

PM Modi chairs CCS meeting on West Asia

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday discussed with a group of senior ministers the prevailing geo-political situation in West Asia and measures to keep supply chains uninterrupted despite conflicts surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, the Black Sea, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden.

The extended Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting, chaired by the prime minister, was attended by permanent members, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, as well as special invitees, Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister JP Nadda, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri, official sources said.

Earlier, a high-level meeting of Union ministers, including Amit Shah, ► P11

Parliament passes Anti-Paper Leak Bill Vande Mataram: National song gets legal protection

NEW DELHI: Vande Mataram, the national song that has stirred passions and political controversies for more than a century, received legal protection on Thursday with Parliament passing a bill making any insult to it a punishable offence, rekindling the long-running debate over its place in India's history and identity.

The government asserted that the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, grants Vande Mataram a status on par with the national anthem Jana Gana Mana under the law by extending to the national song the existing penal provisions against intentionally preventing its singing or causing disturbance during its rendition.

Such offences are punishable with imprisonment up to three years, a fine or both. A second and every subsequent conviction is punishable with imprisonment of a minimum of one year.

The bill was passed amid noisy scenes in the Lok Sabha. Responding to a brief debate in the lower house in which only two members par-

ticipated, Minister of State for Home Nityananda Rai said the Congress should have given Vande Mataram its due respect during its 76 years of rule, but instead it resorted to appeasement politics.

"For Ek Bharat, Shreshtra Bharat, we need the complete (all six stanzas) Vande Mataram song," Rai said, as he concluded his brief reply to the bill with a chant of Vande Mataram.

The bill was passed by voice vote after the two members spoke. The amendments moved by the Opposition were rejected by the House. A Raja of DMK later tore some documents and threw them towards the Well.

Earlier, DMK member K Kanimozhi opposed the bill, saying it is a "Hindutva agenda" brought masquerading as nationalism.

"It is against federalism. You cannot impose nationalism by bringing a law; the song goes against the secularism of the country. The founding fathers had the wisdom to stop only with two stanzas, but today you are trying to polarise the country by making it compulsory and making it a criminal offence if we do not sing all the six stanzas," she said.

Sambit Patra of the BJP said the Congress in its 76 years of rule did not give Vande Mataram the respect it deserved as a national song.

The national song has continued to stir heated debates every few years over its "secular" or "anti-Islamic" nature and the role it played in India's freedom ► P11

Dr Jitendra: Anti-Paper Leak Bill further fortifies legal framework



NEW DELHI: The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 reaffirms the government's policy of zero tolerance towards examination malpractices and paper leaks while ensuring that the genuine efforts of students are protected, Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, said in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

While moving the Amendment Bill, 2026, which was passed by the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, for ► P11

Tensions prevail in PoJK as clashes continue amid polls

Omar, Mehbooba condemn use of force on protestors

ISLAMABAD/SRINAGAR: Tensions prevailed in Rawalkot region in Pakistan-occupied Jammu & Kashmir (PoJK) on Thursday as clashes continued between security forces and the banned Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC).

The tensions, which have claimed several lives this week, coincide with ongoing regional elections in PoJK, with demonstrators affiliated with JAAC determined to march towards Muzaffarabad to press Islamabad to accept their demands.

The JAAC is a collective of activist groups which have been staging demonstrations for nearly two months over 12 contentious seats of the so-called legislative assembly in PoJK. It alleges that the establishment manoeuvres these seats to install a prime minister of its choosing.

India has described the elections as an attempt by Pakistan to camouflage its illegal occupation and hide its "grave" human rights violations in the region.

"India's position on this matter has been clear, consis-



tent, and well known. The entire Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, including the areas currently under Pakistan's illegal and forcible occupation, are integral and inalienable parts of India," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in Delhi on Tuesday.

"As we have stated earlier, the ongoing mass protests in Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir are the direct consequences of Pakistan's economic exploitation, its denial of the people's fundamental rights, and its administrative oppression," he said.

In PoJK, clashes between



security forces and protesters have intensified since Monday, especially in Rawalkot and Mirpur, which reportedly resulted in maximum casualties.

According to the JAAC, at least 37 men lost their lives in the clashes.

