

## Global hiring activity shows positive trends in April-June quarter, as India and US lead market

New Delhi: Driven by rising demand for talent in the US and India markets, the global hiring activity showed positive trends in the April-June period (Q2 2024), with job postings increasing 7.3 per cent (year-on-year), a report showed on Monday. Cloud, artificial intelligence (AI), big data, cybersecurity and ecommerce were trending themes in hiring, while RTX, Cargill Inc, LVMH, JPMorgan Chase and Co and Marriott International were among the top recruiters during the quarter, according to data and analytics company GlobalData. The job market dynamics revealed a positive YoY trend, despite layoffs by major companies like Google, Nestle, Ford Motor, Nike, Amazon and Walmart. "Travel and tourism, foodservice, and retailing saw significant YoY growth in job postings during the quarter," the findings showed. According to Sherla Sriprada, business fundamentals analyst at GlobalData, companies are looking for people with experience in machine learn-

ing (ML) hardware platforms, AI solutions, smart robotics trial and AI capabilities. "Generative AI (GenAI) has seen a significant rise in demand for talent since April 2023. The US and India were hotspots in Q2 2024. GenAI is finding applications for next generation products and services across industries," said Sriprada.

Banking and payments and business and consumer services witnessed increased job postings, registering growth in Q2 2024 compared to Q2 2023. The knowledge of AI platforms continued to be among the key skills sought by companies during Q2 2024. "Q2 2024 demonstrates the global job market's resilience, with job postings increasing despite notable layoffs. The growing demand for skills in AI, cloud computing, and cybersecurity signals a strong move towards digital transformation," said Sriprada. As travel and tourism and retail sectors continue to grow, the emphasis on tech-savvy talent is set to influence the future of global employment,



she added. Hiring activity in India saw an 11 per cent yearly increase in July compared to the same period last year, with

retail and telecom jobs taking the lead, according to a latest report by talent platform foundit.

## Nizamabad farmer declared govt employee, denied crop loan waiver



Nizamabad: The Congress government on Monday came under severe criticism after a young farmer in Madhapur village of Makloor mandal in the district was denied the crop loan waiver on the ground that he was a government employee. Rodda Suman, who took a loan of Rs 1.92 lakh from a bank, was informed by agriculture officials that he could not avail of the benefit of crop loan waiver as he was identified as a government employee in the farmers information document. KTR writes to Kharge, Rahul accusing Congress govt of betraying TG farmers; demands full crop loan waiver A shocked Suman tried to con-

vince them that he was not a government employee and that he had been into farming for the last few years. However, the officials told him they would not include his name in the beneficiary list as he had been identified as a government employee. Enraged, Suman asked them to direct him to the department in which he was working. "Either you provide me with a loan waiver amount or give me a government job," he told the officials. The farmers alleged that the government was rejecting the applications on one ground or the other. It is learnt that a large number of farmers have not received loan waiver amounts in the mandal.

## Raksha Bandhan celebrated with fervour in Telangana

State Panchayat Raj Minister Danasari Anasuya, popularly known as Seethakka

Hyderabad: Raksha Bandhan festival was celebrated with traditional fervour and gaiety across Telangana on Monday. Sisters tied 'rakhis' to their brothers as part of the festival, signifying the brother-sister bond. Shops selling Rakhis and also sweets shops have been doing brisk business in Hyderabad and other places in the state since the last few days.

State Panchayat Raj Minister Danasari Anasuya, popularly known as Seethakka, AICC incharge of party affairs in Telangana Deepa Dasmuni, Congress

MLA Parnika Reddy, state women's commission Nerella Sharada and other woman leaders tied Rakhis to Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. BRS Working President K T Rama Rao posted on X a photo of his sister and party MLC K Kavitha tying Rakhi to him in the past and said he would stand by her through thick and thin. "You may not be able to tie Rakhi today, but will be with you through thick and thin," Rama Rao said. Kavitha is currently lodged in Tihar jail in Delhi after being arrested in a case related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam.



# Indirect discrimination at the centre of the ongoing legal tangle

On August 9, the Supreme Court of India (SC) partly stayed the instructions regarding the dress code to be followed by students issued by Chembur Trombay Education Society's NG Acharya and DK Marathe College, a private college in Mumbai. The circular prohibited students from revealing anyone's religion by wearing a "burkha, nakab, hijab, cap, badge, stole etc." on campus. Interestingly, while hearing the matter, Justice Khanna orally remarked, asking whether tilak and bindi would be disallowed as well and further enquiring how women are being empowered by the college telling them what to wear. The restriction on wearing hijab is of constitutional significance as it is violative of Article 19(1)(a), the right to freedom of speech and expression and Article 25(1), which guarantees that every person shall have freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice and propagate religion, subject to certain restrictions which are public order, morality and health. Further, forcing students to remove their hijab before entering a classroom is also an invasion of their privacy and a violation of their dignity which are also protected under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

The petitioners, three female Muslim students, had approached the apex court challenging the judgment of a division bench of the Bombay High Court in June 2024 (Zainab Abdul Qayyum Choudhary & Ors. v. Chembur Trombay Education Society's NG Acharya and DK Marathe College and Ors.) which had dismissed their writ petition and upheld the college's instructions. The High Court stated that it was in the "larger academic interest of the students as well as for the administration and discipline of the college" that the objective that a student's religion ought not to be revealed is achieved. The Supreme Court's interim order staying the circular brings back the limelight on the hijab ban on university campuses.

In October 2022, in Aishat Shifa v. The State of Karnataka (2022) a division bench of the apex court delivered a split verdict on a batch of appeals challenging the restriction on female Muslim students from wearing a hijab or headscarf in educational institutions in Karnataka. Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia set aside the judgment of the Karnataka High Court and held that wearing a hijab should be simply a matter of choice. Dhulia further noted that whether the hijab was an essential religious practice under Islam was not the central question of the dispute, but instead, the issue was a matter of conscience, belief, and expression.

