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PM Modi, Japan PM inaugurate Maruti Suzuki India's Haryana plant worth Rs 35,000 cr

New Delhi, July 1 (GNS): The Army on Wednesday formally started raising five integrated battle groups (IBGs) along the front with China to boost combat readiness.The IBGs have been tasked with responding and striking at targets within 24 hours of getting orders. The concept upgrades the "Cold Start Doctrine", a military strategy developed after Operation Parakram following the 2001 Parliament attack. Sources said each IBG would be headed by a Major General-rank officer. Five such officers had been posted to take charge of the IBGs, marking the formal raising of the new outfit.

With the government sanction letter for the Mountain Strike Corps' IBGs finalised on July 1, the raising, postings and administrative processes can now commence. The raising is likely to be completed by mid-2027. The IBGs will be stationed in two north-eastern states — Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh — that share a boundary with China. A Fire Support Group, that has long-range artillery guns and other firepower, will serve as the back-up for the IBGs. The Mountain Strike Corps has two divisions — one tasked to Ladakh and the other to the North-East. The sources said the IBGs were currently being raised only in the North-East.

An IBG integrates combat formation to make the forces faster, more flexible and self-sufficient. An IBG is designed to be a compact unit with infantry, armour, artillery, engineers, signals, air defence and logistics support under one commander. It is meant to react quickly to threats and operate with less dependence on larger formations.

Each IBG will have a strength of around 5,000 personnel, which will be larger than a brigade (3,000-3,500 troops) but smaller than a division (10,000-12,000 troops).

Former Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi had stated in January that the government had approved the long-pending proposal for setting up IBGs, the first of which would come up in the Mountain Strike Corps.

The creation of the IBGs is part of a series of steps to restructure the Army to make it leaner and more agile. An IBG along the Himalayas has different equipment, training and attack tactics than the forces operating in the plains.

The IBGs will not require new raising or inductions. Instead, they will involve integrating the existing elements of the infantry, tank regiments, artillery, UAVs, engineers and signals.

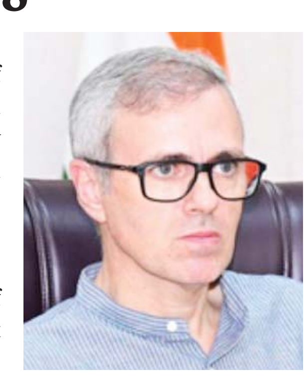
Gen Seth calls on Defence Minister Singh after taking over as Army Chief

New Delhi, July 1 (GNS): General Dhiraj Seth, who assumed charge as the 31st Chief of the Army Staff on July 1, called on Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday and outlined his plans for the Indian Army during this meeting. General Seth had also spoken about his plans on Wednesday after taking over as the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS).

"The Indian Army is a combat-ready and battle-hardened force, fully prepared and capable of meeting every challenge in the operational domain. To respond effectively to the evolving security environment, we must take forward the modernisation of the Army with renewed energy and firm resolve," he had said. "Our aim is to build a technology-enabled, future-ready Army which is fully empowered and capable of operating across multiple domains," Gen Seth said.

He spoke about the 'Decade of Transformation' while identifying his key focus areas. "I have put them together in the acronym 'VIJAY'. Each letter of 'VIJAY' reflects my priorities, which I will briefly outline. 'V' stands for Vigilance. We will maintain constant vigilance along our borders and against emerging threats. We will also ensure a high level of operational readiness to respond effectively to any challenge to national security. "The letter 'I' stands for Innovation and Transformation. My focus will be on innovation in both doctrine and technological solutions," he said. "Innovation will remain an integral part of our thinking, our systems and our capability development. At the same time, necessary transformations will be undertaken in keeping with the changing character of warfare. '

One should not object to India-Pakistan dialogue: Omar Abdullah



Srinagar, July 2 (GNS): Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said that nobody should have an objection to India-Pakistan dialogue since it is aimed at improving relations between the two neighbours. The Chief Minister said the conflict between the two countries was not new and has persisted for the last three to four decades.

"This conflict is 30 to 40 years old, and last year, it intensified after the Pahalgam attack. Now, the Prime Minister is being requested, through a letter, that the relations between the two countries should be improved. No one should have any objection to that," he said.

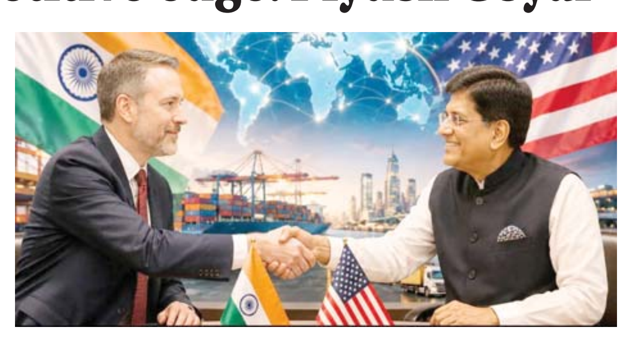
A letter coordinated by OP Shah, chairman of the Centre for Peace and Progress, and signed by 61 Indians and 55 Pakistanis, has urged the two countries to engage in bilateral talks. Questioning those criticising the initiative, Abdullah said senior leaders of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had also advocated improving ties between India and Pakistan.

"Recently, a senior RSS leader said that India and Pakistan should talk to each other and become friends. When the RSS says this, no one objects, but when the leaders in J&K say the same thing, it becomes an issue. We are only saying what former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee used to say: friends can be changed, but we cannot change neighbours. We want relations between neighbours to improve," Abdullah said.

More than 100 prominent citizens, including former Jammu and Kashmir chief ministers Farooq Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, from India and Pakistan, have urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Pakistani counterpart Shehbaz Sharif to revive bilateral dialogue and restore normal ties.

Among the signatories are former RAW chief A S Dulat, Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha, former diplomat Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, former Union minister Mani Shankar Aiyar, former Pakistan foreign minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, besides several retired diplomats and civil society members.