"The number of those injured remains unknown. Amid heavy gunfire, our people have continued to stand peacefully and unarmed. God willing, our peaceful struggle against oppression and injustice will continue," it said in a statement.

However, the Pakistan government denied any death of civilians saying ► P11

Police attach assets of 5 LeT handlers in Reasi

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir Police on Thursday attached the immovable properties of five alleged Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror handlers in Reasi as part of an ongoing investigation into a terror-related case, officials said.

The accused exfiltrated to Pakistan several years ago to receive training in handling arms and ammunition, they said.

"They are now working for Lashkar in Pakistan and supplying arms, ammunition and money to fuel terrorism in

Jammu and Kashmir," a senior official said.

The action was taken during the investigation of a case registered at Mahore police station under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) in 2024, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Enemy Agents Ordinance (E&IMCO), they said.

The attachment proceedings were carried out by a police team led by Mahore Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Parul Bhardwaj in the presence of the Executive Magistrate and local witnesses, they said. ► P11

Fresh batch of 1,700 devotees left for Shri Amarnathji Yatra



■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: A batch of over 1,700 devotees left Jammu base camp for 3,880-metre-high cave shrine of Shri Amarnathji in South Kashmir himalayas amid multi-tier security escort on Thursday, officials said.

More than 4.40 lakh pilgrims

have offered prayers at Lord Shiva shrine at the holy cave till now.

Twenty-third batch of 1,795 pilgrims, including 1,406 men and 389 women, left Bhagwati Nagar base camp here for Baltal in 82 vehicles around 2.50 am, they said.

With the departure of today's batch, the total number of ► P11

NH to remain closed today for widening

JAMMU: Traffic on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway will remain suspended on Friday to facilitate widening of the carriageway and removal of overhanging debris at vulnerable locations between Udhampur and Banihal, officials said on Thursday.

The decision followed requests from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI).

District magistrates of Udhampur and Ramban issued separate orders permitting the works, stating it was in the interest of the safety of commuters and drivers using the strategic highway. ► P11

No 'adverse' action against CJP protesters: Govt Order

NEW DELHI: Delhi Police will not take any adverse legal action against individuals who participated in the Cockroach Janta Party-led protest in the national capital, but those with criminal background will have to face action, according to a Delhi government order.

In its order, the home department said that with regard to arrests or detentions, if already made, the process for reviewing the arrests and releasing the arrested persons will be undertaken expeditiously.

Delhi Police has registered 13 FIRs in connection with violence during 'Chalo Sansad' march by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) on July 20. The police have also identified more than 2,800 people with criminal background who participated in the protest march.

"Government of NCT of Delhi does not propose to take any further

adverse action against the individuals involved in the protests, and the matter shall be treated as closed without any future proceedings on this account," the home department said in its order.

It stated that no adverse legal action will be taken by any of the police authorities within NCT of Delhi against those persons who have been involved in these protests.

The protection, however, shall not extend to persons having criminal antecedents, as mandated in the recent order of Supreme Court, the order said.

The July 20 violence took place during the march from Jantar Mantar to Parliament in New Delhi district.

Ahead of the protest, Delhi Police had significantly stepped up security across the New Delhi district and other sensitive locations, deploying large numbers of personnel. ► P11

Omar reviews projects; public issues in his home constituency Ganderbal

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday reviewed key development projects and public issues in the Ganderbal district.

Abdullah undertook an extensive tour of Ganderbal, his home constituency, holding a series of public engagements and chairing a review meeting to assess the progress of key developmental projects and obtain a first-hand account of issues affecting the district, an official spokesperson said. He said the chief minister inspected the ongoing



construction of the New Bus Adda Road, a vital infrastructure project expected to significantly ease traffic congestion in the area.

Stressing the importance of timely completion, Abdul-

lah directed the executing agencies to expedite the pace of work so that the road could be dedicated to the public at the earliest.

The chief minister chaired a review meeting to ► P11

— Bribery Complaint — DC Jammu suspends official, starts dismissal proceedings

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: A citizen who visited the office of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Jammu on Wednesday complained that he had to pay money to obtain his income certificate.

On verification, the complaint was found prima facie true.

It is informed that the official concerned has been placed under suspension and proceedings to dismiss him from service have been initiated.