Further emphasis was placed on the issue that a girl child had the right to wear hijab in her house or outside and that right did not stop at the school gate. A female Muslim student retains her fundamental rights and carries her dignity and privacy even inside the school gates, and it would be incorrect to say that these rights become derivative rights inside a classroom. On the other hand, Justice Hemant Gupta upheld the constitutional validity of the government order and held that the freedom of expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of



the Constitution did not extend to the wearing of a headscarf. Gupta further went on to hold that since the State has not put a restriction on the exercise of the right conferred under Article 19(1)(a) but had regulated the same in a manner that during school hours on working days and in class, the students shall wear the uniform as prescribed.

Since it was a regulatory provision for wearing a uniform, therefore, the decision of the State government mandating that students wear the uniform as prescribed did not violate the freedom guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a), rather it reinforced the right to equality under Article 14. Given the starkly diverging views expressed by the division bench, the matter was referred to be placed before the Chief Justice of India (CJI) for the constitution of an appropriate bench. Previously, the Karnataka High Court had in Resham v. State of Karnataka and Ors. (2022) upheld a Karnataka government order issued under the Karnataka Education Act, 1983 banning the wearing of hijabs in classrooms, by holding that wearing a hijab was not part of an essential religious practice under Islam. The High Court also held that the hijab would not be covered under the principle of reasonable accommodation as it would lead to a sense of "social separateness" and also goes against the feeling of uniformity.

In its 2020 landmark judgement of Lt.Col. Nitisha and Ors. v. Union of India, the Supreme Court explicitly recognised the principle of indirect discrimination. Indirect discrimination can be described as a form of discrimination in which a facially neutral or supposedly neutral criteria or provision is applied 'uniformly' to all persons, but in reality, disproportionately affects and disadvantages a particular group of people who share a protected characteristic such as religion and gender iden-

tity. The ban on wearing hijab is a prime example of indirect discrimination which disproportionately affects female Muslim students due to their religious and gender identities, with the prescribed uniform being the neutral criterion applicable to all students. As the appeal against the judgement by the Bombay High Court proceeds in the Supreme Court, the court will hopefully examine this intersectional matter through the lens of indirect discrimination. In a secular republic where the freedom of

religion is guaranteed, the contention of the college authorities that their goal is to prevent students from revealing their religion makes little sense. The primary concern of the court ought to be to prioritise the fundamental rights, dignity, agency, and privacy of the petitioners while they pursue their education. Avanti Deshpande is a lawyer and researcher. Her interests include human rights law, criminal law, and gender justice. The views expressed are personal

## San Francisco goes after websites that make AI deepfake nudes of women and girls

Nearly a year after AI-generated nude images of high school girls upended a community in southern Spain, a juvenile court this summer sentenced 15 of their classmates to a year of probation. But the artificial intelligence tool used to create the harmful deepfakes is still easily accessible on the internet, promising to "undress any photo" uploaded to the website within seconds.

Now a new effort to shut down the app and others like it is being pursued in California, where San Francisco this week filed a first-of-its-kind lawsuit that experts say could set a precedent but will also face many hurdles. "The proliferation of these images has exploited a shocking number of women and girls across the globe," said David Chiu, the elected city attorney of San Francisco who brought the case against a group of widely visited websites based in Estonia, Serbia, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. "These images are used to bully, humiliate and threaten women and girls," he said in an interview with The Associ-

ated Press. "And the impact on the victims has been devastating on their reputation, mental health, loss of autonomy, and in some instances, causing some to become suicidal." The lawsuit brought on behalf of the people of California alleges that the services broke numerous state laws against fraudulent business practices, non-consensual pornography and the sexual abuse of children. But it can be hard to determine who runs the apps, which are unavailable in phone app stores but still easily found on the internet. Contacted late last year by the AP, one service claimed by email that its "CEO is based and moves throughout the USA" but declined to provide any evidence or answer other questions. The AP is not naming the specific apps being sued in order to not promote them. "There are a number of sites where we don't know at this moment exactly who these operators are and where they're operating from, but we have investigative tools and subpoena authority to dig into that," Chiu said. "And we will certainly utilise our powers in the course of this litigation."

# Daimler India Commercial Vehicles inaugurates new, state-of-the-art Mechatronics Lab with transformed efficiency

Daimler India Commercial Vehicles (DICV), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Daimler Truck AG, today announced the inauguration of a new state-of-the-art Mechatronics Lab inside its Oragadam facility. This lab significantly increases the efficiency of software architecture verification and validation, and ensures cost efficiencies in the range of 70-80% when compared to traditional methods. Agile methodologies deployed in the lab facilitate the rapid identification and resolution of software bugs through a close-loop feedback system. Testing and verification methods that earlier took weeks and months now take days, thereby drastically improving the efficacy of quality and testing processes.

3. 4. DICV's Mechatronics Lab verifies and validates software feature functionality for trucks and buses that not only meet current safety standards, but also helps Daimler Truck products manufactured in DICV stay ahead of the curve in meeting future global safety regulations. 5. 6. Mr. Pradeep Kumar Thimmaiyan, President of Product Engineering & Chief Technology Officer at Daimler India Commercial Vehicles, said, "Our new Mechatronics Lab signals a transformative phase in our Research and Development operations, ushering us into an era that underscores enhanced agility and breakthrough innovations. Beyond validation, our Mechatronics Lab stands as a hub for innovation, positioning us uniquely on the global stage. Already, the lab is the core of our future electrical and electronic architectures. The DICV Mechatronics Lab complements the company's long-term vision, positioning it at the forefront of technological advancements in the commercial vehicle sector. It underscores our commitment to 'Make and Develop in India, for India and the World', embodying our vision to not only cater to domestic needs but also to set new benchmarks internationally." 7. 8. Mr. Dilip Shrivastava, Head of Mechatronics and Software Technology, Daimler India Commercial Vehicles added, "Our Lab can verify and validate around 300 features, encompassing over a thousand signals within 10 days, and can verify 600 fault codes in a developing product in just a few weeks, which otherwise would have taken months. Our aim is to ensure our software architecture gets verified and validated before it gets embedded in our trucks and buses as early identification of software bugs which saves enormous developmental cost. Keeping our long-term vision in mind we are bringing such efficiencies that can accelerate product development cycles for which our Mechatronics Lab will play a lead role. By establishing the lab, evaluation of diverse vehicle architectures has become seamless, eliminating the need for multiple test vehicles while enhancing the overall efficiency." 9. 10. DICV's Mechatronics Lab will be instrumental in driving DICV's research and development efforts, particularly in enhancing the efficiency, safety and performance of its trucks and buses as well as expediting the development time of new generations of vehicles. It also enables the simulation and confirmation of rare fault cases, that are challenging to reproduce in real-