Trade talks with US in final stage, India to get competitive edge: Piyush Goyal



New Delhi, July 2 (GNS): The India-US bilateral trade agreement (BTA) talks have entered the final stage, with most key issues having been sorted out and both sides working towards a deal that gives New Delhi an advantage over its competitors, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday.

Speaking at the NDTV Indo-Japan Strategic Dialogue, Goyal said he does not foresee any major hurdles in concluding the US trade agreement despite recent legal and policy developments in Washington.

"We don't see any difficulties with the US," Goyal said, adding that "concessions and other elements have largely been finalised." He said India has consistently sought preferential market access over competing nations, a position that has been understood by the US administration. Following the US Supreme Court's decision to strike down tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), Goyal said Washington is now working on an alternative mechanism that would preserve India's competitive advantage. He added that US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer has acknowledged India's position during the negotiations. Despite higher tariffs, India's exports to the US have remained resilient. Goyal said bilateral trade has continued to grow and projected that India's merchandise exports in the April-June quarter will rise about 15 per cent year-on-year.

Goyal further stated that the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will take effect on July 15, opening up new opportunities for Indian exporters. Besides, the legal scrutiny of the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement is expected to conclude within 10 to 12 days, after which it will move through the approval process, he added.

Petrol, Diesel price reduction not feasible now: Puri

New Delhi, July 2 (GNS): Consumers expecting a reduction in petrol and diesel prices may have to wait longer, as Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Thursday said there is no justification for lowering retail fuel prices at this stage. Addressing the issue of fuel pricing, Puri said petrol and diesel prices have remained largely stable despite significant fluctuations in global crude oil markets.

He noted that petrol prices have increased by only 5.58 per cent over the past four years, while diesel prices have risen by 6.23 per cent during the same period. The minister said state-run oil marketing companies (OMCs) are still recovering cumulative under-recoveries of around Rs 2.18 lakh crore. He added that these companies also continue to hold fuel inventories purchased when international crude oil prices were much higher, making an immediate reduction in retail prices impractical. "So the question of bringing fuel prices down is not legitimate at this point in time," Puri said.

Highlighting the government's handling of global energy market disruptions, Puri said India has successfully protected consumers from much of the volatility caused by international crude oil prices.

'Don't just adopt AI, use it intelligently': Jitendra Singh

Jaipur, June 2 (GNS): The 29th National e-Governance Conference (NeGC) concluded successfully on Thursday with Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, Jitendra Singh, urging the governments to focus not only on adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI) but also on using it intelligently to strengthen governance.

Addressing the valedictory session and National e-Governance Awards 2026 ceremony at the Rajasthan International Centre (RIC), MoS Singh congratulated the organisers and said the active participation of all states and Union Territories had made the conference more comprehensive and impactful. He said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Centre has adopted a futuristic approach to governance, continuously leveraging emerging technologies to improve transparency, efficiency and public service delivery.

MoS Singh noted that the repeal of obsolete laws has significantly simplified administrative processes and made governance more transparent and effective.

Referring to initiatives such as Mission Karmayogi and Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), the MoS said India's governance reforms have gained international recognition, with countries including Mauritius, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and South Africa adopting several Indian e-governance and administrative innovations.

Highlighting Rajasthan's progress in digital governance, MoS Singh added that the state has emerged as a leader in implementing e-governance initiatives.

Go beyond quick fix to fight deepfakes

Dinesh C Sharma

THE Central government has published draft rules for the regulation of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated digital content. The draft extends the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules issued in 2021 to cover 'synthetically generated information'. Such information or content has been defined as something which is artificially or algorithmically created, generated, modified or altered using a computer resource to make it reasonably appear as authentic or true.

The rules have been framed specifically to address the menace of deepfake videos, audio and synthetic media, which have flooded social platforms in recent months and demonstrated the potential of generative AI to create convincing falsehoods. Such content depicts individuals in acts or statements they never made, such as a recording of a purported telephonic conversation between US President Trump and India's Prime Minister Modi or a fake clip of the popular show Kaun Banega Crorepati, hosted by Amitabh Bachchan.

AI-generated deepfakes are often used to spread misinformation, damage someone's reputation or commit financial fraud. Political parties can use them to influence voters during elections. The response of government agencies so far has been to issue advisories to social media platforms and 'significant social media intermediaries' (SSMIs) against what it feels is 'objectionable' content. The SSMIs are supposed to have a compliance system to deal with complaints and regulatory requirements. The new set of rules seeks to provide a legal basis for labelling, traceability and accountability related to synthetically generated information. This will be done by making it binding for all AI-generated content to be labelled through metadata embedding so that synthetically generated or modified information can be distinguished from authentic content. Social media intermediaries will be accountable for verifying and flagging synthetic information.

The proposed measures thus cover not only social media platforms and intermediaries but also AI companies and tools that offer technologies for enabling the creation or modification of synthetically generated information. AI tool companies will have to ensure that such information is labelled or embedded with a permanent, unique metadata or identifier.

Like the statutory health warning on tobacco products, the label on synthetic content will have to be displayed prominently, covering at least 10 per cent of the surface area of a visual display or the initial 10 per cent of the duration in the case of audio content. Social media platforms will be required to ask users to declare if the information they are uploading is synthetically generated, and the platform will have to deploy 'reasonable and proportionate' technical measures to verify such declarations. If online platforms remove or block access to AI-generated or other problematic content in good faith, they will not lose legal protection granted under the Information Technology Act.

Regulating any kind of AI is proving to be a nightmare for regulators and governments around the world because of the very nature and organisation of this technology. The AI content food chain is complex and multi-layered. It is not just AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini or Dall-E but also several intermediaries and platforms that enable, permit or facilitate the creation or sharing of AI-generated content like AI art generators, voice-cloning tools, deepfake apps; embedded tools in social media or video platforms where users upload AI-generated material; chatbots or content creation tools that produce AI text or visuals. Except for major social media players like Facebook, Instagram, X and LinkedIn, which have a physical presence in India, most players in the AI food chain are based elsewhere and it may be hard to subject them to Indian regulations.