Deputy Commissioner Dr Rakesh Minhas reiterated that documents such as an Income Certificate, Domicile Certificate, Ration Card, Fard

and other revenue records are the entitlement of every citizen and that anyone demanding money for these services is stealing from the public.

The district administration reaffirmed its commitment that every complaint will be heard, the identity of the complainant will be kept confidential and the action taken will be made public.

Citizens have been urged to report any official demanding money or gratification for any legal service, with an assurance that such complaints will be acted upon with speed.

"Do not pay. Do not adjust. Do not let it go," the DC said, adding that one complaint moved the ► P11

HC pulls up Govt for denial of permission to Olympic Judge

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh High Court has admonished the J&K administration for "damaging India's reputation as a nation" after its failure to grant timely permission prevented Paris Olympics judge Bilquis Mir from officiating at the Canoe Sprint World Cup in Hungary.

Summoning Commissioner Secretary of Sports Shahid Choudhary after the canoeist was denied permission to officiate at the event, a single-judge bench of Justice Rahul Bharti expressed its displeasure at the conduct of the govern-

ment and directed the bureaucrat to personally appear before the court to explain why the earlier court order for provisional permission to be granted to Mir was not complied with.

Hearing a petition of Indian Kayaking and Canoeing Association and also a contempt petition filed by Mir against Choudhary and Director General of Sports Council as well as the Jammu and Kashmir administration, the court directed Choudhary to appear in person on August 3 before it.

Though Choudhary, a 2009-batch IAS officer, has been transferred to Arunachal Pradesh ► P11

Govt: E20 petrol safe for vehicles

NEW DELHI: The government on Thursday defended its ethanol blending programme, saying extensive testing and large-scale field experience had found no evidence that E20 petrol causes abnormal engine wear, corrosion or reduced vehicle life, while arguing that the programme has strengthened India's energy security and helped cushion consumers from global oil price volatility.

In a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Suresh Gopi said the Ethanol ► P11

Over-speeding caused over 82K road accidents in 2025 J-K records 1,109 highway mishaps

NEW DELHI: Over-speeding caused 82,124 road accidents in India in 2025, accounting for around 16 per cent of all road accidents, Parliament was informed on Thursday.

In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said driving on the wrong side and lane indiscipline caused 4,089 accidents, followed by jumping red lights (276) and the use of mobile phones while driving (136).

The number of road accidents in India rose by 5.3 per

cent to more than 5.13 lakh in 2025, with road crashes claiming the lives of 21 people every hour, according to government data.

On average, 59 road accidents occurred every hour in the country.

"A total of 5,13,563 road accidents have been reported by police departments of states and Union Territories in the country during the calendar year 2025, claiming 1,83,382 lives," Gadkari said.

The minister also said that police departments in states and Union territories reported a total of 2,85,770

road accidents across the country during the first six months of 2026.

Among the states, Tamil Nadu reported the highest number of road accidents at 71,387, whereas Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of accident fatalities at 27,550 in 2025.

Responding to a separate question, Gadkari said electric vehicles are increasing due to their lower operational costs and zero tailpipe emissions compared to Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) vehicles.

"VAHAN data ► P11

Anurag Thakur files privilege notice against Rahul Gandhi

NEW DELHI: MP Anurag Thakur on Thursday submitted a notice of breach of privilege and contempt of the House to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla against Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi for what he termed as "use of unparliamentary and derogatory language and levelling grave and unsubstantiated allegations" against Home Minister Amit Shah.

In the three-page notice, Thakur also requested Birla to refer this matter to the Privilege Committee for a detailed enquiry and appropriate action, including a direction to Gandhi to tender an unconditional apology to the House as well as to Shah.

Referring to the proceed-

ings of the House on July 29, when the debate on the anti-paper leak bill was taking place, Thakur said Gandhi violated Rule 352 while narrating a purported conversation with protesting students.

"Use of unparliamentary and derogatory language (violation of Rule 352):-During his address to the House, Shri Rahul Gandhi, while narrating a purported conversation with a student, categorised persons into three classes, 'students', 'idiots' and 'andhbhaktis', the latter two terms being used to characterise citizens and, by clear implication, political opponents and supporters of the government."

Thakur, an MP ► P11

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