world conditions, ensuring comprehensive verification and validation. 11. 12. The lab's infrastructure includes a flashing station for pre-production verification of all ECUs, ensuring hardware and software compatibility before production, thus minimizing errors, and reducing the need for re-releases. The ADAS setup allows on-road data to be reproduced in the lab, aiding initial software modifications and reducing vehicle dependency, saving time and cost. The lab also enables safe verification of Driver State Monitoring (DSM), avoiding risky in-vehicle trials. 13. 14. Over the last decade, DICV has set high standards for safety and efficiency in the commercial vehicle industry. Recognized for industry-leading total cost of ownership, DICV trucks provide lower operational costs and increased productivity. The new Mechatronics Lab will drive this legacy of innovation forward, introducing advanced safety features like AEBS, Blind Spot Assist, Driver Drowsiness Alert, and Lane Departure Warning. DICV remains committed to delivering vehicles that are leaders in safety, efficiency, and overall value, ensuring our customers' success now and in the future.

Daimler Truck at a glance Daimler Truck Holding AG ("Daimler Truck") is one of the world's largest commercial vehicle manufacturers, with over 40 main locations and more than 100,000 employees around the globe. The founders of Daimler Truck have invented the modern transportation industry with their trucks and buses a good 125 years ago. Unchanged to this day, the company's aspirations are dedicated to one purpose: Daimler Truck works for all who keep the world moving. Its customers enable people to be mobile and get goods to their destinations reliably, on time, and safely. Daimler Truck provides the technologies, products, and services for them to do so. This also applies to the transformation to CO2-neutral driving. The company is striving to make sustainable transport a success, with profound technological knowledge and a clear view of its cus-

tomers' needs. Daimler Truck's business activities are structured in five reporting segments: Trucks North America (TN) with the truck brands Freightliner and Western Star and the school bus brand Thomas Built Buses. Trucks Asia (TA) with the FUSO and BharatBenz commercial vehicle brands. Mercedes-Benz (MB) with the truck brand of the same name. Daimler Buses (DB) with the Mercedes-Benz and Setra bus brands. Daimler Truck's new Financial Services business (DTFS) constitutes

the fifth segment, the product range in the truck segments includes light, medium and heavy trucks for long-distance, distribution and construction traffic and special-purpose vehicles used mainly in the municipal and vocational sector. The product range of the bus segment includes city buses, school buses and intercity buses, coaches and bus chassis. In addition to the sale of new and used commercial vehicles, the company also offers aftersales services and connectivity solutions.

## BRS Maharashtra unit to hold crucial meeting in Nanded ahead of Assembly polls

Hyderabad: Ahead of the assembly polls due in Maharashtra later this year, the Bharat Rashtia Samithi (BRS) Maharashtra unit is holding a crucial meeting in Nanded on Tuesday. Important functionaries of the party from all the 36 districts in the State would take part in the meeting which was intended to discuss its future course of action.

Despite the temporary setbacks the party suffered in Telangana, the Maharashtra unit of the party was firm on carrying its 'Kisan agenda' forward to address the agrarian crisis persisting in the State while strengthening the organisational network. The BRS agenda is more relevant to Maharashtra, said the party leaders. The farmers affected by the drop in soybean prices, that created unrest in a major part of the State and the payments pending from sugarcane factories and a host of other factors, have been looking forward to the BRS. While the rest of Maharashtra received adequate rainfall, the Vidarbha region had experienced significant deficiency adding to the travails of the farmers. With the principal political parties failing to address the issues before the peasant community, people have been looking forward to the BRS with hope that



it would be able to take up their issues and fight the government. The BRS had made a significant headway in reaching out to the people at the grassroots last year. The party leaders, who started working on key issues in coordination with like-minded political entities, are now keen on fighting the assembly polls in its strongholds. They have identified some 25 assembly constituencies where the party enjoyed considerable clout to get into the fray.

The party had taken a neutral stand and stayed away from the Lok Sabha elections. The outcome of the deliberations at the meeting would be placed before the party leadership. The opinion of the party coordinators from all the 36 districts would be conveyed to the party leadership, said senior leaders of the party.

# Centre launches new system to understand cropping patterns, impact of weather

The Union Agriculture Ministry has launched a digital geo-spatial platform, Krishi-Decision Support System (DSS) in New Delhi on Friday (August 16, 2024), which will share real-time data-driven insights on weather patterns, soil conditions, crop health, crop acreage and advisories with all stakeholders — such as farmers, experts and policymakers. The Ministry said the system was “a significant milestone” in the country’s agricultural innovation landscape. Minister of State for Agriculture Bhagirath Choudhary and Union Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi were present at the event. The Ministry said Krishi-DSS was a first-of-its-kind geospatial platform specifically designed for Indian agriculture. The platform provides seamless access to comprehensive data, including satellite images, weather information, reservoir storage, groundwater levels and soil health information, which can be easily accessed from anywhere at any time. Krishi-DSS includes several advanced modules designed to support comprehensive agricultural management. “With crop mapping and monitoring, we will be able to understand cropping patterns by analysing parcel-level crop maps over the different years. This information helps in understanding crop rotation practices and promotes sustainable agriculture by encouraging the cultivation of diverse crops,” the Ministry said. Drought monitoring The DSS can also be helpful in drought monitoring and it will provide near real-time information on various indicators,



i.e. soil moisture, water storage, crop condition, dry spells, etc., and will inform the stakeholders about how weather is impacting the crops, crop harvest status, crop residue burning, etc. “From flood impact assessment to crop insurance solutions and many more, Krishi-DSS is a holistic solu-

tion. It’s about empowering our farmers, informing our policies, and nourishing our nation,” the Ministry said. Meanwhile, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan held a meeting with the employees and officers of all levels of the Ministries of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare

and Rural Development. He took a pledge to fulfill the vision given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for agriculture and rural development and asked the employees to put in all their efforts and hard work to fulfill the road map for 2047 and the resolutions for a developed India.