The rules on deepfakes appear to have been drafted in a hurry. They look more of a knee-jerk reaction to the recent spate of deepfake videos involving political leaders rather than a well-thought-out regulatory step to protect the online rights of citizens. The focus of the rules is entirely on 'taking down' of deepfakes considered objectionable, and holding social media platforms responsible for such content. Instead, the regulation must be designed to protect everyone's right to their physical features as well as their voice. Film stars in India are specifically seeking this right to prevent unauthorised AI representation of their faces and voices. Regulators the world over are responding to the deepfake challenge in different ways. Denmark proposes to treat a person's unique likeness as intellectual property for all citizens, not just celebrities.

Indo-Afghan strategic renewal

Prof. D. Mukherjee

The Taliban's return to power in August 2021, after the U.S. withdrawal under the Doha Accord, transformed South Asia's strategic and emotional landscape. For Mother India, this demanded careful recalibration of Afghan policy, balancing security with historic ties. India-Afghanistan relations transcend politics, rooted in civilizational continuity and cultural affinity, exemplified by Tagore's Kabuliwala. Yet, Pakistan's interventions since 1947 have exploited Afghan territory to harm India through terror and subversion. The Taliban's resurgence brings both risk and opportunity. With some leaders tied to Pakistan, Bharat Mata must engage cautiously, guided by prudence and 'VasudhaivaKutumbakam', acting as a guardian to foster regional stability. This discourse arises from India's reflection, balancing history and strategy with wisdom. Its aim is to reassess policy toward Taliban-ruled Afghanistan while reaffirming her civilizational duty. Having faced Pakistan's manipulations and Afghan fighters' misuse, India seeks a path that safeguards her children and preserves ties with Afghans. Drawing lessons from the past and interpreting Kabul's intentions, her engagement must blend realism with moral conviction-compassionate yet vigilant, principled yet strategic-ensuring regional stability, global harmony, and the welfare of humanity remain central.

India's engagement with Afghanistan during the 1980s and 1990s left enduring scars. Under the guise of Islamic solidarity, Pakistan's ISI turned the Mujahideen into instruments of cross-border terror, many later targeting India, particularly in the Kashmir Valley, causing loss of life and uprooting communities. The tragedies of victims like Sarla Bhat reflect this betrayal. For Mother India, the lesson is clear: trust must be earned through deeds, not words. Pakistan has long exploited Afghan instability to undermine India. Yet, India's post-2001 development efforts-roads, schools, hospitals, and dams-built genuine goodwill among Afghans. As the Taliban seeks legitimacy, India must ensure her compassion is guided by prudence, keeping strategic engagement insulated from Pakistan's deceptive influence.

The October 2025 visit of Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to India, approved by the UN on medical grounds, has significant diplomatic weight. His meetings with Deobandi scholars and madrasa representatives raise questions: is this genuine outreach to Bharat Mata or Pakistan's influence? Facing economic isolation and internal divisions, the Taliban sees India as opportunity and necessity. Mother India must respond with cautious optimism-opening humanitarian and cultural channels while conditioning formal recognition on Kabul's commitment to peace, inclusivity, and preventing terrorism. Diplomacy must remain calm, firm, and discerning.The October 17, 2025 Pakistani airstrike in Afghanistan, reportedly guided by Sirajuddin Haqqani, highlights growing Islamabad-Kabul tensions. Civilian casualties reflect Taliban defiance of Pakistan. For India, it shows deceitful alliances fail and offers a chance to engage Kabul independently. Yet instability risks refugee flows, arms smuggling, and renewed extremist activity along western borders. Bharat Mata must act with empathy and vigilance, using platforms like the UN and SCO to support Afghan sovereignty, condemn Pakistan, and reinforce her strategic and moral stabilizing role.

To counter Pakistan's disruptive ambitions, Mother India envisions the AII Axis linking Afghanistan, India, and Iran-a corridor of trade, energy, and cooperation bypassing Pakistan. The Chabahar Port, co-developed by India and Iran, offers Afghanistan reconstruction opportunities and India access to Central Asia. With Tehran seeking revival and Kabul striving for legitimacy, Bharat Mata finds strategic partners. Her diplomacy, rooted in non-alignment and respect, can make this alliance a model of pragmatic peace, weaving history, commerce, and culture to stabilize the region and curb extremism. India's diplomatic strength lies in balancing faith with freedom. Across the Muslim world, she champions democracy, tolerance, and respect, exposing Pakistan's misuse of religion. The Indonesian President's UN call for coexistence and rejection of extremism aligns with India's vision. By strengthening ties with Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other progressive nations, Bharat Mata counters Pakistan's duplicity. Simultaneously, she engages the United States strategically.

When corruption becomes the cost of life

India, celebrated for its relentless growth, its rising GDP, and its swelling demographic dividend of over 140 crore people, offers an impressive feat of numbers and optimism, served with some inconvenient truths. A country as diverse, managing with wealth inequality, yet working hard on lifting its poor with targeted welfare schemes and giving them a chance at dignity.

But if there is one adversary we consistently fail to conquer, it is corruption, so deeply rooted in governance that our attempts at change are stuck in a loop, returning only familiar disappointment. Take the Lokpal, our designated guardian against corruption. What makes headlines? Not convictions, but an open tender inviting bids for BMWs worth `70 lakh each for their seven-member body that was formed to bring more accountability and to uphold justice. An RTI by Ajoy Bose reveals, between inception and March 2023, the Lokpal received over 6,200 complaints, disposed of most, but didn't secure a single conviction.

