides price support to Japanese off-takers, thereby ensuring the long-term commercial viability of such imports.

ACME has also signed a 10-year agreement with Mitsubishi Gas Chemical Company, Inc. for the supply of 1,00,000 tonnes per annum (100 kTPA) of green methanol from its Paradip facility. The project is aligned with global decarbonisation goals, particularly in the maritime sector, and is designed to meet European Renewable Fuels of Non-Biological Origin (RFNBO) requirements as well as International Maritime Organization (IMO) standards for cleaner marine fuels.

"I welcome Japan's decision to extend its CfD subsidy support to the ACME-IHI Green Hydrogen project. It reflects the growing global confidence in India's green hydrogen ecosystem and our emergence as a trusted partner in the global clean energy transition. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, the National Green Hydrogen Mission is creating a strong and future-ready ecosystem. It is attracting global investments, building international partnerships, and opening new markets for Indian green hydrogen and its derivatives, said Union Minister for New & Renewable Energy and Consumer Affairs & Food and Public Distribution.



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