## Space data fuels India’s farming innovation drive

Shifting climate patterns, high input costs, a scarcity of labour and erratic weather began to disrupt his earnings about 10 years ago, said Reddy, 52, currently a contract farmer with global giant Syngenta. Satellite data, gathered and crunched by Indian startup Cropin and provided to him by Syngenta, now gives him optimal sowing times, weather warnings, and better use of irrigation and pesticides, he said. Reddy said that over the last decade he has increased his net profit to 20,000 rupees (\$240) per acre on corn at his farm in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, up from 5,000 - 10,000 rupees. “We are on a surer footing when it comes to agricultural practices; (using satellite data) safeguards us from climate change, pest and disease, problems with irrigation scheduling,” he said. The Indian government, which just relaxed foreign investment rules for the space sector, is leaning heavily into the use of satellite data to solve problems on the ground, with agriculture a key focus. Reuters spoke to 11 experts and farmers, six startups in the industry and three NGOs who said space technology and big data were primed to help Indian agriculture reach new heights. “India’s path to leadership in the new space race lies in utilizing the power of data, and applications within the agricultural sector offer immense potential,” said Pawan Goenka, chairman of the Indian National Space Promotion and Au-

thorization Centre, the country’s space regulatory body. Market Research Future, an India-based data analysis firm, says the global space agriculture market will be worth \$11.51 billion by 2032, up from \$4.99 billion in 2023. Although China holds the largest market share, the sector is growing faster in India than anywhere else in the Asia-Pacific region, it said. Cropin, founded in 2010 and backed by both Google and the Gates Foundation, recently signed a deal with Amazon Web Services to crunch satellite data to solve for global food insecurity. Cropin’s partnership with farmers, the World Bank and the government of India in 244 villages digitised more than 30,000 farm plots, covering 77 crop varieties across climate-zones, a company project analysis in 2019 showed. The study showed 92% of the farmers involved increased their average yield by 30% and their farm revenue by nearly 37%. The company got similar results in Africa. Agritech push Cropin and others are tapping into a burgeoning sector. The use of satellite data for crop insurance and horticulture has a market potential of about \$1.35 billion over the next 5 years, Deloitte said in a report. Baring Private Equity-backed SatSure, another Indian startup, crunches earth observation data to inform loan analysis. Chief Executive Officer Prateep Basu said there are about 70 million active farmer bank accounts in the country, representing roughly 38% of the total pool. That



makes up about \$200 billion of all lenders’ loan books, he said. India has 2,743 agricultural tech startups, many of which incorporate satellite data or other space technology. Funding hit a high of \$1.3 billion in 2021; companies gathered \$394.4 million in 2023 and \$136.7 million so far in 2024. But there are barriers to large-scale adoption of space technology in agriculture. The average landholding size for farmers in India is just 1.08 hectares. That fragmentation, coupled with poverty and low levels of literacy, pose challenges for tech adoption, industry experts said. “Agriculture has never been a tech-forward sector and often farmers want to

rely on traditional practices, or the wisdom of their forefathers,” said Raghunath Reddy, a Syngenta manager. In India, McKinsey says agricultural technology has the potential to grow farmers’ incomes by 25% to 35%. Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her 2023 budget speech, announced a 703 million rupee (\$8.42 million) accelerator fund to boost agritech startups. In March 2023, the government said the fund was supporting 1,138 such companies. For farmers like Reddy, agriculture tech has meant better living standards - over the past few years he has bought a car and bought a new house in town.”

# Extreme heat exposure on the rise for millions of kids: United Nations

Nearly half a billion children are facing twice as many days of extreme heat each year -- or more -- than their grandparents did, the United Nations said Tuesday, August 13, 2024, warning of deadly consequences. As climate change continues to push up temperatures globally, one in five children -- some 466 million kids -- live in areas that are registering "at least double the number of extremely hot days every year" compared to 60 years ago, the UN children's agency UNICEF said. "The bodies of young children are not like little adults, they have much more vulnerability to extreme heat," UNICEF advocacy chief Lily Caprani told AFP, also warning of dangers for pregnant women. Additionally, children lose out from education when schools are forced to close due to high temperatures -- which has affected at least 80 million children in 2024 so far. UNICEF used days reaching 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35 degrees Celsius) as its benchmark, comparing average temperatures in the 2020-2024 period to the 1960s. Such hot days -- as well as the means to cope with high temperatures, such as air conditioning -- affect the entire world, it noted. Children in West and Central Africa are the most exposed, with 123 million children -- 39 percent of the kids in the region -- facing a third of each year with 95-degree days or higher. At the higher end, in Mali, for example -- where air conditioning is out of reach for millions and blackouts can leave fans idled -- more than 200 days a year can reach 95 degrees or higher.

In Latin America, meanwhile, 48 million children are facing double the number



of 95-degree or higher days than 60 years ago. Worldwide, the "trajectory is getting worse and worse for these children," Caprani said. Children "are fragile and they breathe very quickly. They can't even sweat like an adult does. They are much more vulnerable to heat stress and it can be literally deadly," she added. High temperatures can contribute to child malnutrition and leave kids more vulnerable to disease,

especially malaria and dengue, which spread in warm climates, UNICEF warned. Excessive heat can also negatively impact neurodevelopment and mental health. UNICEF is calling for increased education for parents to know the signs of heat stroke, better training for medical personnel, and investing in air conditioning in schools -- where, even when classes aren't canceled, learning can be made difficult

by hot conditions. Yet the bigger push remains in reining in climate change, caused by humanity's use of fossil fuels. "As governments are currently drafting their national climate action plans, they can do so with the ambition and knowledge that today's children and future generations will have to live in the world they leave behind," UNICEF chief Catherine Russell said in a statement.