No surprise then, the one time the institution grabbed national attention was when parliamentarian Mahua Moitra was accused and "investigated." Recently, front-page news recounted the tragic deaths of 24 infants in Madhya Pradesh, victims of contaminated cough syrup, their organs failing before their lives had a chance to unfold. The tragedy faded and, as always, we moved on from headlines and turned away from accountability for the corrupt system. India's spirit of moving on from one tragedy to another deserves an acknowledgement of its own.

Our officials, meanwhile, offer indifference; a Chief Minister, when asked a question by a local journalist, said he had already spoken on the issue a day prior, so he didn't feel it was important enough to be answered again. The state Government has shielded the Health Minister from taking any responsibility, drug controllers remain comfortably protected in their posts, and any blame is deflected to doctors and junior staff, as if those at the bottom bear the weight for crimes rooted above. We also saw politics play out with the state blaming Tamil Nadu for the deaths, but no one will ask the question as to how these syrups passed the drug quality test. But this pattern isn't new.

Three years ago, in Gambia, 70 children under the age of three fell to the same fate after consuming a contaminated cough syrup from an Indian manufacturer. The contaminant in question is diethylene glycol, or DEG, an industrial solvent commonly used in antifreeze, paints, brake fluids, and plastics. While cough syrups need solvents too, the preferred choice lies with glycerine, a safer and approved solvent for pharmaceutical use. With DEG being cheaper over pharma-grade glycerine, these companies, to make money and keep the drug authorities' nexus well-greased, make the hazardous choice over the lives of humans. The adulteration isn't some inadvertent result of negligence or poor hygiene. This is a deliberate malpractice to cut costs. The want of Indians for the best bargain or cheap price knows no bounds, even venturing into bargaining with the lives of infants. Why aren't we angrier back home? Corruption permeates every junction: A 2023 accusation outlined how a state drug controller was paid INR 5 crore to "switch samples," leading to unsafe medicines passing into the hands of the vulnerable. Marion Pharmaceuticals made the WHO's medical alerts, yet its products kept streaming into overseas markets unhindered.

When 18 Uzbek children died from the same adulterated syrup, only Uzbek courts delivered strong sentencing. In India, regulatory action is fleeting; licences suspended, then quietly restored, as headlines pile atop each other, burying accountability deeper each month. This is where anger should ignite, but more often, resignation sets in. We are a country used to calamity followed by distraction, tragedy followed by routine.

The desire for cheapness, the indifference to systemic rot — these habits have consequences counted in graves, not rupees. Yet the rhetoric remains unchanged: someone else's problem, someone else's fault. The Indian Government is truly quite adept, that is, burying accountability under a pile of rubble disguised as news. What is the answer, then? It's in demanding more — from our regulators, our ministers, and ourselves. Will we continue to allow apathy and privilege to outlast outrage and justice? Or will we finally refuse to let infant deaths, corrupt deals, and broken promises become yesterday's forgotten news? The problem, sadly, is not confined to pharmaceuticals alone. Sometimes, what's at stake is simply honesty in the labelling of lifesaving products, a battle fought for years by a Hyderabad doctor who, after a decade of painstaking advocacy, was brought to tears when the FSSAI finally banned misleading "ORS" labels on spurious drinks.

For ten long years, this one doctor persisted, refusing to let companies play fast and loose with public trust and the health of children suffering from dehydration. Her victory, when it came, was bittersweet; FSSAI's action felt like justice not just for her, but for every parent tricked by clever packaging and corporate obfuscation. But in India, no win is ever absolute.

Almost as quickly as the ban arrived, the respite was snatched away by a swift order from the Delhi High Court, granting a stay that let the misleading labels creep back onto shelves once again. Is it any wonder that those who fight for public health in India are haunted by exhaustion and frustration just as much as by tragedy? How long can a single whistle-blower persist when the rules keep changing and when victories remain so fragile? India's real strength should come from not just surviving its contradictions but resolving them. It's time the country asks itself whether progress means more than the sum of GDP digits and the churn of new schemes. Dignity and safety, especially for the youngest and weakest, must not be negotiable, nor should truth be buried beneath convenience. In the end, the choice is collective —another cycle of silence, or a new demand for consequence and care. Will we allow tragedy to simply "pass"? The answer, once we, as a country, care enough to know, would probably change the entire story itself. Another pressing concern is the capacity and independence of India's regulatory institutions. Drug testing laboratories, state drug control departments and enforcement agencies require greater investment, modern infrastructure and trained personnel to ensure medicines meet quality standards before reaching the public. Transparent inspections, time-bound investigations and public disclosure of regulatory actions can help rebuild confidence in the healthcare system. Stronger coordination between the Centre and the states is equally essential to prevent unsafe products from slipping through the cracks.

Technology can also play a transformative role in improving accountability. Digital track-and-trace systems for pharmaceutical products, QR code-based verification, and real-time monitoring of manufacturing and distribution can make it easier to identify defective batches and initiate swift recalls. At the same time, protecting whistleblowers, encouraging independent audits and imposing stringent penalties on companies and officials found guilty of malpractice would send a clear message that public health cannot be compromised for profit. Ultimately, the fight against corruption and regulatory failure is not solely the responsibility of governments or courts. Civil society, healthcare professionals, the media and citizens all have a role in demanding transparency and refusing to normalise preventable tragedies. Sustainable progress is measured not only by economic growth but also by the safety of essential services, the integrity of public institutions and the confidence that every child, patient and family can place in the systems meant to protect them.

This year, India's exports will be higher than last year: Union Minister Piyush Goyal

New Delhi, July 2 (GNS): Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Friday that India's exports this year will be higher than last year, reflecting the growing competitiveness and resilience of the domestic industry, while the government is reaching out to partner countries across the globe to open up new opportunities.

Addressing the 'Bharat Buildcon 2026' conference here, Goyal highlighted India's expanding network of free trade agreements (FTAs) with developed countries, including Australia, the UAE, Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland and the UK, with negotiations ongoing with the European Union (EU) and others. These agreements will further open global opportunities for Indian industries such as construction, steel, and allied sectors, the minister pointed out.