## Three more Ramsar wetland sites now in India, taking total to 85

The Environment Ministry on Wednesday (August 14, 2024) said that three more wetlands in India have been designated 'Ramsar sites'. This brings the total number of such sites in India to 85. The three new sites are -- the Nanjarayan Bird Sanctuary; the Kazhuveli Bird Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu; and the Tawa Reservoir in Madhya Pradesh. "As the nation gears up to celebrate its Independence Day, thrilled to share that we have added three Ramsar sites to our network. This takes our tally to 85 Ramsar sites, covering an area of 13,58,068 hectare in India," Bhupender Yadav, Environment Minister, posted on social media platform X. As the Nation gears up to celebrate its Independence Day, thrilled to share that we have added three Ramsar sites to our network. This takes our tally to 85 Ramsar sites, covering an area of 1358068 ha in India. India is one of the 'contracting parties' to the Ramsar Convention, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971. It became a signatory in 1982. From 1982 to 2013, a total of 26 sites were added to the list of Ramsar sites in the country. From 2014 to 2024, the country has added 59 new wetlands to the list of

Ramsar sites. Currently, Tamil Nadu harbours the maximum number of Ramsar sites (18 sites), followed by Uttar Pradesh (10 sites).

India's Ramsar wetlands comprise around 10% of the total wetland area in the country across 18 States. No other South Asian country has as many sites though this has much to do with India's geographical breadth and tropical diversity. The United Kingdom (175) and Mexico (142) -- smaller countries than India -- have the maximum Ramsar sites, whereas Bolivia spans the largest area, with 148,000 sq. km. under the Convention's protection.

Being designated a Ramsar site doesn't necessarily invite extra international funds but the Centre and States must ensure these tracts of land are conserved, and spared manmade encroachment. Acquiring this label also helps with a locale's tourism potential and its international visibility. Wetlands, according to the Environment Ministry, are an "area of marsh, fen, peatland or water; whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water



the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters, but does not include river channels, paddy fields, human-made water bodies/ tanks specifically constructed for drinking water purposes and structures specifically constructed for aquaculture, salt production, recreation and irrigation

purposes". To be Ramsar site, however, it must meet at least one of the nine criteria defined by the Ramsar Convention of 1971, including supporting vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities; or regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds;

# In Kolkata, rape, murder, and rampage

At the stroke of the midnight hour, on the eve of India's 78th Independence Day, tens of thousands of women gathered across the streets of the country. With anger that bubbles up only after a ferment, they protested the brutal rape and murder of a trainee doctor in Kolkata's state-run R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital a week earlier. This mass outrage was not just about the crime, but also about the larger lack of safety of women and doctors across India, where there are more than 80 rapes every day on average, as per the National Crime Records Bureau (2022). A common refrain was: "What freedom do Indian women really have?" On August 14, WhatsApp was flooded with messages calling women to gather at midnight across different cities. The protesters marched to chants of 'Reclaim the Night', a reference to the fact that the 31-year-old doctor was attacked in the middle of the night while she was taking a break from duty, and also to the 1970s movement, where women occupied public spaces at night, marching against sexual violence and for gender equality. At least 50 protest marches have been held since the incident on August 9.

For many, the mass demonstrations were reminiscent of 2012. Then too, a young woman who had stepped out at night was raped and murdered in New Delhi. Then too, thousands took to the streets demanding justice for the victim, as well as safe public spaces. "The 'Nirbhaya' incident (as the rape and murder in Delhi is often referred to) occurred 12 years ago," said Indrani Banerjee, a social worker. Wearing a T-shirt with 'Feminist' inscribed in bold letters, she was protesting at Kolkata's Jadavpur area. "Has anything changed since then?"

That night, hundreds of people, including doctors, gathered outside the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital too, in peaceful protest. However, a few minutes past midnight, mayhem broke out. A mob of about 100 people tore through the police barricades erected outside and chased away doctors who were about to join the midnight march.

According to witnesses, the mob comprised intoxicated young men, who went on the rampage. They smashed medical equipment including ventilators, broke hospital beds, and tore posters demanding justice for the victim, which had been put up on the gate of the emergency wing. It was in the seminar hall on the fourth floor of the same building that the trainee doctor had been sexually assaulted and killed on August 9. Terrified health workers, protesters, and journalists scrambled for safety. A second-year postgraduate trainee doctor said he ran into an auditorium with many others. They stacked up heavy furniture against the door of the room to prevent the mob from barging in. The gate of the emergency building of the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, which was forced open by the mob. "When the mob entered the premises, we ran for our lives," he recalled. "We were unable to contact many of our friends. Those men did not spare patients or doctors; they beat everybody up. We didn't recognise any of them." As chaos ensued, a person in the crowd shouted at the female doctors gathered there "The girls should return to their hostels immediately. It is dangerous out here."

Outside the hospital, the police used

tear gas shells to disperse the mob, much like in 2012. Several police personnel were injured in the clash. The pungent smell of tear gas lingered in the air around the hospital as the mob tried to regroup at several key intersections of R.G. Kar Road. The situation was defused a couple of hours later when the Kolkata Commissioner of Police, Vineet Kumar Goyal, arrived with a large contingent of police and Rapid Action Force personnel. "What has happened here is because of a malicious media campaign against the Kolkata Police," Goyal alleged. Hours after the incident, the Kolkata Police took to social media and claimed that the scene of crime had not been tampered with. "Don't spread fake news. We will take legal action," the police handle posted on X. This sparked more anger on social media. One user posted, "Find the rapists, murderers and the goons and take legal action (rather) than issuing threats online."

On August 9, after a gruelling 36 hours of duty, the female doctor, a second-year postgraduate trainee in the chest department of R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, had gone to the seminar hall at about 2 a.m. to take a break, said the former principal of the hospital, Dr. Sandip Kumar Ghosh. Many departments do not have designated on-duty rooms for doctors to rest after long hours of work, several doctors said. This leaves them with no choice but to sleep in patient beds, waiting rooms, or, as in this case, empty halls. The previous night, the trainee doctor had spoken to her parents on the phone. "She was in good spirits as usual," they said. On the morning of August 9, her semi-naked body was found on a blue mattress in the seminar hall. It bore multiple injuries and signs of sexual assault and torture. After an agonising wait, they received another call 22 minutes later, again from the same person. The caller claimed that the trainee doctor had died by suicide within the hospital premises. The shocked parents rushed to the hospital.

The inquest report, which was prepared at 4.40 p.m. on August 10, at the direction of the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, Sealdah, revealed gruesome details of the incident. It pointed to 10 injuries on the victim's body including bleeding from the vagina, both eyes, and mouth; and injuries on the face, neck, nails, right hand, left leg, and stomach. In their petition to the Calcutta High Court demanding a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the parents said that they were not allowed to see their daughter's body for three hours and alleged that the delay was intentional. While speaking at a press conference on August 9, Dr. Ghosh revealed the identity of the victim, which is prohibited by law. To the protesting doctors, he said, "It was irresponsible of the girl to go to the seminar hall alone at night." An effigy of the former principal of R.G. Kar Hospital, Sandip Kumar Ghosh, by students of National Medical College. They locked the administrative building to stop him from taking over duty at their college after he resigned from R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital.

An effigy of the former principal of R.G. Kar Hospital, Sandip Kumar Ghosh, by students of National Medical College. They locked the administrative building to



stop him from taking over duty at their college after he resigned from R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital. | Photo Credit: Shrabana Chatterjee His comments sparked outrage. Under mounting pressure from the protesting doctors, Dr. Ghosh resigned from the hospital on August 12. However, hours later, he was reappointed as the principal of the National Medical College and Hospital, Kolkata. Soon after the incident, the hospital administration allegedly started renovating the building where the rape and murder had occurred. Allegations that there were attempts to cover up the crime gained ground. In its August 13 order, a division bench of the High Court noted that it was disturbing that a case of unnatural death had been registered by the police on August 9 at the Tala Police Station. Despite the victim being a trainee doctor, the principal or the hospital had not lodged a formal complaint with the police, the court observed. "This, in our view, was a serious lapse, giving room for suspicion," it noted. On August 16, the High Court rapped the State government and asked what the urgency was in reassigning a new posting to the principal, who has been accused of several lapses. The Court directed that Dr. Ghosh be sent on leave and not be appointed as principal of any other medical college and hospital. The Court also asked the State government about the renovation at the hospital. The State government's counsel told the Court that allegations that the place where the incident took place was demolished were incorrect. The accused, a civic police volunteer Within 12 hours of the crime, the Kolkata Police arrested Sanjoy Roy, 35, a civic police volunteer since 2019. Roy was active with the Police Welfare Association. He lived in the barracks of the Calcutta Police's 4th battalion and used a motor-bike marked 'police'. He had "no business" to be in the seminar hall that night, the police said. Roy was arrested and later handed over to the CBI. The Mamata Banerjee-led government began appointing civic police volunteers about 10 years ago, to assist the police. Civic police volunteers are expected to have studied at least until Class VIII. They are paid ₹9,000 a month. Over the years, the force has been growing. "Civic police volunteers have helped the Trinamool Congress (the party in power) get more footing in the Bengal regime. There is no permanent work, only contractual, so they remain loyal to the ruling party. There is no proper process for appointment. No norms are followed. That

is why the party can appoint their own cadre. The party also uses the civic volunteers to conduct election work," said Biswanath Chakraborty, a professor of political science at Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. The strength of the Kolkata Police is 37,000. Of them, 7,200 are civic police personnel. The police have been hesitant to admit that the accused had any association with the force. When asked about the job profile of the accused, the Kolkata Police Commissioner merely said, "To us, he is a criminal of the highest order". Even after the arrest of Roy, there has been widespread speculation that multiple people may have been involved in the crime given the horrific nature and extent of the victim's injuries. People began sharing the names of doctors of the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital as some of the other accused, online. Soon, misinformation was rife. The family of a medical intern from a village in West Bengal was forced to lodge a police complaint when his name began doing the rounds as an accused person.

"Rumours are being floated that someone is associated with the crime. He is an intern and comes from a small place... This is pathetic. I cannot on the basis of some rumours arrest an intern. It is against my conscience," said Goyal. He added that the police never said that there was only one person involved in the crime. Scientific evidence requires time, he added. Misinformation is not the only problem online. Many doctors have been sharing photos and videos of the victim on social media, which is also in violation of the law. "This could have been me. Since August 9, postgraduate trainee doctors everywhere have decided to stop work and seek justice for the victim and security for doctors in hospitals. Medical services across several hospitals in West Bengal have been severely affected. Despite pleas from the State government, the trainee doctors have refused to resume work. Doctors under the auspices of the Mangaluru branch of the Indian Medical Association stage a candle light march and protest in Mangaluru on August 13 to condemn the rape and murder of a medical student while on duty in Kolkata. Doctors under the auspices of the Mangaluru branch of the Indian Medical Association stage a candle light march and protest in Mangaluru on August 13 to condemn the rape and murder of a medical student while on duty in Kolkata.

# The rising political stakes of Milkipur by-elections

Till the other day, Milkipur was just one of the 403 assembly constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, which remained in the shadows of the temple city Ayodhya, barely 40 km away. Now, for the BJP, it's time to avenge the defeat. The firebrand CM, who has mastered the art of poll management, has taken up the responsibility of defeating the SP in Milkipur. Now, for the BJP, it's time to avenge the defeat. The firebrand CM, who has mastered the art of poll management, has taken up the responsibility of defeating the SP in Milkipur. But the high-stakes battle for this non-descript constituency in the forthcoming by-elections has pivoted it to the country's electoral map as it is one of the assembly segments of the Faizabad-Ayodhya Lok Sabha constituency, whose result in the 2024 general elections had shocked the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It was a loss of face for the champions of the Ram Temple movement – Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had inaugurated the magnificent temple on January 22, 2024, about two months before the elections, the chief minister and Hindutva mascot Yogi Adityanath, who made frequent trips to the city and launched mega development plans, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, its associated Vishwa Hindu Parishad and dharmacharyas who invested several decades in contesting the centuries-old Babri mosque-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute. At a time when the country was celebrating "Ram Aaye Hai, Ram Aaye Hai", the BJP lost the seat to the Samajwadi Party.