India's total exports for FY25 reached an all-time high of approximately $825 billion, marking a significant growth of about 6.01 per cent over the previous fiscal.

Goyal further highlighted that several developed countries are eager to expand trade relations with India, noting that nations such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have expressed keen interest in entering into FTAs with India.

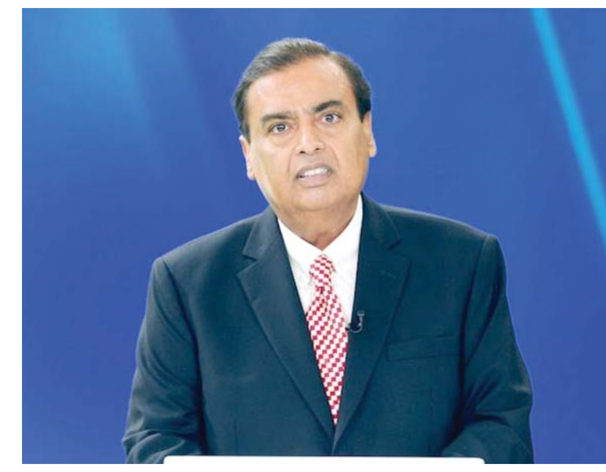
The minister's assurance came in the backdrop of the hike in US tariffs on Indian exports to 50 per cent as a punitive step for buying Russian oil. Goyal said the government is committed to ensuring that industry does not face unnecessary stress or difficulties arising from unilateral actions by some countries. He urged industry representatives to highlight sectors where alternative markets are required, assuring that the Commerce Ministry is reaching out to partners across the globe to open up new opportunities.

He also highlighted the vast export potential in steel and iron ore, noting that India could export 15 million tonnes of steel annually, strengthening its export basket with high-quality, competitively priced products.

The minister also drew attention to the acute housing shortage in Australia, where nearly 1 million homes are required. He invited Indian businesses, workers, and experts to seize this opportunity, stating that Australia is open to financial collaboration, technical expertise, and workforce support from India. Training and certification opportunities are also being offered so Indian professionals can meet Australian standards. "If we miss this opportunity, we will have only ourselves to blame," he remarked, calling it a potential game-changer for India's construction and financial sectors. Goyal emphasised that, alongside global outreach, boosting domestic consumption remains a priority. The upcoming GST Council meeting, he noted, is expected to provide measures that will quickly stimulate demand and give a strong boost to domestic manufacturing.

The Minister said the government is focused on supporting industry so that no sector is left behind—whether in accessing international markets or strengthening domestic opportunities. He also encouraged active participation in Quality Control Orders (QCOs) to ensure India emerges as a trusted supplier of high-quality products.

Reliance Jio to float IPO in first half of 2026: Mukesh Ambani



Mumbai, , July 2 (GNS): Reliance Industries Limited's (RIL) telecom arm Reliance Jio will launch its initial public offering (IPO) in the first half of 2026, company Chairman and Managing Director Mukesh Ambani announced on Friday. "Today, it is my proud privilege to announce that Jio is making all arrangements to file its IPO," Mukesh Ambani said at the company's 48th Annual General Meeting. The conglomerate is aiming to list Jio by the first half of 2026, subject to all necessary approvals, he stated. Ambani informed that Jio has surpassed a 500 million customer base ahead of completing 10 years of operation.

"Just a week from now, Jio will enter its 10th year of service to the nation. Looking back, these years have been the most glorious in India's digital history," he said.

He informed shareholders that the Jio family has crossed 500 million customers, symbolising unwavering trust and support. Jio's bold Deep-Tech initiatives sparked India's technological revolution and became the backbone of our Prime Minister's Digital India Mission, the RIL Chairman said. Listing the achievement he said, Jio made voice calls free from anywhere to everywhere in India, the telecom provider made it a habit for common Indians to watch videos on their mobile and do digital payments, and Jio laid the foundation for India's Digital Public Infrastructure such as Aadhaar, UPI, Jan Dhan, Direct Bank Transfer, and empowered a confident new generation.

As a result of these achievements, the financial performance of Jio is scaling new heights with every passing year. "Jio's revenue was Rs 1,28,218 crore ($15.0 billion), a growth of 17 per cent YoY in FY-25; and EBITDA was Rs 64,170 crore ($7.5 billion). These figures are a testimony to the enormous value Jio has already created, and even greater value it is destined to create," said Ambani.

Youth should lead India's next chapter as 'Vishwaguru Bharat': Jyotiraditya Scindia

New Delhi, July 2 (GNS): (UNI) Union Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Friday made a stirring call to the youth to lead India's next chapter as 'Vishwaguru Bharat.' Addressing the gathering at ESYA, the tech fest of IIIT-Delhi, he invoked India's grand legacy as a global knowledge hub.

"From Aryabhata's zero, to advances in medical science and surgery, to Nalanda and Takshashila that drew seekers from across the world, this quest for knowledge is in our DNA. The largest library at Harvard pales in comparison to Nalanda. That spark still lies within us," said Scindia. Calling the Tech Fest a 'launchpad to enact bold dreams,' Scindia stressed that India's rise rests on the shoulders of its youth.

On technology, the minister reiterated the role of AI, saying what IT did 40 years ago, AI will do today but the task is not just to build AI, it is to build 'Responsible AI for All' and it must elevate humanity, not dominate it.

The Minister highlighted India's growing leadership in frontier technologies. The Telecom Technology Development Fund (TTDF) has already invested in over 120 futuristic projects spanning quantum computing, terahertz communication, bio-nano systems, indigenous chipsets, and encrypted routers. The minister reaffirmed India's goal to emerge as a global leader in 6G and contribute at least 10 per cent of global patents by 2030 and the heart of this ambitious target lies within the students of India. Scindia reminded students that India's rise is anchored in its civilisational values, adding that "We are a country that has never raised war, that believes in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam." He urged the students to build for Bharat with solutions for the farmer awaiting precision agriculture, the child in a digital classroom, the patient in a small town relying on tele-health.