Now, for the BJP, it's time to avenge the defeat. The firebrand CM, who has mastered the art of poll management, has taken up the responsibility of defeating the SP in Milkipur. A saffron victory even in just one of the assembly segments of the Faizabad-Ayodhya seat would assuage hurt sentiments, settle the leadership dispute, endorse the Hindutva agenda and go on to prove that Awadhesh Prasad's win was just an aberration. The by-polls. Yogi is making his third visit to the area on August 18 and is credited with converting a two-lane Faizabad-Rae Bareilly road to a four-lane, besides a hospital. But people demand more in this backward region where farming is the main source of income, where the pride of place is the Agriculture University, and stray cattle are a major menace. However, it is quite unlikely that Narendra Modi, Amit Shah or Rajnath Singh will campaign in this constituency.

When Prasad, the new poster boy of the Samajwadi Party, graced the front row in the Lok Sabha, sitting in between the leaders of the alliance partners — Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav — the pain was visible on the faces of the BJP leaders occupying the treasury benches. The mocks and taunts add to their discomfort. With his newfound influence, Prasad has been given charge of the constituency. As Prasad gets mobbed by people for selfies, many wonder where he was all these years. One of the seniormost leaders of the Samajwadi Party who walked shoulder to

shoulder with Mulayam Singh Yadav, the 79-year-old Prasad maintained a low profile, similar to Milkipur, though the area's contribution to the temple movement was no less. Adjacent to Ayodhya, the people had provided food and shelter to the karsevaks who thronged the temple city multiple times to participate in its liberation movement though they had leftist leanings, primarily because the seat was nursed by CPI leader Mitrasen Yadav, who not only won the seat five times between 1977-1985 and 1993-96 but also actively fought for the backwards of the area. Later, when two Brahmin leaders won the seat on a Congress ticket in 1989 and on a BJP ticket in 1991, the common saying in the area was, "Yahan perh ka har patta bat gaya hai" (Here, even the leaves on trees have been divided), referring to the backward-upper caste division in the society. Yadav and the two Brahmin leaders vied with each other in rushing to police stations to get relief for their constituencies- backwards and the upper caste respectively. Apparently, amid all the hype and hoopla over the apex court's Ayodhya order in favour of the Hindus, the BJP high command had simply ignored the warning signals, the first time when the SP's Tej Narayan Pandey aka Pawan Pandey had defeated the BJP candidate Lallu Singh in the 2012 assembly elections in the Ayodhya assembly constituency. The second time was Awadhesh Prasad's victory from the Milkipur assembly seat in 2022 after the foundation laying ceremony of the Ram temple by the Prime Minister in August 2020. Awadhesh Prasad had earlier won in 2012.

For its part, the Samajwadi Party is also not leaving any stone unturned to retain Milkipur. Since the country's Independence, Awadhesh Prasad happens to be the first Dalit candidate to contest from the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat against BJP's old-timer yet controversial Laloo Singh — a major reason behind his unexpected victory. The by-polls for 10 assembly seats in the state are likely to be held along with the crucial elections in three states: Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand. But it is the Milkipur result which will make the national headlines as it will have far-reaching consequences on the state's politics, the nibbling internecine battle in the BJP as well as its Hindutva agenda.

The entry of the Bahujan Samaj Party and Bhim Army has turned the fight multi-cornered. Though many believe Mayawati has taken the plunge to help the BJP by dividing votes, a section feels that she realises the now-or-never situation for the party that is left with one MLA in the Vidhan Sabha and no representation in the Lok Sabha. The rise of Bhim Army founder Chandrashekhar Azad has also been a cause of worry. While he goes full-throttle against atrocities on Dalits, Mayawati has no member to match it on the floor of the house. The fear factor that kept her behind the walls of her home is diluting. But one wonders if she will still fight the battle through statements or public speeches. As



of now, she is bombarding the media with her statements against one and all. Azad has already visited the constituency and has built an army of workers in the villages as his party will also contest the election. And while the by-polls may be two months away, the BJP and the Samajwadi Party have fully geared up their machinery for a battle. A high-octave battle will ensue which will test the popularity and poll management of the CM and the SP's much-touted PDA (Pichda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak or backwards, Dalits and minorities) formula that paid the party rich dividends in the 2024

General Elections. Milkipur is a reserved constituency, represented by the Communists and the Samajwadi Party five times each, Jan Sangh-BJP thrice, Congress twice and the BSP once since 1967.

The reserved constituency is backward-Brahmin-dominated. Sunita Aron is a consulting editor with the HT based in Lucknow. You can find her on X as The weekly column, Keeping up with UP tackles everything from politics to social and cultural mores in the country's most populous state. The views expressed are personal.

## Cosmic butterfly emerges from star's death

Hyderabad: When a star with a mass between one and eight times that of the Sun exhausts its nuclear fuel, it expands into a red giant. Over time, the outer layers of the star's atmosphere are shed, forming a glowing shell of gas and dust that can remain illuminated for thousands of years by the light of the remaining core, known as a white dwarf.

One striking example of this phenomenon is Kohoutek 3-46, which resembles a butterfly in shape. Estimated to be around 20,000 light-years old, this celestial object is classified as a planetary nebula—a term that, despite its name, has no relation to planets. The name was coined by astronomer William Herschel in the 18th century, based on the nebula's appearance through early telescopes.

Unlike the more common round planetary nebulas, Kohoutek 3-46 exhibits a rare bipolar hourglass shape, found in only about 10 to 20 percent of such nebulas. Discovered in 1964 by astronomer Lubos Kohoutek, who identified 300 planetary nebulas throughout his career, this object offers a unique glimpse into the end stages of stellar evolution.

The image of Kohoutek 3-46 was captured by the Gemini North telescope in Ha-



When a star dies, a cosmic butterfly shaped one emerges, as in case of the Kohoutek 3-46, which resembles a butterfly in shape. This is estimated to be 20,000 light years old and it is classified as a planetary nebula.

Currently visible in the Northern Hemisphere's evening sky, it is located in the constellation Cygnus, part of the prominent "Summer Triangle," and is near Lyra, which hosts the well-known Ring Nebula.