India's GDP growth accelerates to 7.8 pc in April-June quarter

New Delhi, July 2 (GNS): India's GDP growth accelerated to a robust 7.8 per cent in the first quarter (April-June) of the current financial year compared to the growth of 6.5 per cent during same quarter of FY 2024-25, official figures released by the Ministry of Statistics showed

The agriculture sector bounced back with a strong growth rate of 3.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2025-26, as compared to the growth rate of 1.5 per cent registered in the first quarter of the last financial year when farm output was hit by an erratic monsoon. The manufacturing sector posted a growth 7.7 per cent and the construction sector grew by 7.6 per cent. The growth rate of the tertiary sector which includes services shot up to 9.3 per cent during the first quarter of 2025-26 compared to the corresponding figure of 6.8 per cent in Q1 of FY 2024-25.

Gross Fixed Capital Formation, which reflects the amount of investment being made in the economy, went up to 7.8 per cent during the quarter from the corresponding figure of 6.7 per cent in the same quarter of the previous financial year.. The government's final consumption expenditure (GFCE) registered an increase of 9.7 per cent growth rate in nominal terms during Q1 of FY 2025-26, compared to the growth rate of 4 in Q1 of FY 2024-25 . Real private final consumption expenditure clocked a per cent growth rate during Q1 of FY 2025-26 as compared to the 8.3 per cent in the same period of the previous financial year. Apart from the strong performance of the agriculture sector, the massive investments by the government in big ticket infrastructure projects such the highways, railways, ports and airports have helped to drive up the growth rate as India continues to be the fastest growing economy amid the global slowdown.

Centre transfers over Rs 4.28 lakh cr as tax revenue to states

New Delhi, , July 2 (GNS): The Central government has received Rs 10,95,209 crore from April to July of the current financial year, which comprises 31.3 per cent of the corresponding budget estimates (BE) for 2025-26, according to data released by the Finance Ministry. Of this, a sum of Rs 6,61,812 crore constitutes net tax revenue to the Centre, Rs 4,03,608 crore is non-tax revenue, and Rs 29,789 crore is part of non-debt capital receipts. The Centre has transferred Rs 4,28,544 crore to state governments as devolution of share of taxes during this period, which is Rs 61,914 crore higher than the previous year, the Finance Ministry said.

Total Expenditure incurred by the Centre during this period is Rs 15,63,625 crore, which constitutes 30.9 per cent of the corresponding BE 2025-26. Out of this total amount, Rs 12,16,699 crore is on the revenue account and Rs 3,46,926 crore is on the capital account, which is spent on large infrastructure projects. Interest payments make up Rs 4,46,690 crore of the total revenue expenditure, while major subsidies account for Rs 1,13,592 crore.

The government's capital expenditure on big-ticket infrastructure projects in the highways, railways, ports and power sectors has crossed Rs 3.5 lakh crore compared to Rs 2.6 lakh crore a year ago. This augurs well for the economy as these infrastructure projects push up the growth rate and have a multiplier effect on creating more jobs and incomes. The government's fiscal deficit is also well under control at 29.9 per cent of the budget estimate fixed for the full fiscal year 2025-26.

A declining fiscal deficit reflects the strengthening of the fundamentals of the economy and paves the way for growth with price stability. It leads to a reduction in borrowing by the government, thus leaving more funds in the banking sector for lending to corporates and consumers, which leads to higher economic growth.

India's broadband users cross 984 million in July

New Delhi, , July 2 (GNS): India's broadband subscriber base grew from 979.71 million at the end of June to 984.69 million at the end of July, marking a monthly growth of 0.51 per cent, the government said on Friday.

The growth was led by mobile broadband services, which continue to dominate with 930.41 million users, followed by fixed wired broadband at 45.49 million and fixed wireless broadband at 8.79 million.

While mobile broadband grew 0.39 per cent, wired broadband saw a higher monthly growth of 1.80 per cent, and fixed wireless broadband registered the fastest rise at 7.09 per cent during July. The largest broadband providers in the country include Bharti Airtel at 307.07 million subscribers, Vodafone Idea at 127.58 million, BSNL at 34.27 million and Atria Convergence Technologies at 2.34 million. In the wireline segment, subscribers rose to 48.11 million in July from 47.49 million a month earlier, registering a growth of 1.32 per cent. BSNL, MTNL and APSFL together held about 20.5 per cent of this market. The wireless subscriber base, including mobile and 5G fixed wireless access (FWA), also grew slightly to 1,171.91 million in July from 1,170.88 million in June. While urban subscriptions increased by 0.50 per cent to 641.03 million, rural subscriptions fell by 0.40 per cent to 530.88 million.

The government also said that India received 15.41 million requests for mobile number portability (MNP) during July. With 984.69 million broadband connections and over 1.22 billion total telephone subscribers, India continues to consolidate its position as the world's second-largest telecom market, driven by mobile data usage, growing fixed broadband adoption, and rapid 5G expansion.

Paytm clarifies on Google Play alert, no issues with Paytm UPI

New Delhi, , July 2 (GNS): Financial services major Paytm on Friday clarified that Google Play's recent notification on unified payments interface (UPI) handle changes was incomplete and may have created confusion. The company emphasised that there is no disruption to UPI payments on Paytm and both consumer and merchant transactions remain seamless. The update is relevant only for recurring payments such as subscription billing. "This means that if a user was paying for YouTube Premium or Google One storage or to any recurring platform through Paytm UPI, they will simply need to change their old @paytm handle to the new handle linked to their bank which is @pthdfc, @ptaxis, @ptyes or @ptsbi," Paytm explained.