# Hasina government's collapse could reshape refugee dynamics around the Chittagong Hill Tracts

In the last article under this column, I explored the broad ramifications of the downfall of former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the security environment in Northeast India. While long-term dynamics are harder to predict, a brief scrutiny of one specific issue that may have short- and medium-term domino effects on the Northeast is in order: The influx of refugees into Mizoram due to resurgent armed conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), and the likelihood of a terrain shift after the collapse of the Hasina government. Since late 2022, Bangladeshi security forces, under the Hasina government's directions, have been conducting military operations against Kuki-Chin insurgents in the CHT affiliated to the Kuki-Chin National Front, also known as "KNF" or "KCNF" in short. The notorious Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) have largely led these campaigns. Founded by Natham Bawm, a Dhaka University student, in 2008, the KNF was born as the Kuki-Chin National Development Organisation (KNDO). According to one 2023 report by the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, it was rechristened as a separatist group in 2017 with the intent of carving out a separate Kuki-Chin nation from CHT. KNDO became the Kuki-Chin National Volunteers (KNV).

Four years later, KNV transformed into its current iteration, KNF. According to some media reports, a nondescript Islamist outfit known as the Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya (JAFHS) was financing the outfit, which alarmed Dhaka. In October 2022, following an incident of civilian killings in CHT's Rangamati district, the RAB launched a major counterinsurgency drive against KNF fighters. By the end of November, Dhaka's operations had pushed at least 420 Chin-Kuki refugees across the border into Mizoram's Lawngtlai district. In the following months, refugees continued to trickle into southern Mizoram as Bangladesh continued its operations in phases, amid infrequent and largely ineffective peace talks between the KNF and Dhaka. Last April, the fighting flared after a series of alleged bank robberies by the Kuki-Chin fighters in CHT. It was then that the Bangladeshi army stepped in to take charge of the CHT operations to conduct joint raids with the RAB. Concerns over asylum movements

The renewed fighting continued to push Chin-Kuki asylum seekers into southern Mizoram in multiple waves through the summer, amid serious accusations of human rights violations by Dhaka's forces against the tribal community. The Mizoram government, driven by fraternal ethnic ties, has welcomed them. Around 2000 of them took refuge in the Northeastern Indian state, in addition to some 33,000 refugees from Myanmar's Chin State. New Delhi is likely uncomfortable with the continuous trickle of refugees into India but can do little in the face of overwhelming Mizo-Chin solidarity. In July, Mizoram's current chief minister, Lalduhoma, even told Prime Minister Narendra Modi that Aizawl would not push the refugees back months after the state's



sole Rajya Sabha MP, K Vanlalvena, accused the Border Security Forces (BSF) of pushing some 150 of them back to Bangladesh. The Centre's concerns revolve around its security-centric view of the situation, which in turn, is partly premised on the KNF's purported links with the little-known JAFHS. Last year, some Indian media reports also indicated that KNF cadres were masquerading as refugees to cross over into India – either to take shelter or travel onward to Myanmar's Chin State for training and arms procurement. While most of these claims are backed by little more than unverified intelligence reports, they have done much to shape New Delhi's security anxieties over the situation, some of which were shared by the Hasina government in Dhaka. These common paranoias came to the surface when Hasina in a speech in May claimed that there was a foreign-sponsored attempt to carve out a "Christian state" from what was understood to be the Kuki-Chin-dominated areas straddling CHT, Northeast India and western Myanmar. In that context, New Delhi has long worried that the KNF's alleged use of Indian territory as a staging base and conduit to Myanmar could sour relations with Dhaka.

What could happen now?

Hasina's departure has not just ended the Awami League's dreary 15-year rule, it has comprehensively shaken up the country's core institutions. These include the RAB and the army, which have been at the forefront of operations in the CHT. Both these institutions were known to have been captured by Hasina loyalists. The RAB, especially, was known as her personal enforcer. Hasina's departure, therefore, has pushed her loyalists within these forces to the margins. On August 7, RAB even got a new director general, with AKM Shahidur Rahman replacing M Khurshid Hossain. These changes could result in a reduction of kinetic operations in the CHT, which in

turn, would reduce the outflux of refugees into India. In fact, relative stability in the hills could allow the asylum seekers currently in southern Mizoram to return home.

Moreover, the interim administration, with Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus as the Chief Advisor, that took over from the Hasina government last week may revisit Dhaka's CHT policy. This government would likely prioritise human rights and dialogue with the Kuki-Chin armed factions over military operations in an attempt to do things differently from its more abrasive predecessor. This creates a window of opportunity for India to engage transparently with Dhaka to mutually resolve the political-security dilemmas over CHT and the

attendant refugee crisis. India must exploit this opening to settle common concerns and shared anxieties while ensuring that human rights violations in the CHT are probed through just mechanisms and displaced people are given humanitarian aid. This would not only make the Northeast safer and more stable, but it would also create fresh synergy between India and Bangladesh at a time when both are confronting a new diplomatic conundrum. Angshuman Choudhury is a New Delhi-based researcher and writer, formerly an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research and focuses on North-east India and Myanmar. The views expressed are personal.

## UAE merchants now accept Rupee via UPI to attract Indian customers

New Delhi: The government of India has been promoting UPI as a global payment platform. Now merchants in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are accepting payments via UPI in Rupees to attract Indian customers. One of the biggest retail companies in the UAE, Lulu has started giving customers the option to accept payments through UPI in all its stores in the country.

Indian citizens can easily make payments using the UPI app just like in India. The amount paid will be deducted from their bank account in India. So Indian citizens and NRIs can easily do shopping in UAE through UPI in Rupees like in India.

UPI payments were launched in the UAE in the beginning of July. Apart from Lulu, payments through UPI are being accepted by many big and small merchants across the UAE. Indian citizens and NRIs

in the UAE can easily pay through QR codes through Point of Sale (POS) machines. According to the NPCI: "The number of Indian travellers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is estimated to reach 98 lakh in 2024. Around 53 lakh Indians are likely to reach UAE alone." The Government of India, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and NPCI International are working together to promote UPI on the global platform. UPI is officially accepted in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, UAE, Singapore, France, and Bhutan. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI)-based transactions surged 35 per cent on a YoY (Year on Year) basis in the month of July, reaching Rs 20.64 lakh crore against Rs 20.07 lakh crore. The total UPI transaction count went up almost 4 per cent (month-on-month) to 14.44 billion in July from 13.89 billion in the previous month.