For example, if a UPI ID was abcd@paytm, it will now be abcd@pthdfc (or as per the bank). One-time UPI payments are not impacted and continue as usual. Paytm noted that this transition is part of its migration to new UPI handles after receiving approval from the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to operate as a Third Party Application Provider (TPAP). The deadline to complete the update for recurring mandates is August 31, 2025, which is why Google Play issued its alert. Reassuring customers, Paytm said this is a simple update to ensure uninterrupted recurring payments while all other UPI transactions on the app continue without any change.

Paytm reported a profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 123 crore in Q1 FY26, while the company's operating revenue grew 28 per cent year-on-year (YoY) to Rs 1,918 crore. For the June-ending quarter, EBITDA stood at Rs 72 crore, underscoring Paytm's disciplined approach towards cost structure and driving growth and efficiency through embedded AI capabilities. Paytm has extended its leadership in India's merchant payments landscape, as it continues to add new device subscriptions across MSMEs and enterprises.

DoP partners with MapmyIndia to build standardised digital addressing system

New Delhi, July 2 (GNS): By integrating with MapmyIndia's mapping platform, we are creating a standardised digital addressing system that will benefit millions of citizens and strengthen India's digital infrastructure for efficient service delivery, Harpreet Singh, Member (Operations), Department of Posts (DoP), said on Friday after the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between DoP and MapmyIndia - Mappls in the national capital. The partnership aims to boost the Department of Posts' Digital Address Code initiative, DIGIPIN, by making it more accessible and user-friendly. Under the agreement, MapmyIndia will provide its base maps to be integrated into the Know Your DIGIPIN application.

This will allow users to generate accurate DIGIPINs based on their geographic location and improve visibility across platforms. DIGIPIN will also be embedded into the Mappls app, enabling citizens to search, identify, and navigate to locations using their digital addresses. Additionally, MapmyIndia will allocate DIGIPINs to addresses already present in its database, thereby strengthening location-based services and ensuring wider adoption of the system. Rakesh Verma, Co-founder and CMD of MapmyIndia Mappls, said the collaboration would pave the way for a fully indigenous National Digital Addressing System.

"MapmyIndia Mappls is proud to join hands with The Department of Posts to develop a fully indigenous National Digital Addressing System," Verma said.

He added that integrating the MapmyIndia suite of APIs and SDKs with the Department.

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HYDERABAD, TELANGANA

TG cabinet approves 6,278 health posts, free meals for students & staff, Rs 7,345 cr Musi Project

Hyderabad, July 2 (GNS) The Telangana Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, on Thursday approved a series of welfare, infrastructure and healthcare initiatives, including the creation of 6,278 posts in the Health Department, extension of free meals to students and school staff, and the Rs 7,345-crore first phase of the Musi Riverfront Development Project.

Briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting at the Secretariat, Revenue, Information and Public Relations Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy said the Cabinet also deliberated extensively on the Centre's changes to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

He alleged that the NDA government had implemented changes despite opposition from states and the Telangana Assembly, which had earlier passed a unanimous resolution against them. He said the state would comply with the new provisions as there was no alternative but would pursue legal remedies against the Centre's decision.

The Cabinet approved the extension of the mid-day meal programme, breakfast and milk to all students studying up to Class XII in government schools and junior colleges. The same facilities will also be provided free of cost to nearly 1.5 lakh teachers, lecturers and other staff. To strengthen healthcare infrastructure, the Cabinet sanctioned 6,278 new posts for the Telangana Institute of Medical Sciences (TIMS) Super Speciality Hospital and TIMS hospitals at Sanathnagar, LB Nagar and Alwal, besides the Warangal Super Speciality Hospital.

It also decided that treatment under the Chief Minister's Relief Fund would be extended to these hospitals through Letters of Credit (LOCs). The Cabinet also approved Rs 7,345 crore for the first phase of the Musi Riverfront Development Project covering a 21-km stretch from Gandhi Sarovar. The project aims to address sewage and flooding issues while improving urban connectivity through riverbank roads.

Among other decisions, the Cabinet approved land allocations for large integrated warehouses in Warangal district, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas in Mahabubabad and Suryapet districts, a Kendriya Vidyalaya in Jagtial, and several other Central and State government institutions.

Congress will not be intimidated by BRS 'Thuggery', says Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy

Hyderabad, July 2 (GNS) Telangana Revenue, Housing and Information & Public Relations Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy on Thursday said the Congress government would not be intimidated by what he termed the "thuggery" of the BRS, while accusing the opposition party of making baseless allegations of corruption against the government. Responding to media queries during an event, Ponguleti alleged that BRS leaders, who had "siphoned off crores of rupees" during their tenure, were still under the illusion that they remained in power or would soon return to office.

He said Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, ministers and MLAs had already exposed the alleged corruption of the previous BRS government on the floor of the Assembly. Despite this, he alleged, BRS leaders continued to level reckless and unfounded accusations against the Congress government in an attempt to tarnish its image. Describing the opposition's allegations as "absurd", Ponguleti said it was illogical to claim that corruption worth three or four times the value of a tender had taken place.

He warned that if the BRS continued with such politics, it might not even retain the status of the principal opposition in the future.

Referring to the recent challenge for a public discussion on Gurukul procurement, the minister claimed that Congress ministers had accepted the challenge and reached the venue, but the BRS leaders failed to turn up. "Our ministers waited there for an hour and addressed the media before leaving. We also know what they are likely to say in the Assembly, and we will finalise a date for that discussion as well," Ponguleti said. Ponguleti said the Congress government remained committed to transparency and accountability in governance, asserting that every major decision and public expenditure would withstand scrutiny.

TGSRTC suspends JBM electric bus services pending safety clearance

Hyderabad, July 2 (GNS) The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC) has temporarily suspended the operation of all JBM electric buses across the state, placing passenger safety above all else following recurring high-voltage battery-related incidents.

The decision comes in the wake of a fresh incident involving a JBM electric bus, even before the final report on the June 21 bus fire near Alugunur in Karimnagar district was received.

TGSRTC has asked JBM to submit a comprehensive report covering the causes of the incidents, permanent remedial measures, battery fitness certification and the establishment of a Command Control Centre at Hyderabad Bus Bhavan to monitor the fleet. In response, JBM has deployed its technical team along with battery experts from China to investigate the incidents and recommend preventive measures.

The services of JBM electric buses would resume only after the company's technical team certifies the vehicles as "Fit for Operation" and a team of senior TGSRTC officials is satisfied that all prescribed safety standards and conditions have been fully complied with. Reiterating that passenger safety remains its top priority, TGSRTC said it would not compromise on safety standards in public transport and would take all necessary precautions before restoring the electric bus services, an official statement from GSRTC said on Thursday.

Kavitha detained during protest demanding land for Telangana martyrs' families

Hyderabad, July 2 (GNS) Police detained Telangana Rakshana Sena (TRS) president Kalvakuntla Kavitha for staging a protest demanding land for families of Telangana martyrs at Boduppal near Hyderabad on Thursday.

Police foiled the protest called by TRS, demanding that the Congress government fulfil its promise of allotting land to Telangana activists who participated and laid down their lives during the statehood movement.

Hundreds of workers of TRS had reached Boduppal in Medchal Malkajgiri district since early morning to participate in the protest.

Police denied permission for the protest and removed the tents erected by TRS cadres. Police detained the protestors. Tension prevailed when Kavitha, with her supporters, reached Medipally and participated in a puja at the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) layout.

A large number of police personnel deployed there tried to disperse the protestors, including women.

As the protestors resisted, a scuffle broke out between the two sides. Police personnel physically lifted Kavitha to the police vehicle. She was later shifted to Bollarum police station.

The TRS leader told the media that the countdown has begun for the Congress government. She said they were arrested only for demanding that the Congress government implement the promise that house sites of 250 square yards will be allotted to each family of the Telangana martyrs.

TRS leaders condemned the arrests and alleged highhandedness by the police.

They recalled that the Congress had also promised a monthly honorary pension of Rs 25,000 for the parents or spouse of the martyrs and a government job for one family member.

They said Congress made the promises, but after coming to power, forgot them. They alleged that the government is trying to suppress voices questioning it, rather than fulfilling its promises. They vowed not to rest till the government allots 250 square yards to the families of martyrs.

The TRS leaders said they would expose the Congress government's betrayal before the people. They made it clear that arrests would not deter them from raising their voice.

BRS leaders detained as debate challenges heighten political tension in Hyderabad

Hyderabad, July 1 (GNS) Tension prevailed at BRS headquarters Telangana Bhavan here on Thursday as police detained former minister T. Harish Rao and other BRS leaders as they were heading to Gun Park for a debate with state ministers on the alleged irregularities in Gurukul residential school tenders. There was high political drama in Hyderabad as three ministers reached the Telangana Martyrs' Memorial (Gun Park) for a debate with Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leaders.

However, police detained former ministers Harish Rao and V. Srinivas Goud, BRS general secretary R.S. Praveen Kumar and other leaders as they were leaving for Gun Park from Telangana Bhavan. The challenges and counter-challenges by the leaders of ruling Congress and main Opposition BRS for a debate on Telangana's debt burden and the alleged irregularities

in Gurukul residential school tenders had heightened the political tension since Thursday morning. BRS working president K.T. Rama Rao had also reached Telangana Bhavan and waited for excise and tourism minister Jupally Krishna Rao, who had dared the BRS leader for a debate on the state's debt burden.

However, Krishna Rao told media on Thursday morning that he was ready for a debate at Gun Park. After attending a programme at Congress headquarters Gandhi Bhavan, the minister reached Gun Park and spoke to media persons.

Krishna Rao said that he was ready for a debate on the debts taken during the BRS regime. He claimed that the BRS government increased the state's debts by Rs.7.3 crore during its 10-year rule.

The BRS leaders, on the other hand, slammed the leaders for running away from the debate by using police to detain them even as they had accepted their challenge for debate and were heading for Gun Park.

Rama Rao told the media at Telangana Bhavan that this was not the first time that Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy ran away from debate. He recalled that earlier he had reached Press Club for debate with the Chief Minister on farmers' issues but he failed to turn up.

India's first privately developed orbital rocket Vikram-1 to launch between July 12 & Aug 4

Hyderabad, July 1 (GNS) Hyderabad-based private space launch company Skyroot Aerospace on Thursday announced that the maiden test flight of its Vikram-1 launch vehicle, India's first privately developed orbital-class rocket, will take place during a launch window opening July 12 and extending until August 4. In a release, the company said Mission Aagaman is targeted for launch no earlier than July 12, subject to the successful completion of vehicle assembly and testing at Satish Dhawan Space Centre, besides favourable weather, safety and range clearance.

The mission marks a significant milestone for India's private space sector, with Vikram-1 set to become the country's first privately developed rocket to attempt placing payloads into orbit. "This mission is designed to capture real in-flight performance data across every phase of the vehicle's ascent. The data will validate our designs and support the development of a reliable, high-cadence commercial launch programme. The moment Vikram-1 lifts off, India's private space industry will cross a threshold it has never crossed before," said Pawan Kumar Chandana, Co-founder and CEO of Skyroot Aerospace.

Mission Aagaman follows the successful launch of Vikram-S, which became the first privately built rocket to reach space from Indian soil in November 2022.

Skyroot said the maiden orbital mission will be a partially commercial flight, carrying payloads for a mix of domestic and international customers. The company plans to begin full-fledged commercial launches after one or two successful orbital demonstration missions.

According to the company, all stages of Vikram-1 have been integrated and stacked at the launch pad. The mission will validate key systems, including propulsion, stage separation, guidance, navigation and control, generating critical flight data to support the vehicle's commercial certification.

Standing about seven storeys tall, Vikram-1 is a multistage launch vehicle built using an all-carbon composite structure and powered by indigenously developed propulsion systems, including 3D-printed rocket engines and high-thrust solid rocket motors.

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